



## THE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CRITICAL SKILLS THAT ENHANCED SELF-EMPLOYABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examined the sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills that enhanced self-employability of the youth corps in Southwest, Nigeria. The study observed how the youth corps acquired their knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills that enhanced their self-employability. The study was conducted among the National Youth Service Corps in Southwest, Nigeria believing that the same procedure would be applicable to the youths in the remaining five geo-political zones of the country. A snow-ball sampling technique was adopted to administer a well-structured questionnaire on three hundred and eighty-two (382) youth corps in Southwest, Nigeria. Three hundred and fifty (350) copies of the questionnaire were returned, correctly filled and used for the study with a record of 91.6% response rate. A multiple of analytical methods were employed for data analysis. These include descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistical tools include: frequency counts and percentages; the inferential statistics were: regression, correlation and analysis of variance analyses. The results in descending order of mean are as follows: skill acquisition/entrepreneurship development programme (0.4020), seminar and workshop (0.3464), personal exploit (0.2582), vocational training and skills acquisition centres (0.2255), entrepreneurial business knowledge (0.1830) among others. This study concludes that the youths should see sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills such as innovation challenges programme, empowerment trust fund, foundations, and business innovation as mere competitive undertaken. They should also see the exercises involved as means of developing their perseverance and conscientious nature when they eventually establish their businesses. The study recommends that government agencies and stakeholders need to consistently organise training for entrepreneurs and acquire the knowledge necessary to maintain consistent economic dynamics. In addition, entrepreneurs need to see training and retraining

as a means of maintaining business relevance, and therefore need to work collectively on it.

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**Keywords:** *Knowledge, Critical Skills, Youth Corps, Self-employability*

## INTRODUCTION

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) defines 21st century skills a set of relevant knowledge, specific abilities, expertise, and literacies required to excel in business and life. The skill is a combination of subject knowledge, specific abilities, expertise, and literacies required for job and life success. The knowledge, literacies, and proficiencies that prepare individuals to address the problems and possibilities of today's world are known as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The world is changing rapidly towards 21<sup>st</sup> century digital era and many studies have been conducted on what knowledge and skills that are most required in a society especially young generations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is a developing international movement that focuses on the skills that young people need to learn in order to succeed in a fast-changing digital society. Critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, adaptability, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills are all 21<sup>st</sup> century talents (Silva, 2009). These abilities are routinely necessary for job related knowledge, competence, and attitude in order to accomplish certain duties in an organisation with effectiveness and efficiency (Mullins, 2010). Critical skills for the twenty-first century include the ability to access, synthesise, and transmit information, as well as the ability to cooperate to solve complex issues and develop new knowledge through the creative use of numerous technologies (Ledward & Hirata, 2011; Lamb et al., 2017).

In today's knowledge based economy, the combination of technical processes and entrepreneurial abilities is the true source of power (Mashingaidze, 2016). The accumulation of evidence also suggests the knowledge and skills possess by the youths (Bransford et al., 2000; Barbot et al., 2016). The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are intended to help the youth in keeping up with modern market trends. Despite that less attentions have been devoted to research on the application of such skills to enhance entrepreneurial attitude by young graduates in the country, employers are increasingly looking for youths who are flexible, proactive,

creative, adaptable, and collaborative. The knowledge of critical skills are essential for youths to effectively exploit their environments and involve in entrepreneurial collaboration for successful performance of their enterprises.

Entrepreneurial skills are the knowledge and abilities to recognise and exploit client needs, technological or commercial opportunities (Chells, 2013; Hayton, 2015). Entrepreneurial skills have been identified as one of the most important components in assisting teenagers. In understanding and cultivating entrepreneurial attitudes (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998; Wang & Wong, 2004). The knowledge and attitude of the youths towards entrepreneurship do influence their proclivity to open their own company in the future. These skills could also help in developing the youths and unemployed graduates to acquire new experience and opportunity that would help them to create jobs and be self-reliant.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills are the methods by which the youths get involved in enterprises in order to succeed in their future careers (Ango & Kyari, 2018). Young people who want to be entrepreneurs or operate their own businesses must first master the fundamentals and know that it takes a lot of grit and devotion to start a business, and it also takes a business owner who understands the ins and outs of being an entrepreneur needs business skills to thrive and succeed (Ekundayo and Durowaiye, 2014). Young people can become entrepreneurs through a variety of strategies, such as seeking a mentor who can show them the best ways to get started. An aspiring entrepreneurs can also seek out notable business owners in the neighbourhood and obtain as much information as possible from them in order to increase their business knowledge (Krueger et al., 2000). Research information can also increase the youth's business knowledge by doing some targeted internet search about the enterprise of their choice. The youths who are intending entrepreneurs can as well subscribe to the entrepreneur magazine for more information on how to be a successful entrepreneur. They must use useful resources for all entrepreneurs that may assist them in expanding their business knowledge and executing a methodical approach that can inspire them to start their enterprises (Fayolle and Gailly, 2015). Many business entrepreneurs who have

achieved significant levels of success have done so because to their extensive expertise.

