

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a Viable Tool in Entrepreneurship for Poverty Eradication among Youths in Benue State of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a viable tool in entrepreneurship for poverty eradication among youths in Benue State of Nigeria. Two research questions were raised and answered while two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted the cross sectional survey research design. A sample of 109 business owners from a population of business centres in Benue environs, simple random sampling technique was used to ensure a fair representation. An instrument titled ICT based Entrepreneurship Skill Rating Scale (ICTESRS) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in entrepreneurship training. Using Cronbach Alpha Method, the reliability coefficient was calculated at 0.82. Data was analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while related t-test was employed in testing the null hypotheses. The finding revealed that ICT has significant influence on entrepreneurial businesses in Benue State ($t = 326.93$, $df = 1 @ 108$, $p = .023$, since the $p < 0.05$). Entrepreneurial businesses have significant influence on poverty eradication in Benue State, calculated ($t = 301.27$, $df = 1 @ 108$, $p = .012$ since the p value < 0.05). The study recommended among others that entrepreneurs should acquire and use ICT modern tools in promoting their businesses.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Information and Communication Technology, Poverty, eradication

Introduction

Generally, youth is considered as transitional period during which a person turns out to be an active and fully responsible member of the society. Youth is not a homogenous construct hence, there is no single agreed definition of whom and what bands youth. The Internet Crime Complaint Center Report defines youth as young people between the ages of 15 and 24 while the Commonwealth of Nations consider people aged between 15 and 29 years as youth (Internet Crime Complaint Center Report, 2015). The operational boundary of the term 'youth' differs from country to country, based on specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors and even in youth-based programs and schemes (Nosrati, Hariri & Shakarbeygi, 2013). Practically, it is considered as a transitional stage in life which lies in between childhood and

adulthood (Odumesi, 2014). In Nigeria, the perspective of youth receives a contour as “it is the phase of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual growth, aged between 15 to 29 during which he/she actively partake in the process of developing attitudes, skills, knowledge and competencies for realizing the potential and strength of optimized level for the self-development, family, communities and the country” (Nigeria Youth Policy, 2013). Das and Nayak (2013) defines youth as a period during which a person is being prepared and prepares to be an active and fully responsible member of the society especially being involved in gainful activities and profitable ventures for sustainable economic development such as entrepreneurship.

Today entrepreneurship is considered one of the most important factors that can contribute to initiating sustainable economic development. There has been a massive entry of youth in the business world that quickly spread to the whole world. Entrepreneurship has been one of the most important and increasing sources of economic development, contributing significantly to wealth creation in all economies (Alba, Alvearez-Coque & Mas-Verdi, 2013).

Sanchez and Sahusguillo (2016) define entrepreneurship as “a process by which individuals - either on their own or inside organizations - pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control” entrepreneurship has been defined to focus more on the specific context of setting up a venture and becoming self-employed (Sjindjapkin & Johanson, 2015). Being entrepreneurial can mean many things to many people. Entrepreneurship is the creation of innovative organization or setting up a venture to become self-employed. In the view of Agommuch and Ndirika (2017), entrepreneurship is the creation of opportunities for self employment to provide goods and services. The advent of information technology has changed all the aspects of the world to a great extent and entrepreneurship in particular. The world is fast entering the information age, which in result, is changing the way business and people communicate, transact and behave. The advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has helped businesses and people to use new technologies and information systems in transactions and information exchange.

The roles played by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the entrepreneurial development of youths cannot be over emphasized. Information and communication technology has been seen as very useful equipment for effective preparation of young people for skill development and future employment. Information and communication technology (ICT), which is usually related to communication systems, applications and devices such as computers, mobile telephones and the Internet, have a great capacity to stimulate new economic opportunities for youth. For most organizations, the use of this technologies not only lead to better and faster business but also to improving competitiveness.

Some of the widely used ICT tools that have proved to promote entrepreneurial activities which include: Mobile phones, the Internet, Personal Computer (PC), radio

broadcasting, television broadcasting and cloud services (Steve, 2021). Through both traditional and new ICTs, youths in entrepreneur are now offered new opportunities to comparatively start and grow enterprises easily despite society-centered cultural, financial and educational constraints (Kotnik & Stritar, 2015). According to the latest trend of ICT, youths in entrepreneurial business face many barriers preventing them from taking full advantage of emerging economic opportunities, increasing productivity in their enterprises and accessing more productive and higher value added jobs and higher income generating employment opportunities (Shaemi-Barzaki, Baharestan & Akbari, 2014).

