



Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition of Students in Public Universities During Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) Strike in Nigeria: Opportunity-Based Perspective

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Abstract

About 45% of university graduates in Nigeria are either unemployed or employed in professions outside of the university degree they possess. This statistic is alarming and has a ripple effect on the individuals involved, families, and society at large. The quest to tackle the challenges of unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria and globally led to the shift in emphasis from certification to skill acquisition. Thus, the study investigated the opportunity-based entrepreneurial skills acquisition of undergraduate students in public universities during industrial actions by ASUU in Nigeria. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. A descriptive survey research design and a sample of 744 undergraduate students using a purposive sampling technique, were used for the study. The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire, which was subjected to validation and reliability test. Data were collected online using Google Forms. Mean, standard deviation, percentage, and Chi-Square statistical tools were used to analyze the collected data. The results revealed that faculty of education undergraduate students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State are not idle but are meaningfully engaged in learning diverse entrepreneurial skills during ASUU strikes. The study also revealed significant gender stereotyping among the students in favor of female students in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. These findings imply that the students are equipped with the necessary entrepreneurial skills that can make them independent, employers of labor, and as well competitive in the global labor market. It was recommended amongst others that male students should be reoriented to begin embracing Culinary/Art skills. On the other hand, female students should be encouraged to also embrace technical skills.

Keywords: *Opportunity-based theory, Entrepreneurial skill acquisition, Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU); Public University Education; Gender*

INTRODUCTION

Education is an indispensable ingredient for personal, social, and national development. Nwune and Obialor (2022) considered it a veritable tool for any nation's social and economic development and citizenry. Education as a tool for change offers great promises and potential. According to Mgbonyebi and Olaniyi (2019), education helps people to acquire knowledge and by extension, basic vocational skills essential for self-empowerment and economic development. According to Amaewhule and Ogor (2020), such knowledge and basic skills are considered useful and call for entrepreneurship orientation in the mind of the students. The researchers further stressed that the deliberate acquisition of these skills would help to empower students economically. However, the educational system operational in most developing nations, as inherited from their colonial masters, places more emphasis on good grades than skill acquisition (Davis, 2004; Lochan & Barrow, 2008), although this trend is gradually being phased out. The emphasis on skills acquisition can help boost the economy of any society by producing entrepreneurs with track records of success (Onyeanywuna & Ognia in Okoro, 2021).

In Nigeria, a college degree is no longer considered the only ticket to success and wealth creation (Adebambo, 2022). The future of work is now more about job/entrepreneurial skills than college

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degrees. Thus, students who want to secure their future economically, are expected to work more on acquiring these skills alongside their degrees. The acquisition of these skills is necessary for undergraduate students not only to brighten their chances of employment in the labor market but also to become employers of the labor themselves by shifting attention to productivity and job creation. However, Odumosu et al. (2020) observed that the graduate employability of undergraduate students in Nigeria was abysmally low. This observation could be attributed to a lack of job/entrepreneurial skills required by employers of labor.

Entrepreneurship is the process of a successful business organization. It can also be defined as the process of building a mindset and skills (Diandra & Azmy, 2020). From the above definition, it means that entrepreneurship is, first of all, a mindset and an activity based on available opportunities. Therefore, the end product of the entrepreneurial process is job creation. According to Croci in Diandra and Azmy (2020), entrepreneurship can operate independently and interdisciplinary. Although entrepreneurship has been introduced in public universities in Nigeria, it has not produced the desired results it promises. To achieve the goal of sustainable personal and economic development, efforts need to be made to strengthen the emphasis on entrepreneurial skills acquisition, especially among students of public universities.

According to Okereke and Okoroafor (2011), entrepreneurial skills are potent tools for job creation, self-employment, and the economic survival of any nation. They are business skills that are indispensable and essential for guaranteeing the economic survival of both students and graduates alike (Okoro, 2021). This emphasis on entrepreneurial skills will produce successful entrepreneurs that can boost the economy of their society (Onyeawuna & Ogona, as cited in Okoro, 2021). This is because these entrepreneurs will eventually become employers of labor in their immediate environments. Most successful business owners in Nigeria started by acquiring a skill or training that has become highly sought after in today's society. The current study is of the view that if students are skilled, they will make significant contributions to society by being job creators themselves. The trend is gradually moving from university degree possession to skills acquisition.