Youths can be successful entrepreneurs through the business degree obtained from their higher institutions of learning and influence from parents, friends or close relatives thereby putting hands-on the business which is the most effective way of gaining business knowledge in simply go out and get experience. Once the youth can gather experience, it will be easier to start a firm that stands out and finds its niche. Since learning how to operate a business properly necessitates a significant amount of time spent in reading, comprehending, and networking with possible mentors. In the same vein, seminars and workshops are designed to provide the information that a prospective entrepreneur need to start a venture or an enterprise. Conferences can assist potential entrepreneurs in gaining a thorough understanding of the loan and grant application procedure, program requirements, and essential criteria of various agencies, and also how the young graduates can adjust and improve business plan and application. An entrepreneurship workshop stimulates life in the youths for knowledge discovery, inspirations, values and experiences actively impacting on business start-up. The Foundation is launched to encourage new, interdisciplinary entrepreneurship education programmes in the country. It aimed to make entrepreneurship a campus wide experience, to assist schools in becoming more entrepreneurial, and to ensure that thousands of students across a variety of campuses began to view their own skills and resources in a more entrepreneurial light (Kauffman, 2013).

Vocational training has also been demonstrated to aid the youths in the development of their social skills and improvement of health-related behaviour. It can improve a person's motivation, attitude, self-esteem, and self-confidence, particularly among the unemployed. Vocational skills are the abilities that enable you to learn a certain trade or profession, such as electrician, truck driver, hair stylist, medical records technician, or emergency medical technician. The life of every human being, most especially the lives of adolescents are dependent on their abilities. Skills acquisition can be referred to the knowledge transfer centres, as well as traditional design technologies and standards aimed at quality control are all being developed with the goal of improving the marketability of our crafts products. Empowerment helps the youths to completely utilise personal or communal power through knowledge,

skills, and motivation for effective societal functioning and economic contribution. Self-employment may be one of the benefits of having entrepreneurial skills. In this country, there are a lot of unemployed graduates, this could be due to our long educational system which emphasises grammar above practical learning. The African continent, without a doubt, has the biggest number of unemployed people. The truth is that one of the causes of unemployment among these bright young people is the lack of skill to back up what they learned in the school. When the graduates were still in school, they did not hesitate to pick up at least one new skill, such as graphic design, typing, hairdressing, electrical maintenance, and so on. The rate of unemployment among graduates would have decreased if they learned any of the skills.

Knowledge of digital information is a crucial talent that has always been emphasised in education, particularly in teaching and learning. (Khairil & Mokshein, 2018). Nabi et al., (2008) Students who obtain education on entrepreneurship would be determined to have an entrepreneurial career whereas knowledge could also affect their entrepreneurial intention (Fayolle and Gailly, 2015). Ibrahim and Mus'ud (2016), believed that entrepreneurial knowledge is the most significant factor to determine entrepreneurial intention. Knowledge is a vital element to ensure that youths receive useful and quality content of education. As a result of this, Krueger et al., (2000) confirmed that entrepreneurial desire is a strong predictor of future entrepreneurial behaviour. According to Ogundele *et al.*, (2012), training is the process of systematically gaining job-related information, skill, and attitude in order to perform specified duties in an organisation with effectiveness and efficiency. The variety sources of getting training would help the youths to develop the skills needed to be self-employed and self-reliant.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

The theory underpinning this paper is theory of planned behaviour. Ajzen (1991) argued that Bandura's idea of self-efficacy provided understanding of the importance of perceived behavioural control. Efficacy can be refers to as a person's belief in his or her ability to carry out the behaviours required to achieve specified performance goals. This also means self-assurance in one's capacity to manage one's own motivation, behaviour, and social surroundings. Albert Bandura proposed the concept that a personal judgement of how successfully one can carry out the steps necessary to deal with potential problems. It takes

dedication and perseverance to overcome hurdles that would prevent you from using your natural ability to attain your objectives. The youths should believe in their abilities to solve a problem that will make them attain a goal and finish a task, or accomplish what they set out to do. High self-efficacy means the youths ought to have the ability to take control of their lives and be the master of their own destiny. It divides beliefs into three categories, they are behavioural, normative, and control beliefs. Behaviourism or behavioural psychology is a learning theory based on the assumption that all behaviours are learned through conditioning process. Interaction with the environment is how conditioning takes place, and our responses to external cues, according to behaviourists determine our actions.

