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ENTREPRENEURSHIPAND INNOVATION IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: CAPACITY BUILDING AND GLOAL SUSTAINABILITY

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the pivotal role of entrepreneurship and innovation in tertiary institutions as drivers of capacity building and sustainable development. It explores how higher education institutions serve as catalysts for entrepreneurial thinking, skill acquisition, and technological advancement others include fostering entrepreneurship mind, innovation hubs and incubators, industry partnerships and collaboration, research and development, and community engagement. The study highlights global best practices, in entrepreneurship innovation, faculty training, experiential learning and capacity building in tertiary institutions across the globe and the integration of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to entrepreneurship and sustainable development, fostering innovation and problem solving, and the importance of policy and structural reforms to support innovation ecosystems within and outside the campuses such as reducing unemployment, stimulating economic growth, promoting creativity, innovations and foster industry collaboration. Recommendations are made to improve institutional frameworks, funding mechanisms, promote experiential learning, leverage and pedagogical approaches to align education with leverage sustainable development goals (SDGs) imperatives.

Key Terms: *Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Tertiary institutions, Students, Capacity building*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, entrepreneurship and innovation have emerged as essential pillars for economic growth and global sustainability. Entrepreneurship and innovation are increasingly recognized as vital for economic growth, and tertiary institutions are becoming crucial in fostering these qualities through education and support. This involves developing entrepreneurship skills; promoting innovative thinking and facilitating creations of new businesses. Tertiary institutions are also encourage to partner with developing entrepreneurial skills and promoting innovation among students, preparing them to be job creators rather than just job seekers. Tertiary institution is a post secondary educational institution, also known as higher education. These institutions offer programs beyond secondary school, it comprising universities, polytechnics, and colleges, have a unique role to play in fostering these competencies among young people. By embedding entrepreneurial education and innovation-driven programs into their academic framework, institutions can cultivate job creators, critical thinkers, and socially responsible leaders capable of addressing global challenges. According to Oyinola et al (2023) “entrepreneurs are innovators and innovators can be entrepreneurs” [p. 1]. The entrepreneur is in constant search for, and exploitation of ideas and viable business opportunities Grilli, (2022), some of which has the potentials to transform societies.

Most entrepreneurs are endowing with natural instinct which either cultivated organically in the business climate or developed through formal education system. To enhance entrepreneurs, it is important to catch the young. Some scholars are optimistic that participating in entrepreneurial education impacts students resolve to become entrepreneurial and become success. Usman and Mohammed (2022) opine that entrepreneurship education is aimed at preparing the graduates to be economically self empowered and develop a wheel for economic sustainability and development. Through, entrepreneurship education youth an graduates of tertiary education will be acquainted with the basic skills and knowledge to run a start-up successfully as both job creators and employers of labor rather than the noted job seeker’s status in our economy today. In today’s rapidly changing global landscape, entrepreneurship and innovation have emerged as key drivers of sustainable development and economic growth. Tertiary institutions universities, polytechnics, and colleges play a pivotal role in equipping students with entrepreneurial mindsets and innovative skills

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that extend beyond traditional academic instruction. Sule (2017) assert that entrepreneurship revolves round creativity, and innovation, risk taking, perseverance, and wild

consultation, objectivity and desirability for social needs and wants. These institutions serve not only as centers for knowledge transfer but also as incubators for innovative ideas, startup creation, and problem-solving frameworks tailored to local and global challenges. The federal government of Nigeria has launched initiatives like the STEM Up Grant to empower students in tertiary institutions to build scalable, job creating ventures. This aligns with the SDGs' focus on promoting entrepreneurship and innovation for sustainable development dateline.ng/fg-to-unveil-system. By integrating SDGs into entrepreneurship education, Nigeria tertiary institutions can equip graduates with the skills and knowledge needed to drive economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship. Therefore, some tertiary institutions resolve to adopt modern purpose to positively empower graduates to be change makers, leaders and entrepreneurs equipped with competencies, attributes, and influence economic development.

Entrepreneurship and innovation have shifted from being peripheral activities to becoming central missions of universities worldwide. Traditionally, universities were regarded primarily as centers of teaching and knowledge dissemination, nut the 21st century has seen a redefinition of their roles towards fostering entrepreneurial mindset, enabling technology transfer, and solving complex societal challenges. Reports such as Higher Education Innovation (HEInnovate) by the OECD and European Commission emphasize that entrepreneurial universities must integrate leadership, organizational capacity, teaching and learning innovation, and knowledge exchange into their institutional DNA (OECD, 2021). Similarly, UNESCO's Reimagining Our Feature Together argues that education should be designed as a social contrast in which learners gain competencies to act as agents of transformation rather than passive receivers of information (UNIESCO, 2021). Evidence from Global Innovation Index 2024 further demonstrates that nations with strong innovation-oriented universities consistently rank higher in productivity and competitiveness (WIPO, 2024). Thus, the case for embedding entrepreneurship and Innovation in higher education is not merely inspirational, but an economic and social imperative.