Presently, the world is seriously evolving, and having exceptional skills can be an added advantage to a university degree. For instance, Adebambo (2022) reported 45% as the approximate percentage of university graduates in Nigeria that are either unemployed or employed in professions outside of the university degree they possess. The findings of Adebambo imply that the possession of a university degree with entrepreneurial skills gives one an edge over another with a university degree but without any entrepreneurial skills. The acquisition of entrepreneurial skills will not only make graduates more employable but will also equip them better to interact efficiently in their workplaces and with the larger society. Adebambo also noted that there are three categories of skills that students can leverage to improve their employability. These categories of skills include surviving skills, thriving skills, and soft skills.

According to Adebambo (2022), Surviving skills can be referred to as vocational skills, which include phone repair, plumbing, photography, fashion designing, shoe-making, carpentry skills, etc. These skills are characterized by low incentives and applied only to make ends meet. The present study conceptualizes vocational skills as technical skills. Similarly, Adebambo regarded thriving skills as digital skills needed to thrive and flourish. These skills are contemporary and highly profitable in this digital age. They include coding, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, digital marketing, video editing, graphics, website designing skills, etc. For Teixeira, et al. (2021), Culinary/art skills are skills associated with dietary and other artistic skills.

For the current study, entrepreneurial skills are grouped into three categories, namely, information

and communication (ICT) skills which include Graphic designing, computer programming, web designing, affiliate marketing, computer appreciation, Software development, Cloud computing, Data analysis, social media management, Kindle publishing, Cryptocurrency, and Forex trading. The second is technical skills, including phone/laptop repairs, Plumbing, Photography, Video editing, Masonry, Shoe making, Dry cleaning, Housekeeping, Hair Styling, Painting, and Interior decoration. The third is culinary/art skills, including baking, Bed-making, Event Planning, Fashion designing, and catering. These skills were chosen because they are common among undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The present study is anchored on the opportunity-based theory of entrepreneurship propounded by Peter Drucker (1985). The theory states that entrepreneurs do not cause change but exploit the opportunities that change creates. According to this theory, an entrepreneur is one who always searches for change and responds to the change by exploiting it as an opportunity. What is apparent from the above about entrepreneurs is that they seek opportunity and exploit it. According to Baptista et al. (2014), opportunity-based entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurial ventures based on their attractiveness and implications. They also seek entrepreneurial opportunities to implement their ideas (Dimitratos et al., 2016). An entrepreneur is resourceful.

The studies reviewed show that there is low graduate employability amongst students of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria owing to their non-acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, which has become essential in the present-day economy. Many researchers have attributed the low graduate employability mostly to the incessant industrial actions in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Although researchers have emphasized the need for students to turn the obvious disadvantage of industrial actions to their advantage by acquiring entrepreneurial skills during these periods, none has considered this need from the opportunity-based theory standpoint.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Yatu et al. (2016), an entrepreneur is a person who has acquired the needed resourcefulness and resilience for operating a business within an environment. Entrepreneurs are highly sought after because they are the driving force of the economies of developed and developing countries through job creation (Akhuemonkhan et al., 2013; Ayatse, 2013). In Nigeria, the need for entrepreneurs stems from the ever-increasing unemployment rate. Odumosu et al. (2020) attributed the rising unemployment rate in Nigeria to the unemployable and 'half-baked' graduates produced by the educational system. The researchers further asserted that these graduates lack employable skills required by employers of labor in the real world. Also, it is observed that the mindsets of these students are already customized to seek white-collar jobs that are not readily available. This preconceived idea about white-collar jobs inhibits the productivity and full potential of the students, in essence, cripples their prospects of becoming entrepreneurs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to bridge this gap. Entrepreneurship is the viable solution to this pressing problem of unemployment and lack of white-collar jobs (Barba-Sanchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018). With white-collar jobs becoming a rare luxury in modern-day Nigeria, emphasis has since shifted to promoting entrepreneurial skills, especially among students of public universities.

In Nigeria, public universities are part of the institutions that make up the tertiary education level. Others include polytechnics, mono-technics, colleges of education, and other specialized colleges (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013). The majority of the universities in Nigeria are owned by the government (Federal and State) and are called public universities, while a handful of others are privately owned. According to the National Policy on Education, university education, among other things, should make an optimum contribution to national development through its commitment to entrepreneurial skills acquisition by all students. Regrettably, the realization of the objective above

is quite far from what is obtainable presently (Odumosu et al., 2020). Alabi (2019) attributed the failure of university education to achieve its objectives to the incessant industrial actions (strikes) embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), which has robbed tertiary institutions of adequate time and opportunity to invest in students' education.