Maramura and Shara (2016) maintains that Information and communication technologies have been present in all spheres of human life for a long time and have a very large impact on communication and relationships between people. These technologies especially mobile phones, computers and the Internet are critical for business development and improving competitiveness. The role of ICT in entrepreneurship is manifold, Thurik, (2013) asserted the it ranging from facilitated communication between the two sides to online sales. ICT systems affect business` with products and services, markets, product cost, and product differentiation. Thus, the success of innovative business critically depends on the implementation and creative use of ICT (Mwangi, 2016). Today's progress of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is making the global market closer to each individual and therefore increased volume and an online store. However, this way of doing business is still under-utilized, because of resentment of people towards ICT, because of lack of awareness of what opportunities are available to them. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in any business venture is possible for increasing productivity, faster to share information between people and to have better communication between employees within and outside the company. The high level of mobile phones usage in developing countries and increased availability of internet services have enabled many businesses to expand their operations.

ICT has thus become one of the key technological infrastructures where existing technologies continue to rapidly develop and novel technologies are being constantly introduced, fostering the emergence of new entrepreneurial opportunities. Research of a number of nascent technologies has shown that they create opportunities for new ventures (Stenholm, Acs, & Wuebker, 2013).

The most common reason that researchers and experts promote entrepreneurship in any economy that entrepreneurship is seen as a major engine for economic growth and job creation especially for the youth who are the strength and power house of any nation. (Ubongu, 2020). There is a need for robust ICT advice on what to let the youths do in order to develop their entrepreneurial competencies and keep them off the streets and away from social vices. Hence the need to investigate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a viable tool in entrepreneurship for poverty eradication among youths in Benue State of Nigeria

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian society is faced with challenges of unemployed youths roaming all corners of the streets. It seems that lack of delivery of entrepreneurial skills through innovative strategies is a contributing factor. Most youths are dormant and are not well prepared towards becoming entrepreneurs as they are not given enough exposure in the use of ICT which is a viable tool for enhancing entrepreneurial skills, business communication and profit maximization for self and national economic growth. Such tools includes handsets, laptops, twitter, facebook, tiktok, email, whatsaps and a host of others which could be used for advertising and purchase of goods and services. Lack of awareness is a major factors militating against the proper delivery of entrepreneurial business skills using ICT. Lack of awareness on the part of the youths who are not well informed on the need for acquiring employable ICT skills that will make them good entrepreneurs, which will enhance their relevance in the job market, is a prominent problem. It is on this ground that this research is carried out to examine Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a viable tool in entrepreneurship for poverty eradication among youths in Benue State of Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the influence of ICT on entrepreneurial businesses in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of Entrepreneurial businesses on poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significance of influence of ICT on entrepreneurial businesses in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. There is no significance of influence of Entrepreneurial business on poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted Mar's (1991) theory of entrepreneurship. The cross-sectional survey research design was employed. The study was carried out in Benue State of Nigeria. A population of young business owners in Benue State was involved. The sample comprised 109 youths who own businesses in the study area. Simple random sampling technique was used to ensure a fair representation. The Information and Communication Technology based Entrepreneurship Skill Rating Scale (ICTESRS) is a 10 – item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale type of Strongly Agree (SA)-5points, Agree (A)-4points, Undecided (U)-3points, Disagree(D)-2points and Strongly Disagree (SD)-1point. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was determined for the instrument using Cronbach Alpha method. Research questions were

answered using mean and standard deviations while the two null hypotheses were tested using related t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Decision rule for the influences are as follows:

3.50-4.00 (very high influence), 2.50-3.49 (High Influence), 1.50-2.49 (low influence)

1.00-1.49 (very low influence)

The results were present thus:

Research Question 1: What is the influence of ICT on entrepreneurial business in Benue State?