Nigeria where youth unemployment rate is purported to be an average of 42.5% (NBS, 2022), integrating entrepreneurship education into the curriculum of universities prepares graduates to effectively contribute their quota to the society. Entrepreneurship education has been recognized as a tool for curbing unemployment and supporting sustainable development Kolade, 2018. Entrepreneurship education is a collection of formalized teachings that informed trains and educates anyone interested in participating in socioeconomic development through a project to

promote entrepreneurship awareness, business creation, or small business development UNESCO, 2022. Entrepreneurship education is a form of specialized and all round training program designed by education authorities to change the world views of undergraduates from job seekers to wealth creators by developing their talents and potentials Suleiman, 2022. Oyinila, 2023, reported that 80 % graduates from Nigerian universities struggle with obtaining employment partially due to the curricula that focuses on obtaining white collar jobs. To put an end to this menace, the Federal Government through the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Industrial Training Fund (ITF) has accelerated effort to drive entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. This involves a directive for tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria to include entrepreneurship education as a core course into the curriculum. This led to some universities establishing entrepreneurship development centers to support targeted interventions (Edopolor, 2020) and empowering graduates with appropriate skills. The Federal Government of Nigeria also established some programs in partnership with the stakeholders to enhance entrepreneurship skills among Nigerian students and graduates. The agencies tasked with responsibilities of supporting include the (National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Students Industrial Working Experience Scheme (SIWES), Vocational and Technical Training, Agricultural and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Training. These initiatives are designed to be inclusive and ensuring learners from all backgrounds assess the life skill and opportunities which support entrepreneurship (Mensah, 2019).

Entrepreneurship education is now recognized globally as a tool for developing essential 21st century skills such as opportunity recognition, creativity, resilience, and collaboration. It's no news that Nigerian university students exposed to entrepreneurship education demonstrated higher entrepreneurial intentions than those without such training. Similarly, Fayolle and Linan (2020) concluded that experiential and competency-based approaches significantly enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy and skill acquisition. Furthermore, a study by Nabi et al (2018) revealed that entrepreneurship education that incorporates real-world projects, mentorship, and incubation opportunities has long-term effects on venture creation and employability. These findings collectively highlight the role of HEIs in equipping students with competencies not just for survival in the labour market but for innovation-led economic contribution. Capacity building within tertiary institutions involves strengthening human capital, infrastructure, policy frameworks, and curriculum design to foster a culture of innovation. According to Nika, et al. (2024). "Capacity building is a comprehensive review of organizational performance, capacity enhancement through a systematic review of existing literature." United Nations defines

Capacity building as the development of skills, knowledge, infrastructures, and through programs such as entrepreneurship education, innovation hubs, research centers, and industry-academic partnerships, institutions can empower students and faculty to become solution-oriented change-makers. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) is

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leading the change through initiatives like the Research for Impact (R4i) program, which equips researchers and lecturers with entrepreneurial thinking and innovation skills TETFund Accelerates (2024). This, in turn, enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully to society and tackle issues such as poverty, unemployment, climate change, and inequality. Moreover, aligning entrepreneurial education with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ensures that innovations developed within these institutions have a long-term impact on global sustainability. The SDGs, particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 8(Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasize the importance of equipping students with entrepreneurial skills to drive sustainable development. Encouraging social entrepreneurship, green technologies, and inclusive business models can help bridge the gap between economic ambition and environmental responsibility. The imperative of Entrepreneurship and innovation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria for capacity building and global sustainability can never be over emphasized. Considering over well-meaning acceptance of entrepreneurship education in both private and public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The expectations in undergraduates would be motivated to become creative and innovative thereby building the capacity for global sustainability. Entrepreneurship and innovation encourage and improve undergraduate's ability in team work, trust, reliability and cooperation ar work place and perceiving future position as capacity builders for global sustainability.