ASUU is one of the four trade unions in Nigerian public universities. Others are the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT), and the Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU). ASUU is the trade union of all lecturers in public universities. Chukwudi and Idowu (2021) observed that since its inception, ASUU has constantly been at loggerheads with the federal government of Nigeria over its demands which include, among other things, proper funding of public universities and a better welfare package for its members. This has resulted in several recurrent industrial actions by the union. An industrial action (strike) is a situation whereby university lecturers downplay their tools and refrain from their teaching activities in public universities for varying periods, ranging at times from one month to three to eight months in some cases, pending when their demands are fulfilled.

During this period of the tussle between ASUU and the federal government, there are usually varying ripple effects. Some of these include the stoppage of university lecturers' salaries, distortion in the university academic calendar, additional year(s) in the stipulated number of years for a program, the hastiness to cover grounds in teaching and to conduct examinations upon suspension of industrial actions, without due empathy and consideration for the students. Most notably, in those periods of academic discontinuity, students are helpless and are forced to vacate the school premises to their various homes. Unfortunately, some of these students idle away at home without engaging in any productive activity (Aidelunuoghene, 2014).

According to Egbegi and Iheriohanma (2018), some students' idleness at home creates room for their involvement in social vices such as cultism, cybercrimes, gambling, gossip, sexual vices, and the like. These vices are a precursor to raising morally depraved and unproductive students who would eventually become the burden of society in the long run. On the other hand, some students seize the opportunity to acquire, perfect, and optimally maximize some entrepreneurial skills, which add to their personal and societal value and productivity. These skills may also help support the student's education and provide a platform for them in real-world situations after their schooling. ASUU strike is indeed the right time for students to be engaged skillfully.

There is a saying that *when two elephants fight, the grass suffers*. Although the students are not the architect of these unending ASUU strikes, they have continued to be the perennial victims of the impasse. Contrarily, they can utilize the period (opportunity) and learn a skill or two, to become resourceful and meaningfully engaged while the strike lasts. The present study is anchored to investigate students' use of time and opportunities created by the ASUU strikes for entrepreneurial skills acquisition. The essence of this emphasis on skill acquisition is that entrepreneurial skills are highly profitable and in high demand, too, irrespective of students' gender.

The concept of gender as it relates to students' characteristics in research has been a subject of unending investigation among researchers in various fields (Nwune et al., 2021). This concept is defined by Godpower-Echie and Owo (2019) as the specific roles, attitudes, and values that society assigns to both genders on a differential basis. According to Oludipe (2012), some societies still believe and perpetuate this gender stereotype, assigning certain roles and job-related skills differently to the male and female gender, thereby interpreting what kind of skills both genders may acquire. Research (Alade et al., 2015; Idaka & Uzoechi, 2016; Nwakanma & Anigbogu, 2019;

Obi, 2015; Oludipe) has shown that the male gender dominates vocational and ICT-related skill areas more than the female gender that is believed to be good with culinary related skills. Also, Utitofon et al. (2021) admitted the domination of the male gender in skills acquisition exercises but advocated for women's consideration and inclusion in skill acquisition to boost economic development. This study also attempted to find out if this gender stereotype ideology permeates the entrepreneurial skills acquisition of undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State during ASUU strikes.

Purpose of the Study

The study's main purpose was to investigate the opportunity-based entrepreneurial skills acquisition of undergraduate students in public universities during industrial actions by ASUU. Specifically, the study attempted to determine the following;

1. what did undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State do with their time during the ASUU strikes
2. what entrepreneurial skills do undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State acquire during ASUU strikes
3. what entrepreneurial skills do male and female undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State acquire during ASUU strikes

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study.

1. What do undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State do with their time during ASUU strikes?
2. What entrepreneurial skills do undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State acquire during ASUU strikes?
3. What entrepreneurial skills do male and female undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State acquire during ASUU strikes?

Research Hypothesis

One research hypothesis guided the conduct of the study.

1. There is no significant difference between the entrepreneurial skills acquisition of male and female undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State during ASUU strikes.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), the design seeks to assess the current status quo obtainable in any given research incident. The population of the study is comprised of 30,898 undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State (Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University). The sample of the study comprised 744 (264 males and 480 females) undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The sample was selected using the purposive sampling technique. The sampling technique was used because the activities of ASUU were proscribed in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University at the time of the study, resulting in their lecturers' non-involvement in the industrial actions of ASUU struggles.

