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EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL AND DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING ON THE CAREER GROWTH OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS IN IMO STATE UNIVERSITY, OWERRI

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Abstract

In the modern, technology-driven labor market, entrepreneurship and digital skills are crucial for career growth, particularly for university graduates navigating an ever-evolving job landscape. This study examines the impact of entrepreneurship, e-commerce, and digital communication skills training on the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri. The study specifically explores how entrepreneurship and e-commerce training affect career opportunities, investigates the role of digital communication skills in enhancing employability, and assesses the overall contribution of entrepreneurial and digital competencies to students' career preparedness. A descriptive survey research design was employed, and data were gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed to 135 management students who had participated in entrepreneurship and digital skills training programs. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings show that entrepreneurship and e-commerce training significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial mindset, problem-solving skills, and their ability to leverage online business opportunities. Additionally, digital communication skills training has a positive impact on students' confidence, adaptability, and employability in the digital economy. The study concludes that a combination of entrepreneurship and digital skills training is essential for preparing management students for sustainable career growth in the 21st century. Based on these findings, the study recommends that universities incorporate more practical and industry-relevant entrepreneurship and digital skills training into their curricula to better equip students for the demands of the modern workforce.

Keywords: Career Growth, Digital Skills, Entrepreneurship, E-commerce, Employability

Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology and digital platforms has significantly reshaped the global labor market, challenging university graduates to be proficient and adaptable in navigating the ever-changing demands of Industry 4.0. With advancements in information technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, and digital communication, the competition for employment is becoming more global and intense. This shift has underscored the need for robust career growth programs that prepare students for the complexities of modern work environments. Universities are increasingly focusing on integrating both technical and practical competencies in their curricula, aimed at fostering employability and self-reliance (Adewumi & Olusegun, 2023). However, despite these efforts, many graduates struggle to transition effectively into the workforce due to gaps in their career growth and preparation, particularly in entrepreneurial and digital skillsets.

As the nature of work transforms, today's employers are no longer solely focused on technical knowledge; they now seek candidates who possess problem-solving capabilities, effective communication skills, digital literacy, and an entrepreneurial mindset. Consequently, it has become crucial to equip students, particularly those pursuing management studies, with the necessary entrepreneurial and digital competencies that align with contemporary societal demands (Chukwu & Ijeoma, 2021). However, achieving this goal requires the deliberate inclusion of entrepreneurship and digital training within university programs to strengthen students' career growth and employability prospects.

Although many students still receive traditional academic training, which often lacks sufficient exposure to workplace and entrepreneurial skills, this leaves them underprepared for a competitive labor market. The disruptions caused by technological advancements have highlighted the need for graduates to be more adaptable, innovative, and entrepreneurial qualities that are often overlooked in conventional management education (Nwoke & Okoye, 2022). This shortfall in entrepreneurial and digital skills has resulted in the growing importance of embedding digital competencies, such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and online communication, into university curricula. These skills are now seen as essential for both securing employment and pursuing entrepreneurial ventures in the modern workforce (Ejiofor & Azuka, 2020).

With the increasing reliance on digital tools in business operations, including e-commerce, digital marketing, and online communication, students must develop the ability to operate within digital environments. Skills such as establishing digital storefronts, managing online payments, and utilizing social media for business promotion are crucial for success in today's economy (Oluwatayo & Olamide, 2021). Furthermore, digital communication capabilities are critical for networking, collaboration, and negotiation in a tech-driven world. Management students who possess these competencies are well-positioned to gain employment, create businesses, and remain competitive in the global marketplace.

Given the growing emphasis on entrepreneurship and digital transformation, particularly in Nigeria, integrating entrepreneurship and digital skills training into management education is not just timely but essential. This study, therefore, aims to assess the effect of entrepreneurship and digital skills training on the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing recognition of entrepreneurship and digital competencies as vital for success in the modern economy, many management students at Imo State University, Owerri, still face significant challenges in their career growth. This is mainly due to the predominance of traditional educational approaches that emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical, entrepreneurial, and digital skills. The lack of adequate digital skills training has hindered students' ability to leverage online platforms for business activities, manage digital transactions, and implement effective digital marketing strategies. Additionally, students often struggle to communicate, collaborate, and network effectively in the increasingly digital and competitive work environment. As a result, their employability and entrepreneurial potential are severely limited, making it more difficult for them to secure meaningful employment or establish successful businesses.

