ENHANCING SKILL ACQUISITION OF BUSINESS EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATES FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AI TOOLS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined how artificial intelligence (AI) could enhance the skill acquisition of Business Education undergraduates for entrepreneurial development in public universities in the South Eastern, Nigeria. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The population of the study was 671 made up of 619 undergraduates (year three and four) and 52 lecturers from the four Federal Universities that offer Business Education. The sample of 332 comprising 280 undergraduates drawn using purposive sampling technique and the entire 52 lecturers were chosen. Data were obtained through the researcher's structured questionnaire, which was validated by three experts. The overall reliability coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha statistical tool. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation and t-test statistic. Findings among others showed that applying natural language processing (NPL), and AI-driven simulation and gamified learning experiences in skill acquisition could greatly enhance the entrepreneurial development of the students. Based on these findings, it was recommended that the ITS should be designed in such a manner to accommodating the undergraduates learning space in business education, among others.

Key words: artificial intelligence, skill acquisition, entrepreneurship development, business education, undergraduates

Introduction

Despite the wide recognition of the traditional teaching in higher education, scholars have acknowledged its constraint in the provision of practical, hands-on experiences for real-world entrepreneurial success (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014). Thus, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) into educational frameworks was seen as a stride in revolutionising the traditional teaching and learning in the field of skills acquisition for entrepreneurial development (Arrieta et al., 2019). In adopting individual learners' needs, it provides personalised learning experiences that traditional methods often lack, thus presenting transformative opportunities, especially within higher education systems (Dwivedi et al., 2021). AI involves the development of computer systems that perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence. Some of these tasks are in decision-making, problem-solving, and language understanding. The application of AI has

been found to have broad applications across various sectors, including education. There are lots of AI applications with enormous potential to transform entrepreneurial education; however, this study limits itself to intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) and adaptive learning systems (ALS).

Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) mimics human tutors by providing real-time feedback, personalised support, and customised learning paths to students (Ma et al., 2014). They are designed to provide individualised instruction by continuously analysing a student's performance and tailoring educational strategies to suit their learning needs in real time (Zhou et al., 2017). Studies suggest that ITS are particularly effective in subjects such as mathematics and science, where students are engaged in problem-solving activities aligned with their cognitive abilities (Baker & Siemens, 2018). Hence, it serves as automated essay scoring systems which provide real-time feedback on students' work, improving both the efficiency and fairness of assessments (Hinojo-Lucena et al., 2019). For business education students, ITS simulate real-world business challenges, while allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge and receiving immediate feedback, enhancing their decision-making and problem-solving skills. This personalised approach is particularly beneficial in entrepreneurship education, where practical application and adaptive learning are crucial to success.

In addition to ITS, Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS), offer a dynamic, responsive approach to education by adjusting the complexity and type of instructional content based on an individual learner's progress (Dwivedi et al., 2019). The system delivers customised learning paths that foster creativity and critical thinking—key competencies for entrepreneurial success. It adjusts educational content based on the learners ongoing performance by collecting and analysing real-time data to continually adapt lessons to match individual students' strengths and weaknesses. This real-time adaptability helps optimise learning outcomes by providing targeted instruction that aligns with students' unique learning trajectories (Luckin et al., 2016). This system empowers students to move at their own pace, ensuring they grasp essential entrepreneurial concepts and skills before progressing to more complex tasks. Tasks such as grading, scheduling, and data management can be automated using AI tools, freeing educators to focus on more complex activities like mentoring and curriculum design (Jordan, 2020). Holmes et al. (2021) found that ALS improves student engagement and achievement in online and blended learning environments, making it a valuable tool in both traditional and distance education.

Consequently, while providing personalised feedback and adapting to individual learning needs, the AI tools are seen to foster critical entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making (Zhou et al., 2017). The study of Mahmood et al. (2019) show that integrating practical business training with intelligent learning systems in skill acquisition programmes can significantly enhance entrepreneurial outcomes. In the context of this study, the undergraduates of business education programme in public universities are germane. Business education combines business principles with educational theory and practice, preparing students for careers in various business and teaching roles by developing their professional, technical, and entrepreneurial abilities (Obrenovic et al., 2020). It encompasses subjects such as accounting, management, marketing, and entrepreneurship while fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills (Kaputa, Loučanová, & Tejerina-Gaite, 2022). Entrepreneurial development relies on both hard skills (such as financial management and market analysis) and soft skills (such as leadership and communication) (Arias, Evans, & Santos, 2019). Thus, entrepreneurs with a diverse skill set are better positioned to identify opportunities, make informed decisions, and create value in dynamic business environments (Mwangi & Ochieng, 2020).