### **Empirical Review**

Globally, entrepreneurial training and education has been recognised as strategy for deepening entrepreneurship knowledge towards sustainable economic development of nations. The impact of entrepreneurship education on ambition among Nigerian undergraduates was studied by Ekundayo and Durowaiye (2014); their study gives understanding of the entrepreneurial intentions of small sample of Nigerian undergraduates using a quantitative data gathered from questionnaire administered on 120 selected undergraduates through stratified and simple random sampling. Analytical techniques and inferential statistics were also used. The researchers discovered that students' intention of becoming self-employed was due to the knowledge acquired from entrepreneurship education, and despite to the fact that some of the students were unsure about their own intentions because of fear of getting capital to start the business and their inexperience of managing the intending business. The study concluded that Nigerian youths require additional supports to overcome their foreseen challenges and also to reduce unemployment in the country.

Assessment of Innovative Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions as investigated by Sanusiet *al.* (2017) evaluated entrepreneurship education at Nigerian higher education institutions which is a relatively recent concept. They utilised deliberate sampling to recruit participants for the focus groups and interviews, and their research study were also chosen to show how the diffusion of innovations theory can be used to better understand how change occurs in the educational area. The population of the study includes instructors and



students from Nigerian's higher education institutions, such as the National college of Education, Polytechnics, and Universities. This is because students are the immediate beneficiaries of entrepreneurship education and professors that are the direct facilitators of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The study used thematic analysis, and the deductive coding technique was used to extract utterances from the transcribed interviews. The findings revealed that the criteria used in assessing entrepreneurship education, such as compatibility, complexity, observe-ability, trial-ability, relative advantage and training are driving entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions which inform the academic community about its advancement. It also highlighted the value of entrepreneurship education as a viable method for combating unemployment and as a tool for social, economic, and societal development.

Efe-Imafidon *et al.* (2017) conducted their research on entrepreneurial skill acquisition as a facilitator of self-employment among Nigerian youths, their major goal give evidence to support the concept entrepreneurial skill acquisition as a solution to young unemployment in Nigeria. The study looked at strategic industries in which adolescents should put their efforts in order to develop innovative skills that will help them start their own businesses, create jobs, and boost economic growth and development. Their findings for the study would direct youngsters and the government's efforts toward strategic areas that would foster entrepreneurial practices in Nigeria. The researchers suggested among other things, that facilitators of entrepreneurial skill training and workshop programs ensure that skills taught to youngsters are aligned with the needs of Nigeria's important industries.

Maigida *et al.*, (2013) piloted how entrepreneurial skills might be used as a strategy to achieve youth empowerment in Nigeria through Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). They argued that TVET is an interdisciplinary program that focus on the skills needed to establish a new firm or profession because Nigeria is rapidly becoming a largely youthful society with a high rate of unemployment. It is necessary to teach the youth in entrepreneurship skills through Technical Vocational Education and Training in order to combat the worrisome levels of unemployment. The children offer a huge potential for human capital development that society cannot afford to overlook, and everyone is concerned about the plight of youth and their future chances. Many

young people are experiencing significant unemployment, joblessness, and difficulty gaining a foothold in the labour market. As a result, there is a problem with unemployment, particularly among young people who had graduated from various educational institutions. The youths leave school without the necessary skills or abilities to function in today's rapidly changing society.

Tijani Alawiye (2004), Uzochuwu et al. (2015) observed that entrepreneurs manage innovative businesses well and encourage growth and maintenance to achieve a wide range of socio-economic development goals. Basically, through the development of entrepreneurs, for example, B. Skill acquisition, employment opportunities, or becoming a self-employed person. Acquiring Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment in Nigeria Acquiring Entrepreneurship is a powerful force in promoting self-employment.

Ojo et al., (2014), sought entrepreneurship education as a true tool for the empowerment of young people in Nigeria. A survey found that entrepreneurship is the most efficient way to empower young people, as the country is currently facing challenges such as anxiety, high levels of poverty and unemployment. The researchers critically examined the roles of entrepreneurship education and they discovered that provision of adequate training for individual enables an innovative link to creativity and skills acquisition, promoting autonomy and independence. They identified some techniques of acquiring entrepreneurship skills such as workshop/seminar, industrial training exercise, excursion which could help in empowering the youths. This study recognized entrepreneurship education as a tool, especially for youth empowerment.