Moreover, available research indicates that the impact of entrepreneurship and digital skills training on career growth remains underexplored, particularly in the context of management students. While there is a growing body of work on the importance of these skills, the specific ways in which e-commerce and digital communication training influence career outcomes are not sufficiently addressed. This gap in knowledge motivates the current study, which seeks to explore the relationship between entrepreneurship and digital skills training and the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of entrepreneurship and digital skills training on the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To assess how entrepreneurship and e-commerce training influence the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri.
2. To examine how entrepreneurship and digital communication training affect the professional growth and employability of management students at Imo State University, Owerri.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do entrepreneurship and e-commerce training contribute to the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri?
2. How do entrepreneurship and digital communication skills training impact the career progression and employability of management students at Imo State University, Owerri?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested:

H₀₁: Entrepreneurship and e-commerce skills training do not significantly influence the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri.

Ho2: Entrepreneurship and digital communication skills training do not significantly affect the career growth of management students at Imo State University, Owerri.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Entrepreneurship Training

Entrepreneurship training is a crucial aspect of preparing individuals for the complexities of today's dynamic economic environment, where the ability to identify opportunities, innovate, and manage resources is essential for creating value and driving economic growth. Entrepreneurship is commonly defined as the process of identifying market opportunities, creating value through innovation, and managing resources to establish and sustain a business venture. Key entrepreneurial skills include creativity, strategic decision-making, financial management, and risk-taking. These competencies empower individuals to navigate uncertain business environments, capitalize on opportunities, and build sustainable enterprises (Nwachukwu & Obi, 2022).

With the rise of digital technologies, entrepreneurship has expanded beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar models to encompass digital entrepreneurship. Digital entrepreneurship involves the use of digital tools, platforms, and markets to create, deliver, and capture value. Entrepreneurs in this space leverage the internet, e-commerce, and digital marketing strategies to run businesses, reaching broader audiences with lower operational costs compared to traditional business models (Sullivan & McGee, 2021). The shift toward digital entrepreneurship underscores the need for modern entrepreneurs to not only possess traditional business acumen but also have the skills to effectively operate in digital spaces. This evolution has made entrepreneurship education increasingly focused on preparing students for both physical and virtual business environments.

Digital Skills Training

Digital skills training refers to the development of competencies that enable individuals to effectively use technology to manage business operations, communicate, and engage with markets. In an era marked by the rapid digitization of the global economy, digital skills have become indispensable for success in virtually every industry. Digital skills encompass various technical competencies, including proficiency in e-commerce platforms, digital marketing tools, social media management, data analytics, and financial technologies like FinTech (Van Laar et al., 2020). These skills allow individuals to automate tasks, engage customers online, and make data-driven decisions that improve business performance.

For instance, e-commerce training enables entrepreneurs to set up online stores, manage payments, and track inventory, while digital marketing equips them with the tools to reach potential customers via online channels, including social media, email, and search engine marketing (Marques & Ferreira, 2021). Additionally, data analytics skills allow individuals to analyze consumer behavior and trends, enabling more targeted marketing strategies and business decisions. Given that businesses are increasingly reliant on technology to operate, the ability to navigate and utilize digital platforms effectively is a core requirement for entrepreneurs and employees in today's workforce (Ogunyemi & Akinola, 2023).

Integration of Digital Skills into Entrepreneurship Education

The integration of digital skills into entrepreneurship education has

become increasingly critical in preparing students to thrive in the digital age. Traditional entrepreneurship education has focused mainly on aspects such as opportunity recognition, resource management, and business planning. However, as the digital economy grows, it is now essential for entrepreneurship training to incorporate digital skills, ensuring that students are equipped to engage with the technology-driven landscape (Edokpolor, 2022). This integration allows students to develop a well-rounded skill set, combining traditional business acumen with the technological expertise needed to innovate and create digital business models.