Evidently, while universities and other higher education institutions are incorporating entrepreneurship curricula to equip students with essential business skills (Olorundare & Kayode, 2014), studies show that experiential learning, which allows students to apply theoretical

concepts in practical contexts, is crucial for developing entrepreneurial skills is not optimally utilised (Costa et al., 2017). Programs that include business simulations, project-based learning, and mentorship have proven effective in helping students acquire both technical and interpersonal skills required for entrepreneurial success (Dwivedi et al., 2019). In this regard, business education, a discipline designed to equip students with the necessary entrepreneurial skills and knowledge for real-world business ventures, stands to benefit immensely from AI-driven learning approaches. However, the extent to which AI tools are integrated for the enhancement of skills acquisition of business education students in Nigerian public universities, particularly in the South East, remains underexplored. The paucity of this literature underscores the need for the study.

The study was guided by Jean Piaget's (1930) Constructivist Learning Theory which stressed that learners actively construct knowledge through their experiences rather than passively receiving information. In the context of business education, the application of intelligent tutoring systems (ITS) and adaptive learning systems (ALS) enhances the constructivist approach by offering personalised, real-time learning experiences that adjust to each learner's progress. These AI tools provide practical, real-world simulations of entrepreneurial scenarios where students actively engage in solving business problems. ITS and ALS allow students to apply theoretical concepts to dynamic, simulated environments, where they make decisions, reflect on outcomes, and refine their understanding of complex entrepreneurial challenges. This approach aligns with constructivist principles by fostering active learning, where knowledge is built through experience, experimentation, and reflection.

The study aims to examine how artificial intelligence (AI) could enhance the skill acquisition of business education undergraduates for entrepreneurial development in public universities in the South East States of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the extent to which:

1. Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) enhance skills acquisition of Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in public universities in South East States Nigeria.
2. Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS) enhance skills acquisition of Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in public universities in South East States Nigeria.

The study was guided by the following questions

1. To what extent do Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) enhance skills acquisition of Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in public universities in Southeast Nigeria?
2. To what extent do Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS) enhance skills acquisition of Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in public universities in Southeast Nigeria?

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses

$H0_1$: Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) do not significantly enhance skills acquisition for entrepreneurial development between Business Education students and lecturers in public universities in South East States Nigeria.

$H0_2$: Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS) do not significantly enhance skills acquisition for entrepreneurial development between Business Education students and lecturers in public universities in South East States Nigeria.

Method

The descriptive survey research was adopted as a design for the study. The population of the study was 671 made up of 619 undergraduates (year three and four) and 52 lecturers from the four Federal Universities that offer business education. The sample of 332 comprising 280 students and the entre lecturers were chosen using purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was the researcher's structured questionnaire titled, "Artificial Intelligence in Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Development" (AISDED). The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A provided demographic information of the respondents, while section B elicited information relating to the research questions designed in two clusters on a four-point rating scale of very high extent (4-points), high extent (3-points), low extent (2-points) and very low extent (1-point). The questionnaire was further subjected to face validation by three experts, two from the Department of Business Education, and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Science Education, all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability coefficient value of 0.86 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha statistical tool. Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The real limit of numbers was used for decision making, classified as follows: 3.50- 4.00 (very great extent); 2.50- 3.49 (great extent); 1.50- 2.49 (moderate extent) and 1.00- 1.49(very low extent). The t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Where p- value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected, but where p-value is equal or less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Results

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent ITS enhances skill acquisition for entrepreneurial development (n = 319)

S/N	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Providing flexibility in learning options	2.93	.81	Great extent
2	Enhancing tasks at comfort zone of the individual	3.00	.94	Great extent
3	Enabling online learning seamlessly	2.70	.85	Great extent
4	Adapting to individual's learning strength	2.77	1.26	Great extent
5	Adapting to individual learning space	2.52	.89	Great extent
6	Offering personalized instruction that meets specific tasks	2.76	.88	Great extent
7	Providing instant feedbacks to the individual	2.85	.92	Great extent
8	Correcting mistakes for improvement	2.76	.88	Great extent
9	Adjusting learning activities to align with progress	3.11	.71	Great extent
10	Identifying patterns in students performance	2.77	.88	Great extent
11	Tailoring teaching- learning strategies	2.76	.90	Great extent
12	Making learning accessible without language barriers	2.68	.83	Great extent
	Cluster mean	**2.80**	**0.90**	Great extent

Table 1 shows that respondents had mean scores of great extent on all the items with standard deviation ranging from 0.71- 1.26. The cluster mean of 2. 80 and SD (0.90) indicates that to a great extent ITS enhances skill acquisition of Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in public universities in South East States Nigeria.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent ALS enhances skill acquisition for entrepreneurial development (n = 319)