The instrument titled "Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition Questionnaire ESAQ" was used to collect

data for the study. The ESAQ comprises two sections – A and B. Section A was used to obtain the respondents' demographic data. Section B was made up of two parts; the first part contained five items with a five-point Likert-type rating scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with weights of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 for positive statements and 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 for negative statements was used to determine what students do with their time during ASUU strikes. The second part containing a checklist of entrepreneurial skills grouped under the three categories of skills covered in this study was used to determine the entrepreneurial skills students acquired during the strike period. The validity and reliability of the instrument were conducted by relevant experts.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage) were used to answer research questions while inferential statistics (Chi-Square) were used to test the hypothesis. For the research question, the weighted mean was used to decide on the level of agreement and disagreement of the respondents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What do undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State do with their time during ASUU strikes?

Table 1: Undergraduate Students' mean responses on Skill-related Activities During ASUU Strikes

S/N	Item	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	I am not idle during ASUU strikes	4.02	1.298	Agree
2	Learning a skill is unnecessary	3.85	1.046	Disagree
3	Every ASUU strike is an opportunity for me to learn a new skill	4.09	.992	Agree
4	Every ASUU strike is a time for me to relax more	3.71	.985	Disagree
5	I acquire a few skills during the ASUU strikes	4.02	.889	Agree
Grand mean		3.93	1.04	Agree

Table 1 shows that undergraduate students agreed to be engaged in skill-related activities during ASUU strikes. This outcome is supported by the grand mean (3.93) and standard deviation (1.04) which were used as a benchmark. Specifically, items 1, 3, and 5 had mean scores of 4.02, 4.09, and 4.02, respectively, above the grand mean (3.93) and thus indicated the student's agreement with the items. While items 2 and 4 had mean scores of 3.85 and 3.71, respectively, which are below the grand mean of 3.93 shown in the table above, thus indicating the students' disagreement with the items. Generally, the respondents agreed that they were not idle during ASUU strikes but were meaningfully engaged. In other words, every ASUU strike is an opportunity for students to learn a skill.

Research Question 2: What entrepreneurial skills do undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State acquire during ASUU strikes?

Table 2: Undergraduate Students' Percentage Response to Entrepreneurial Skills Acquired during ASUU Strikes

S/N	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	ICT skills	396	53.2%
2	Technical skills	124	16.7%
3	Culinary/art skills	224	30.1%
Total		744	100%

Table 2 shows that ICT skills, with 53.2%, had the highest patronage by undergraduate students, followed by culinary/art skills, with 30.1% patronage. Technical skills had the lowest patronage, with 16.7%.

Research Question 3: What entrepreneurial skills do male and female undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State acquire during ASUU strikes?

Table 3: Male and Female Undergraduate Students' Percentage Response to Skill Acquisition during ASUU Strikes

		ICT skills	Technical skills	Culinary/art skills	Frequency
Gender	Male	192 (48.5%)	52 (41.9%)	20 (8.9%)	264
	Female	204 (51.5%)	72 (58.1%)	204 (91.1%)	480
Total		396 (100%)	124 (100%)	224 (100%)	744

Table 3 shows the analysis of undergraduate students' entrepreneurial skills acquisition concerning gender. For male students, ICT skills, with 48.5%, had the highest patronage, followed by technical skills (41.9%) and Culinary/Arts skills (8.9%) respectively. For the female students, on the other hand, Culinary/Arts skills, with 91.1%, had the highest patronage, followed by technical skills (58.1%) and ICT skills (51.5%),

Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the entrepreneurial skills acquisition of male and female undergraduate students in public universities in Anambra State during ASUU strikes.

Table 4: Chi-square analysis of the response of mean difference between male and female undergraduate students' skill acquisition

Skills	Gender $\bar{x} \pm SD$	Chi-square	Df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)	P-value	Decision
ICT	1.52 ± .50	100.493 ^a	2	.001	.000	Significance
Technical	1.58 ± .49					
Culinary/art	1.91 ± .28					