Research by Okafor et al. (2023) highlights that entrepreneurs who are digitally literate are better positioned to streamline business operations, enhance customer engagement, and expand their market reach through digital platforms. The digital integration within entrepreneurship education includes teaching students how to use e-commerce platforms for business transactions, utilizing digital marketing strategies to promote products and services, and employing data analytics to gain insights into consumer behavior and business trends. As a result, digital skills training has become an indispensable part of entrepreneurship education, preparing students to navigate both traditional and digital markets effectively.

Moreover, the rise of the digital economy emphasizes the need for digital entrepreneurship, where traditional entrepreneurial skills such as opportunity identification and innovation are merged with the ability to leverage digital technologies. Digital tools such as cloud computing, social media, and online marketplaces offer significant advantages to entrepreneurs, enabling them to run cost-effective businesses, automate processes, and reach global markets without the need for extensive physical infrastructure (Sullivan & McGee, 2021). As such, the combination of entrepreneurship and digital skills training not only fosters innovation but also creates more opportunities for self-employment and business growth in the modern economy. By equipping students with both entrepreneurial and digital competencies, universities can help bridge the gap between academic education and real-world application, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to thrive in the competitive, digital-first business landscape.

Career growth among Management Students

Career growth refers to the ongoing process through which individuals acquire the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary for professional advancement. For management students, career growth involves the integration of entrepreneurial skills, digital literacy, and managerial competencies, equipping them to navigate both the formal employment sector and entrepreneurial ventures (Ademola & Idowu, 2023). The development of entrepreneurial skills, such as opportunity recognition and business sustainability, empowers management students to create their own businesses and contribute to economic development.

Furthermore, digital literacy plays an increasingly significant role in enhancing employability and entrepreneurial potential. Management students who possess digital skills such as e-commerce, online communication, and financial technology are better equipped to operate in technology-driven business environments. These competencies enable students to leverage digital tools to scale businesses, engage customers, and innovate in response to market demands (Odoh & Onyeizugbe, 2022).

The integration of entrepreneurship and digital skills training into management education is crucial for equipping students with the

necessary tools for career success. By fostering these competencies, universities can produce graduates who are not only employable but also capable of innovating and thriving in an increasingly digital and competitive global market.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory, both of which provide important insights into how entrepreneurship and digital skills training impact the career growth of management students.

Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, introduced by Schultz (1961) and further developed by Becker (1964), asserts that investments in education, training, and skill development enhance an individual's productivity, employability, and overall economic potential. According to this theory, education and acquired skills are considered forms of capital because they increase the value of individuals in the labor market, enabling them to earn higher incomes and contribute more effectively to economic growth. In the context of this study, Human Capital Theory emphasizes the role of entrepreneurship and digital skills training in enhancing the career prospects of management students. By acquiring entrepreneurial competencies, students gain the ability to identify market opportunities, innovate, manage resources, and adapt to changing business environments. Similarly, digital skills such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and online communication enable students to operate effectively in today's technology-driven business world. These digital competencies not only improve employability but also empower students to create and manage digital businesses, participate in the global economy, and compete in dynamic markets.

The theory is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where high unemployment rates and a rapidly evolving digital economy highlight the need for skilled graduates. Human Capital Theory suggests that investing in entrepreneurship and digital skills training provides a direct economic benefit not only for individual students but also for the broader economy, which requires a skilled, adaptable workforce capable of driving innovation and economic growth.

Career Construction Theory

The Career Construction Theory, developed by Savickas in 2005, posits that career growth is an ongoing, dynamic process in which individuals actively shape their career paths through their experiences, personal choices, and evolving work environments. The theory emphasizes the importance of career adaptability, self-reflection, and proactive decision-making in successfully navigating career challenges and achieving long-term career success.