S/N	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Creating personalized dynamic learning environment	2.55	1.20	Great extent
2	Assessing individual's knowledge in real time	2.62	.90	Great extent
3	Customizing learning experiences to maximise retention	2.65	.91	Great extent
4	Providing continuos formative assessments of students	2.80	.85	Great extent
5	Modifying sequence of learning activities	2.87	.94	Great extent
6	Exposing challenging problems to prevent boredom	2.52	.91	Great extent
7	Providing differentiated instruction for individual's progress pace	2.53	.98	Great extent
8	Identifying at- risk students early	2.68	.83	Great extent
9	Maintaining motivation to arouse interest	2.83	1.20	Great extent
10	Providing mentorship while addressing complex needs	2.66	.96	Great extent
11	Adjusting curriculum pacing where it is needed	3.19	.87	Great extent
	Cluster mean	**2.72**	**0.96**	Great extent

Table 2 shows that all the items had mean scores of great extent for respondents, while the standard deviations were 1.20, 0.90, 0.91, 0.98, 0.85, 0.94, 0.91, 0.98, 0.83, 1.20, 0.96 and 0.87. The cluster mean of 2.72 shows that to a great extent, ALS enhances skill acquisition of Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in public universities in South East

Table 3: t-test analysis of difference between the mean ratings of students and lecturers on the extent to which ITS enhances skill acquisition for entrepreneurial development

Designation	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	T	p- value	Decision
Students	271	2.82	.55	317	.10	-92	Accepted
Lecturers	48	2.81	.49				

Table 3 shows that the (t= 0.10., sig = 0.92), since the associated probability value was greater than 0.05 set as benchmark, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted. This indicates that Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) do not significantly enhance skills acquisition for entrepreneurial development between business education students and lecturers in public universities in South East States Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test analysis of difference between the mean ratings of students and lecturers on the extent to which ALS enhance skill acquisition for entrepreneurial development

Designation	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	T	p- value	Decision
Students	271	2.77	.60	317	.75	.45	Accepted
Teachers	48	2.84	.57				

Table 4 shows that the (t= 0.75., sig = 0.45), since the associated probability value was greater than 0.05 set as benchmark, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted. This indicates that Adaptive Learning Systems (ALS) do not significantly enhance skills acquisition for entrepreneurial

development between business education students and lecturers in public universities in South East States Nigeria

Discussion

The study shows that ITS enhances skill acquisition of undergraduates for entrepreneurial development to a great extent in public universities in the South East States, Nigeria. This is true as the tool supports individualised instruction that continuously analyses a student's performance and tailors educational strategies to suit their learning needs in real time (Zhou et al., 2017).The study affirms that with the provision of enabling tasks and online seamless learning, the students are believed to explore their world, thereby enhancing their entrepreneurial competence. Hence, the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Moreso, studies also suggest programs that include business simulations, project-based learning, and mentorship have proven effective in helping students acquire both technical and interpersonal skills required for entrepreneurial success (Dwivedi et al., 2019). In addition, the study of Mahmood et al. (2019) show that integrating practical business training with intelligent learning systems in skill acquisition programmes can significantly enhance entrepreneurial outcomes. Thus, with the application of ITS to skill acquisition, students are likely to be equipped with relevant entrepreneurial skills capable of promoting entrepreneurial development in public universities.

The study further indicates that ALS enhances skill acquisition for entrepreneurial development of undergraduates in public universities in South East to a great extent. This is true as ALS is believed to deliver customised learning paths that foster creativity and critical thinking which are key competencies for entrepreneurial success. Thus, the provision of real-time adaptability helps in optimising learning outcomes thereby providing targeted instruction that aligns with students' unique learning trajectories (Luckin et al., 2016). This view is in tandem with both respondents following the acceptance of the null hypothesis. With the provision of various entrepreneurial skills, the entrepreneurs are positioned to identify opportunities, make informed decisions, and create value in dynamic business environments (Mwangi & Ochieng, 2020). The establishment of direct relationship between the tool and entrepreneurial skills is supported in the study of Holmes et al. (2021) which affirms that ALS improves student engagement and achievement in online and blended learning environments, making it a valuable tool in both traditional and distance education. Thus, the integration of ALS is believed to aid in inculcating entrepreneurial competencies on business education undergraduates in public universities in South East States.

Conclusion

The study concludes that to a great extent, ITS and ALS enhance skill acquisition of business education for entrepreneurial development in public universities in South East States Nigeria. This underscores the importance and relevance of AI tools to enhancing skill acquisition for entrepreneurial development of business education undergraduates in public universities. Exposing challenging problems to prevent boredom

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in view of the findings of the study

1. The ITS should be designed in such a manner to accommodating the undergraduates learning space in business education.
2. ALS tool designers should highlight the challenging problems in skills acquisition for entrepreneurial development of business education undergraduates to prevent boredom.

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