Conceptual Framework

Entrepreneurship is the process of identifying and exploiting opportunities for value creation; Entrepreneurship is from a French word "entrepredenre" meaning to undertake or pursue opportunities to fulfill needs and wants through innovation (Amaechi, 2022). Entrepreneur see opportunities which they identify and make moves toward utilizing such opportunities and in the process, needs of individual or group of individuals in the society will be fulfilled. Entrepreneurs are often described as disruptive innovators who are quick to recognize opportunities and take risk to access and harness them in a process of creative destruction Oyinola, 2023. Richard, (1732) described entrepreneurship as a willingness to carry out forms of arbitrage involving the financial risk of a new venture. Therefore, entrepreneurship is described as a process of harnessing available resources as well as exploring market opportunities for a long term wealth and financial gain. Amaechi (2022) opined that entrepreneur is described as the process of value creation through identification of and exploration of opportunities e.g through developing new products, seeking new markets or both. It can be agreed that entrepreneurship is a process of change where as innovation is the most vital function of the entrepreneur. It is the basic requirement for economic development in a free enterprise or mixed economy where innovation is the basis of development. Innovation in a system can increase marginal productivity of the factors of production. The above definitions and discussion point to the fact entrepreneurship involves innovation, development, recognize, seizing opportunities and converting opportunities to remarkable ideas, value while bearing the risk of competition. Innovation on the other hand involves the application of novel ideas to improve processes, products, or services. Innovation has its origins from the Latin "innovare" which stand for renewal Muyiwa (2022). Innovation serves as an important driver for economic growth and development in many facets of the economy such as education, industry, commerce, transportation, communication. To ensure viability, businesses around the world are adopting innovative strategies that focus on investing in training, research and development, firm size, type and sector Abdu, 2018. Capacity building refers to the empowerment of individuals and institutions through knowledge, skills, tools, and policy frameworks to perform effectively.

According to Global sustainability, as articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and long-term development strategies. The Concept of sustainable development could be traced and linked to Caolwitz in 1713 when he edited the first book on forest sciences and judiciously applied the concept in illustrating the need for preservation and sustainability of timber and lumbering for the future generations (Ubabudu & Muraina, 2016). To apply it to the current context, it implies that students should be offered entrepreneurship education, sustainably in their discipline; they can be self-sufficient, have long learning skills, be employers of labour, captains of industry, and achieve all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular goal number 1 and 4, that focuses on eradication of poverty and education as well as aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". Sustainability has become an apparently consensual idea around which to gather the diverse actors and functions of the justification for its existence (McCowan, 2023). This is a strategically planned development which remains relevant, impactful for today's generation and the oncoming generation.

Tertiary institutions will establish relevant, comprehensive assessments and feedback mechanisms that are transformative for sustainable development. Ubabudu, (2023) Entrepreneurial education provided to the students' needs to be reflective of a new period of deep transformation of entrepreneurship renewal for sustainability and not an abstract or to cause a reality crisis on the students or grandaunts. As a result, tertiary institutions of higher learning that provides post secondary school education to students as citadel of learning should embrace and adapt to changes by utilizing their full potential in order to reflect in their entrepreneurial and learning. McCown (2022) well describes the situation, and it is appropriate for him to state that professional personnel must ensure the institution is sustainable, academics must conduct research and publish findings on the topic, and students must be taught in sustainable development. Arogundade (2011), states that sustainable development requires balancing environmental, societal and economic considerations in the pursuit of development and an improved quality of life for today and tomorrow. He further posited that

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sustainability includes intergenerational equity, gender equity just and peaceful societies, social tolerance, environmental preservation and restoration, poverty alleviation and natural resource conservation. In effects, sustainable development entails improvement in the totality of the factors that make life worth living today and in the future. Arogundade further gave the major essentials tools for achieving sustainable development to include the following:

1. Improvement in the quality of basic education;
2. Reorientation of existing education programmes to address sustainable development
3. Develop public awareness and understanding; and
4. Provide training for all sectors of private and civil society.

This type of development benefits both current and future generations maximally without jeopardizing the environment in which we live. Nigeria has to do everything humanly possible to enhance the lives of its teaming population as society which is progressing. This explained why academic entrepreneurial teaching has to be revamped for sustainability. Furthermore, this suggested that to achieve sustainability in this 21st century, students must be trained in both the pedagogy of the subject matter and these developing technologies, as they are likely to come in contact with them at work places. This will undoubtedly increase their marketability, employability, and sustainability in the global community.