Ayatse (2013) described the challenges and challenges of promoting entrepreneurship education among young people, especially college students in Nigeria. Researchers have confirmed that entrepreneurship education is essential in the real sector and to support economic development. The Nigerian government needs to pay attention to this area. Therefore, the paper argued that entrepreneurship education equips unemployed youth with self-employed skills. In addition, the paper recommended that educational programs at all levels of education should be appropriate to provide young people with the necessary entrepreneurial skills. It was also recommended that the Government of



Nigeria should pay close attention to Nigeria's comprehensive entrepreneurship education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in south western Nigeria. This zone consists of 6 states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo). According to Okankuwele (2017), South-western Nigeria lies between longitudes  $2^{\circ}31'1''$  and  $6^{\circ}00'1''$  east and latitudes  $6^{\circ}21'1''$  and  $8^{\circ}37'1''$  north. It has a total area of 77,818 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of 27, 581,992 (National Population Commission, NPC, 2017). The territory is surrounded by Edo and Delta to the east, Kogi and Kwara to the north, the Gulf of Guinea to the south, and the Republic of Benin to the west. The South-West, Nigeria is the abode of the Yoruba people (Ogundele, 2007). This study employed an *Ex post facto* research design with the research instrument, such as questionnaire. A set of well-structured questionnaire was constructed and administered on three hundred and fifty (350) youth corps with a record of 91.6% response rate. A snow-ball sampling technique was adopted to reach the respondents for convenience sake and administered the questionnaire on youth corps who are already involved in at least one form of technological and innovative enterprises. The questionnaire covered the sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills that can enhance them self-employability. The study was conducted among the National Youth Service Corps in the six States of the South West, Nigeria with sources of knowledge such as personal exploit, skill acquisition/entrepreneurship development programme, entrepreneurial business knowledge, family business experience, seminar and workshop, innovation challenges programme, business innovation competitions, campus entrepreneurial initiatives, entrepreneurship mentorship programme, empowerment trust fund, foundations, African youth entrepreneurship programme, vocational training and skills acquisition centres; and exhibitions and trade fairs. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed for data analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Out of the 382 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the youths in the six States in the South West, Nigeria, three hundred and fifty (350) copies representing 91.6% response rate were correctly filled and returned by the respondents. The study examined the sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills that can enhance self-employability of the youth corps in the study area. These sources made it possible for youths to

explore relevant avenue to strengthen their skills sets and possess new ones. Table 1 shows sixteen sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills that can enhance self-employability and their associated frequency distribution and mean values. The result shows that the skill acquisition/entrepreneurship development programmes (0.4020), seminar and workshop (0.3464), personal exploit (0.2582), vocational training and skills acquisition centres (0.2255), entrepreneurial business knowledge (0.1830), and industrial work experience (0.1797) in descending order of mean are the first five sources of knowledge skills that can enhance self-employability of the youth corps in the study area. Skill acquisition/entrepreneurship development programmes are usually in the form of degree programmes or offering of entrepreneurship courses as part of a particular degree programme. Others can be in the area of training outside the highest institution environment like the NYSC SAED for youth corps during orientation course. Some of these do not involve a long period of practical training. Seminar and workshop are other form short period of training which may not have a specific skill in focus. In the case of personal exploit, the prospective business owner lay his or her hand on skill(s), which is/are learned for self-actualization. Vocational training and skills acquisition centres involves enrolment in a full time training for a given period of time after which the trainee is expected to start his/her own business. Entrepreneurial business knowledge is the output of the previously identified sources of skill. The Industrial Work Experience scheme was designed by the Federal Government of Nigeria to provide students with out-of-school training on their courses of study so that they can start practicing immediately after graduation. However, not all the degree programme are entitled to participate in this scheme. Olokundun (2017) reported on entrepreneurship training and pointed out the following factors: complete knowledge of the entrepreneurship course; the adequacy of the course duration and the feasibility of the principles learned are significantly and positively related to the number of business opportunities identified by the graduates. Other sources of knowledge are exhibition and trade fairs (0.1111), campus entrepreneurial initiatives (0.1078), entrepreneurship mentorship programme (0.0915), youth entrepreneurship empowerment programme (0.0882), family business experience (0.0817) and African youth entrepreneurship programme (0.1797). The least probable sources of skills for youth corps according to the ranking in the Table 4.4 are innovation challenges programme (0.0556), empowerment trust fund (0.0523), foundations (0.0490), and business innovation competitions

(0.0458). These results appear to show that the first set of sources of knowledge of 21st century critical skills that can enhance self-employability are those that accommodate most corps. As the ranking move down, the number of opportunities available become slimmer. Therefore fewer are involved and lastly, the last set provide limited opportunity for youth to enhance self-employability since very few are able to make it to the end. They can be said to be competitive in nature and more effort are required to be part of the programme and complete successfully.