Table 4 revealed that there is a significant difference in skill acquisition of male and female undergraduate students in favor of females. As highlighted in the table, the p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative was retained. This is to say that there is a significant difference in the entrepreneurial skills acquisition of male

and female undergraduate students. This significant difference is in favor of female students. Findings from Table 1 reveal that undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, learn or are engaged in acquiring some entrepreneurial skills during ASUU strikes. This finding is contrary to the findings of Aidelunuoghene (2014), who reported that students idle away at home during ASUU strikes. The findings of this present study could be a result of the necessity of entrepreneurial skills and the realization by students of its relevance in the global job market. Students take advantage of each ASUU strike to acquire skills that will enable them to be flexible and relevant economically and become job creators rather than job seekers. This finding corroborates the assertion made by Adebambo (2022), wherein he asserted that a college degree/certificate is no longer the main ticket to success and wealth creation in the present-day Nigerian economy. Entrepreneurial skills are highly marketable in the global market, and students are encouraged to acquire one or more of these skills formally or informally. Also, the findings of the study, as seen in Table 2, reveal that undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, preferably acquire ICT skills (53.2%) during ASUU strikes. ICT skills are followed by Culinary/Art and technical skills with 30.1% and 16.7%, respectively. This finding further proves that students do not idle away but acquire entrepreneurial skills during ASUU strikes. The findings of this study contradict the assertion of Odumosu et al. (2020), wherein the researchers posited that graduates of public universities in Nigeria are unemployable and half-baked because they lack employable skills. The findings show that undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, acquire some entrepreneurial skills before graduating. As reported in this study, these entrepreneurial skills acquired by the students prepare them for employment opportunities upon graduation and, most importantly, shift the students' focus from seeking white-collar jobs that are unfortunately unavailable. Also, students' engagement in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills during ASUU strikes would discourage them from engaging in social vices. The findings of the study also show that students engage more in ICT skills than in the other categories. This finding could be attributed to the digitalization the world has undergone in recent times, thus making the world a global village. To follow the current trend of relevance, undergraduate students tend to align more with these skills. On the other hand, the finding also shows that technical skills were the least patronized by the students. This finding could be attributed to its obsolescence, mechanical nature, low incentives, and probably the difficulty associated with learning these skills within the short periods the ASUU strike lasts.

Gender stereotype cuts across almost all concepts and disciplines including entrepreneurship. Further findings from this study reveal that female undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State actively take part in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. This is against several reports by researchers that the male gender dominates vocational and ICT skills more than the female gender (Alade et al., 2015; Idaka & Uzoechi, 2016; Nwakanma & Anigbogu, 2019; Obi, 2015; Oludipe, 2015). The researchers further stressed that females take up culinary/art skills instead of vocational and ICT skills. The findings of this study, as seen in Table 3, show that female undergraduate students dominated their male counterparts moderately in ICT and Technical skills and largely in Culinary/Art skills. These findings show the gradual rescinding of gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship skill acquisition. This is in line with what Utitofon et al. (2021) advocated, that women's consideration and inclusion in skill acquisition should be emphasized to boost economic development. However, it still appears that the male gender perceives Culinary/Art related skills as a feminine enterprise. The hypothesis testing also revealed that female students differ significantly in entrepreneurial skills acquisition when compared to their male counterparts. This can be attributed to the gender equality achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations (UN, 2015) and also

contemporary societal financial responsibilities which know no gender. This outcome can be seen as a bridge in the gap between male and female students in entrepreneurial skills acquisition.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study, it was discovered that undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, do not idle away at home during ASUU strikes but utilize the period of the strikes to acquire entrepreneurial skills that guarantee their employability upon graduation from school. Also, it was discovered that of all the three (3) categories of entrepreneurial skills considered in this study, ICT skills were the most acquired by the students during the periods of the ASUU strikes.

Again, it was discovered from the findings of the study that the female students were not only beginning to embrace entrepreneurial skills, but they had begun to dominate their male counterparts in skill acquisition. Also, it was discovered that gender stereotyping is still perpetuated in Culinary/Art skills, as it appears that the male gender still considers Culinary/Art skills as a feminine enterprise. The significant difference in skill acquisition in favor of female students is also a sign that gender equality in skill acquisition is a possible achievement. From the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Re-orientation of male students to begin embracing Culinary/Art skills. On the other hand, female students should be encouraged to also embrace ICT and Culinary/art skills.
2. The federal government and other relevant stakeholders should proffer lasting solutions to eliminate the incessant strikes in public institutions of higher learning.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

The use of Google Forms formed part of the limitation of the study. The researchers would have wanted the participants to respond physically. Further and similar studies should be conducted with other levels of academic study especially postgraduate students, to also determine the impact of industrial action on their academic achievement.

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