For this study, Career Construction Theory is valuable because it highlights how management students actively construct their careers based on the skills and competencies they acquire during their education. Rather than passively following predetermined career paths, students shape their futures through the entrepreneurial and digital skills they develop. Entrepreneurship training equips them with the tools to innovate, identify opportunities, and create businesses, while digital skills training, such as e-commerce and digital communication, ensures that they can thrive in a digital economy.

This theory also underscores the importance of career adaptability, an essential quality for success in today's rapidly changing labor market. Management students who develop entrepreneurial and digital skills are better equipped to adapt to shifts in the economy, technological

disruptions, and evolving job requirements. As the global workforce becomes increasingly reliant on digital competencies, students trained in these areas can build meaningful career paths, whether in traditional employment or digital entrepreneurship. Individuals can achieve career satisfaction by aligning their skills and values with the demands of the labor market. For management students in Nigeria, where digital entrepreneurship and the knowledge economy are expanding, acquiring entrepreneurial and digital skills allows them to remain competitive and successfully integrate into both formal employment and entrepreneurial ventures.

Related Empirical Studies

A study by Chikezie and Uche (2023) explored the impact of entrepreneurship and digital skills training on the employability of university graduates in Nigeria. The study involved 500 management students from multiple Nigerian universities, including Imo State University, Owerri. The research found that students who participated in entrepreneurship and digital skills programs had higher employability rates and were better prepared for the workforce. These students demonstrated improved skills in e-commerce, digital marketing, and financial technologies, which significantly enhanced their ability to secure employment and launch entrepreneurial ventures. Furthermore, students felt more confident in using digital tools for business operations, which in turn improved their adaptability in a technology-driven economy. The study concluded that integrating entrepreneurship and digital skills into university curricula is essential for improving the employability of graduates in Nigeria.

Adebayo and Iroegbu (2025) conducted a study on the role of digital skills in enhancing the entrepreneurial capabilities of university graduates in Nigeria. In their research, they surveyed 400 business and management students from various Nigerian universities, including Imo State University, Owerri. The study found that graduates who had completed formal training in digital skills such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and online communication were more successful in launching and sustaining businesses compared to those without digital training. The research highlighted the critical role of digital competencies in modern entrepreneurship, noting that the ability to leverage digital platforms for business operations and marketing was a decisive factor in the success of entrepreneurial ventures. The study recommended that Nigerian universities strengthen their curriculum by incorporating more practical digital skills training to improve the entrepreneurial outcomes of their graduates. The results reinforced the idea that digital skills are no longer optional but essential for career growth and business success in the digital age.

Aliyu and Musa (2024) investigated the effectiveness of entrepreneurship and digital skills training on the career growth of management students at universities in Northern Nigeria, focusing on the University of Maiduguri and its neighboring institutions. The study, which surveyed 350 management students, explored the impact of combining entrepreneurship education with digital competencies like e-commerce, digital marketing, and social media engagement. The findings indicated that students who had completed courses integrating both entrepreneurship and digital skills reported higher levels of career readiness, including enhanced job-search capabilities, increased entrepreneurial ambition, and a higher likelihood of starting their own businesses. Moreover, the study revealed that students felt more confident in using digital tools to support business operations, such as conducting online transactions and promoting products through digital marketing strategies. The authors concluded that such integrated

training programs are crucial for improving the employability and entrepreneurial success of students in the Northern region, where access to traditional job opportunities is often limited. The study called for universities to adopt a more digital-focused approach to entrepreneurship education to better align graduates with modern career opportunities.