Global Evidence of Entrepreneurship as an Economic Driver

Empirical data across nations show that entrepreneurship and innovation drive job creation, poverty alleviation, and national competitiveness. For example, the world Economic Forum (2019) identified innovation capability as a key determinant of global competitiveness, ranking economies with stronger research and development; venture funding, and knowledge networks as more resilient. Similarly, UNCTAD's Entrepreneurship Policy Framework (2015) emphasizes regulatory clarity, skills development, and network facilitation as prerequisites for scaling entrepreneurship ecosystem. Recent updates in the global Innovation Index 2023 confirmed that countries integrating entrepreneurial training into universities, coupled with public-private innovation hubs, consistently show stronger innovation outputs (WIPO, 2023). The link between entrepreneurship and sustainable development has also been reinforced, as innovative entrepreneurs provide scalable solutions to local and global challenges, from renewable energy to digital financial inclusion.

The Role of Tertiary Institutions in Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Tertiary institutions act as incubators for entrepreneurship by integrating theory and practice through curriculum reforms, startup accelerators, and partnerships with industry. Innovation hubs and incubation centers are increasingly found on campuses, providing students with mentorship, funding access, and collaborative spaces. The production of entrepreneurial graduates is the reason for the expansion of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions. However despite the world wide proliferation of entrepreneurship training programs, there has not been much agreement on their objectives, target audience, curriculum, teaching methods and assessment practices (Mwasalwiba, 2010). At University level, the essence of teaching entrepreneurship is to graduate with accomplished skills and competencies to think innovatively, discovers possibilities and translate ideas into value. These ecosystems enable experiential learning and the development of scalable solutions to societal problems. Tertiary institutions universities, polytechnics, and colleges are central in grooming future leaders and change agents. Their role includes:

i. Integrating entrepreneurship education into curricula across disciplines
ii. Establishing innovation hubs, research parks, and incubation centers
iii. Partnering with industries and government agencies
iv. Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration to solve societal problems

When these institutions become engines of innovation, they not only create employable graduates but also job creators.

Nigerian Context: Demographics and Urgency

Nigeria presents a unique case for study of entrepreneurship and innovation in higher education. With 200 million people, more than 60% of whom are youth, the country faces enormous pressure to create sustainable livelihoods and foster inclusive development (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Yet, graduates unemployment and under-employment remain persistently high, revealing a mismatch between university education and labour market demands (Oyinlola et al., 2024). Scholars argue that entrepreneurship education and Innovation ecosystems are critical pathways to bridge this gap and enhance graduate employability. Moreover, Nigeria's burgeoning start-up ecosystem-anchored in fintech, agritech, and healthtech demonstrates the potential of youth-driven innovation when adequately supported (Partech, 2025). Thus, Nigerian universities stand at a pivotal juncture where reforming entrepreneurial education can transform demographic pressure into a dividend for sustainable growth.

Universities as Drivers of Entrepreneurial Mindsets in Nigeria

Nigerian universities have been positioned as critical actors in promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. The National Universities Commission (NUC) introduced compulsory entrepreneurship education in 2004, aiming to equip graduates with entrepreneurial skills (NUC, 2004). While implementation has heightened awareness of the need for practical training in Nigerian Universities (KPMG, 2022). The tertiary institutions were upgraded to entrepreneurship centre, business incubation hubs, and university industry partnership improve students' entrepreneurial intentions and venture creation and more recently, Oyinala et al., (2024) highlight that entrepreneurial universities in Nigeria can act as catalysts for regional development by producing graduates who are

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innovative, adaptable, and resilient. However, scholars caution that for universities to become effective drivers, entrepreneurship education must be practical, research-driven, and integrated with real industry challenges. In this light, Nigeria universities have both the mandate and potential to transform into entrepreneurial hubs that address unemployment, support innovation, and contribution, and contribute directly to sustainable development goals.

Nigeria's Start –up Ecosystem and Global Competitiveness

Nigeria has emerged as one of Africa's leading start-up ecosystems, particular in fintech, agritech and healthtech, largely driven by innovative graduates and young entrepreneurship. According to Partech (2025), Nigeria attracted over $1.2 billion in venture funding in 2024, making it the continent's top destination for investment in start-ups. This growth demonstrates the role of innovation-driven entrepreneurship in positioning Nigeria as a competitive in the global digital economy. Adegbite and Machethe (2020) note that Nigeria fin tech start-ups such as Flutter wave and Pay stack have disrupted traditional banking systems, expanded financial inclusion, and created thousands of jobs. Furthermore, it was discovered show that healthtech innovations during the COVID-19 pandemic improved access to medical services and expanded healthcare capacity leading to growing recognition of Nigeria's international competitiveness. However, for universities to contribute effectively to the ecosystem, stronger research-industry linkages and government support are needed.