**Table 1: Sources of knowledge of 21st century critical skills that can enhance self- employability of the youth corps**

| Sources of the 21st Century Critical Skills that you possess | No  | Yes | Mean   |
|--|-----|-----|--------|
| Skill Acquisition/Entrepreneurship Development Programmes    | 183 | 123 | .4020  |
| Seminar and Workshop   | 200 | 106 | .3464  |
| Personal exploit   | 227 | 79  | .2582  |
| Vocational Training and Skills Acquisition Centres           | 237 | 69  | .2255  |
| Entrepreneurial Business Knowledge                           | 250 | 56  | .1830  |
| Industrial Work Experience                                   | 251 | 55  | .1797  |
| Exhibition and Trade Fairs                                   | 272 | 34  | .1111  |
| Campus Entrepreneurial Initiatives                           | 273 | 33  | .1078  |
| Entrepreneurship Mentorship Programme                        | 278 | 28  | .0915  |
| Youth Entrepreneurship Empowerment Programme                 | 279 | 27  | .0882  |
| Family Business Experience                                   | 281 | 25  | .0817  |
| African Youth Entrepreneurship Programme                     | 284 | 22  | .0719  |
| Innovation Challenges Programme                              | 289 | 17  | .0556  |
| Empowerment Trust Fund                                       | 290 | 16  | .0523  |
| Foundations e.g. Tony Elumelu                                | 291 | 15  | .0490  |
| Business Innovation Competitions                             | 292 | 14  | .0458  |
| Overall Average  |     |     | 0.1469 |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

### Level of knowledge of 21st Century Critical Skills

The study shows that the respondents are at different levels of knowledge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills. The knowledge level of most of the respondents (74.5 per cent) hover around 'high' and 'fairly high' with values 33.5 per cent and 41.0 per cent respectively. Only 11.2 per cent have 'very high' level of knowledge and few (9.0 per cent) and very few (5.4 per cent) are of the opinion that their knowledge level is still 'low' and 'very low' respectively. More than 70.0 per cent of the respondents believe they are aware and know fairly high to high level of knowledge of the skills. This shows that the Nigerian graduate are not completely alien to the skill they need to forge ahead after their four to five years of training within four walls of the higher institutions. In line with this

outcome, Fayolle and Gailly (2015) revealed that knowledge would also affect entrepreneurial intention. In the same vein, Ango and Kyari (2018) also demonstrated that entrepreneurial education could increase entrepreneurial intention by affecting the students' attitude towards entrepreneurial behaviour. Kyari (2018) opined that entrepreneurial education could increase entrepreneurial intention by affecting the students' attitude towards entrepreneurial behaviour. This study supported that education is an important means for gaining the needed knowledge. Programs at all levels of education need to be relevant to provide young people with the necessary entrepreneurial skills (Ayatse, 2013)

**Table 2: Awareness and extent of level of knowledge of the 21st Century Critical Skills**

|  |             | Are you aware of the 21st Century Critical Skills? |     |      |       |         |
|--|-------------|--|-----|------|-------|---------|
|  |             | Not sure   | No  | Yes  | Total | Percent |
| If the response to Question B1 is Yes, to what extent is the level of knowledge of 21st Century Critical Skills? | Very low    | 1  | 1   | 13   | 15    | 5.4     |
|  | Low         | 3  | 0   | 22   | 25    | 9.0     |
|  | Fairly high | 1  | 0   | 113  | 114   | 41.0    |
|  | High        | 0  | 0   | 93   | 93    | 33.5    |
|  | Very high   | 0  | 0   | 31   | 31    | 11.2    |
| <b>Total</b>   |             | 5  | 1   | 272  | 278   | 100.0   |
| <b>Percent</b>   |             |  | 6.3 | 13.1 | 79.7  | 100.0   |

Source: Field Survey, 2021

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills gear up the development of entrepreneurial skills among the youths and encourage them towards innovation by creating new firms and be self-reliant. It guided the youths to see the sources of knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century critical skills such as innovation challenges programme, empowerment trust fund, foundations, and business innovation as mere competitive undertaken and also utilise the exercises involved as means of developing their perseverance and conscientious nature when they eventually establish their businesses.

## RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that government agencies and stakeholders need to consistently organise training for intending entrepreneurs to acquire the

knowledge needed and necessary to maintain consistent economic dynamics. In addition, the youths should be concerted and committed to training and retraining of themselves for improved capacity in entrepreneurship engagements. The government should engage the youths in self-employability endeavours with a view to reducing youth unemployment.

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