Table 1: Summary of weighted mean on the influence of ICT on entrepreneurial business in Benue state, Nigeria

variables	n	mean	Weighted mean	remark
ICT	109	20.90	2.98	high influence
entrepreneurial business		81.98	3.15	

In Table 1, the result revealed that the mean for ICT is 20.90. The weighted mean of the items is 2.98; therefore, it is regarded as high influence. This implies that ICT influences entrepreneurial business in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of Entrepreneurial business on poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Summary of weighted mean on the influence of Entrepreneurial business on poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria

Variables	n	mean	Weighted mean	remark
Entrepreneurial business	364	21.89	3.12	high influence
poverty eradication		81.98	3.15	

In Table 2, the result revealed that the mean for Entrepreneurial business is 21.89. The weighted mean of the items is 3.12; therefore, it is regarded as high influence. This implies that Entrepreneurial business influences poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis1: There is no significant influence of ICT on entrepreneurial business in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of related t-test showing significant influence of ICT on entrepreneurial business in Benue State, Nigeria

Variables	mean	Weighted mean	df	t-cal	p-value	decision
ICT	20.90	2.98	363	326.93	.023	significant
entrepreneurial business	81.98	3.15				

The result in Table 3 revealed; calculated $t = 326.93$, $p = .023$, $df = 1 @ 363$, since the p value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of ICT on entrepreneurial business in Benue State, Nigeria is rejected. This implies that ICT significantly influences entrepreneurial business in Benue state Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of entrepreneurial business on poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of related t-test showing significant influence of entrepreneurial business on poverty eradication in Benue state, Nigeria

variables	mean	Weighted mean	df	t-cal	p-value	Decision
library website	21.89	3.12	363	301.27	.012	significant
utilisation	81.98	3.15				

The result in Table 4 revealed; calculated $t = 301.27$, $p = .012$, $df = 1 @ 363$, since the p value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of entrepreneurial business on poverty eradication in Benue State, Nigeria is rejected. This implies that entrepreneurial business significantly influences poverty eradication in Benue state, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

ICT and significant influence on entrepreneurial businesses in Benue State, Nigeria.

The result from research question one and null hypotheses one shows that ICT influences entrepreneurial businesses in Benue State, Nigeria. This result came as a result of the that ICT facilities has capacity for instant communication and collaboration across

geographical boundaries, allowing entrepreneurs to connect with partners, clients, and suppliers worldwide. It could also be averred by the researcher that entrepreneurs can leverage ICT tools to build and manage virtual teams, enabling them to access a diverse talent pool and work with experts regardless of their physical location. This finding agrees with that of Sanchez and Sahusguillo (2016), Agommuoh and Ndirika (2017) who maintained that entrepreneurship be encouraged among youths in order to be innovative and enhance their creativity and self-employment for the financial enhancement so as to reduce the over dependence on the government for white-collar jobs.

Entrepreneurial businesses and significant influence on poverty eradication

The result from research question two and null hypotheses two shows that Entrepreneurial businesses influence poverty eradication. The result could be explained based on the fact entrepreneurial ventures, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), can create employment opportunities, helping to alleviate poverty by providing people with sustainable sources of income. Moreover, by starting businesses, entrepreneurs contribute to the overall income generation within communities. This increased income can lead to improved living standards, better access to education, healthcare, and other essential services.

This finding is in agreement with that of Kotnik and Stritar (2015), Steve (2021) who are of the view that entrepreneurship can create employment which could aid in poverty alleviation and eradication. The authors stressed that a sure way to address the issue of unemployment and eradicate poverty is through the acquisition of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills for sustainable development in entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore, concluded that ICT has significant influence on entrepreneurial business among youths. That entrepreneurial business has significant influence on poverty eradication among youths. In Nigeria, very few companies and businesses are owned by youths, and they are mostly owners of smaller companies, which show that the economic potential of the youth is rarely used. However, the fact is that the development of young people in entrepreneurship creates the conditions for job creation, which also allows economic development and the development of society as a whole. How the progress of information and communication technologies has enabled the convergence of world markets to every individual. A chance for the development of entrepreneurship should be sought in ever greater use of these technologies. Studies that are listed in the work on the use of ICT have only confirmed the need to constantly point to the benefits of using information and communication technologies in the acquisition of new knowledge and the development of young entrepreneurs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research work, the following recommendations were deemed necessary:

- i. Stakeholders in education should introduce ICT into entrepreneurship education which could be used to meet the market demands and to provide the youths with the set of competencies needed for global challenges.
- ii. Entrepreneurs should acquire and use modern ICT tools in promoting of their businesses.
- iii. The youth should be encouraged to venture into entrepreneurial businesses to alleviate and eradicate poverty.

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