Policy Interventions Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Nigeria

Government interventions have also reinforced the roles of entrepreneurship and innovation in Nigeria's development agenda. The Nigeria Startup Act (2022) provides legal recognition for startups, tax incentives, and institutional framework to support innovation, particularly among youth and university graduates (KPMG, 2022). Analysts such as Templars Law (2024) observe that the Act has the potential to create a national innovation ecosystem by fostering collaboration among universities, investors, and industry. Additionally, the bank of industry and other government agencies have introduced funding and incubation programmes to support young entrepreneurs. Similarly, there is need for policy instruments targeting entrepreneurial capacity building have a direct impact on graduate employability and innovation culture in universities. Despite challenges in implantation, these interventions demonstrate a growing recognition of entrepreneurship as a key driver of Nigeria's long-term sustainability. To maximize impact, universities must strategically align with national policies, integrating them into curricula, incubation programmes, and research agendas.

Contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship and innovation in Nigeria are increasingly linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). Innovative entrepreneurs are tackling issues of poverty, hunger, and health. For example, agritech startups have develop mobile-based platforms that connect farmers to markets, improving the supply chains, and reduce post-harvest losses. In the same process, edtech innovations are expanding access to education in underserved communities, supporting SDG 4 (Quality Education). Recent studies show that when universities embed sustainability into entrepreneurship curricula, students are more likely to pursue ventures that balance profit with environmental and social impact. In Nigeria, this alignment is particularly critical, given the urgent need to address youth unemployment, climate vulnerability, and social inequality. Thus, entrepreneurship and innovation serve not just as economic levers but as transformative tools for sustainable national development.

Capacity Building Strategies

Effective capacity building in tertiary institutions requires institutional support for faculty development, research funding, curriculum transformation, and entrepreneurial policy development. Workshops, hackathons, and enterprise development initiatives can further enhance student capabilities and entrepreneurial mindsets. International collaborations and digital platforms also offer new avenues for expanding institutional capacity. To foster a thriving entrepreneurial and innovative environment, capacity building must be a deliberate process. This involves:

1. **Faculty development:** Training lecturers to teach entrepreneurship practically
2. **Curriculum redesign:** Focusing on problem-solving, business modeling, and design thinking
3. **Infrastructure support:** Equipping campuses with labs, internet, funding opportunities, and workspaces
4. **Mentorship programs:** Linking students with successful entrepreneurs and experts
5. **Policy frameworks:** Encouraging student-led businesses and startups within schools.

These interventions build institutional and individual capacity to innovate effectively and sustainably.

Entrepreneurship and Global Sustainability

Aligning entrepreneurship initiatives with the SDGs fosters responsible innovation and long-term sustainability. Green entrepreneurship, inclusive business models, and technology-driven ventures can contribute to solving critical issues such as poverty, climate change, and youth unemployment. Universities must promote ethical practices and encourage startups to incorporate social and environmental impact into their business goals. Entrepreneurship and innovation directly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example:

1. **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** Entrepreneurship reduces unemployment and boosts income
2. **SDG 4 (Quality Education):** Innovative pedagogy improves learning outcomes

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3. **SDG 7 (Clean Energy):** Green tech solutions can emerge from campus-based Research and Development.
4. **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Eco-entrepreneurship can lead to climate-resilient innovations.

Tertiary institutions must embrace social entrepreneurship, green innovation, and inclusive business models that prioritize both profit and purpose.

Challenges and Policy Implications

Despite promising developments, challenges persist, including limited funding, outdated curricula, insufficient infrastructure, and weak linkages with industry. Policymakers must incentivize entrepreneurship education through grants, regulatory support, and national innovation policies.

Institutions should institutionalize entrepreneurship as a core function beyond academic programs. Entrepreneurship is being taught in most of universities today with grossly inadequate facilities or no facility at all. This pointed out reason why Nigerian graduates undergo retraining before they fit into work place, that the gap between the theory and its practical application is filed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, entrepreneurship and innovation are not optional extras in today's education they are necessities. If properly harnessed, tertiary institutions can become the foundation upon which nations build resilient economies, empowered youth, and sustainable societies. Let us therefore rise to the challenge reforming our institutions, inspiring our students, and innovating for a better world.

1. To drive sustainable development, tertiary institutions must reimage their roles as knowledge producers and innovation catalysts.
2. They must invest in entrepreneurship, support student-led ventures, and align academic programs with real-world demands.
3. Through capacity building and innovation, education can transition from theoretical instruction to transformative impact on society and the environment.

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