Kehinde and Olatunde (2022) conducted a study to ascertain the digital skills needed by business education graduates for unemployment reduction in the 21st century in Ogun State, Nigeria. A self-designed four rating scale questionnaire titled: Digital Skills for Employment Questionnaire (DSEQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and was also subjected to internal consistency testing using Cronbach Alpha, and the reliability coefficient obtained was 0.83. The population of the study comprised 470 Business Education students: 165 males and 305 females in three colleges of education in Ogun State. The sample of the study comprised 216 (male 76 and female 140) respondents determined by using yaroyemen's model and proportionate sampling technique. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data and find answers to the research questions, while t-test was used to test the research hypotheses. Findings of the study suggested that e-commerce, digital business analysis and digital communication skills are needed for unemployment reduction among business education graduates. The results of hypotheses testing revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean score of male and female business education graduates on e-commerce related skills; there is no significant difference in the mean score of business education graduates in federal and state owned colleges of education on digital business analysis related skills; and there is no significant difference in the mean score of business education graduates in public and private colleges of education on digital communicating skills needed by business education graduates for unemployment reduction in the 21st century.

Okolie, Igwe, and Nwosu (2022) investigated the effect of entrepreneurship education and digital competence on the career preparedness of university management students in South-East Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 310 final year management students across three universities in the region, out of which 180 were sampled using stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire which was validated by experts in educational measurement and entrepreneurship studies. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha and yielded a coefficient of 0.89. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and multiple regression analysis. Findings from the study revealed that entrepreneurship education significantly influenced students' ability to identify business opportunities, manage risks, and develop self-employment initiatives. Similarly, digital skills training enhanced students' competence in online business operations, financial technology applications, and virtual communication, all of which contributed positively to their career growth. The study concluded that integrating entrepreneurship and digital literacy training into management education is vital for preparing graduates for both employability and entrepreneurial ventures in the knowledge-driven economy.

Methods

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised management students of Imo State University, Owerri. A total of 135 students were selected as

respondents through purposive sampling, targeting students who had participated in entrepreneurship and digital skills training programs, as these were considered most relevant for the research. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire titled "*Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills and Career growth Index (EDSCI)*." The questionnaire was designed on a modified four-point Likert scale, with the following response options: Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1. The instrument was validated by two experts in management and entrepreneurship education, ensuring its content and construct validity. To assess the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 30 students from a different institution. The reliability coefficient was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a value of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency. Out of the 135 questionnaires administered, 128 (94.8%) were successfully retrieved and found suitable for analysis. Data were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (r) to test the hypotheses in a bivariate format, with the aid of SPSS Version 23, at a 0.05 level of significance. The use of Spearman's correlation helped to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between entrepreneurship and digital skills training and career growth outcomes among management students. This method allowed for an in-depth assessment of how the different skill sets impacted career growth, offering both quantitative and descriptive insights.

Results

Ho1: Entrepreneurship and E-commerce skills training do not significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri.

Table 1: Correlation

	Entrepreneurship and E-Commerce Skills Training	Career growth
Entrepreneurship and E-Commerce Skills Training	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	128
Career growth	Correlation Coefficient	.815**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	128

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researchers' Data, 2026.

Table 1 above shows an r value of 0.815 at a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho1), which states that entrepreneurship and e-commerce skills training do not significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri, was rejected. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that entrepreneurship and e-commerce skills training significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri.

Ho2: Entrepreneurship and digital communication skills training do not significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri.

Table 2: Correlation

	Entrepreneurship and Digital Communication Skills Training	Career growth
Entrepreneurship and Digital Communication Skills Training	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	128
Career growth	Correlation Coefficient	.790**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	128

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researchers' Data, 2026.

Table 2 above shows an r value of 0.790 at a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Since the significance value (0.000) is below 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho2), which states that entrepreneurship and digital communication skills training do not significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri, was rejected. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that entrepreneurship and digital communication skills training significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri.

Discussion of Findings

The test of hypotheses revealed that entrepreneurship and digital skills (e-commerce skill and digital communication skill) training significantly affect the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri. These findings align with Chikezie and Uche (2023), who noted that students who participated in entrepreneurship and digital skills programs were more employable and better prepared for the workforce. This is consistent with the growing demand for a combination of entrepreneurial and digital competencies in the modern job market. The significance of e-commerce skills, as found in this study, also supports the work of Kihinde and Olatunde (2022), who highlighted that e-commerce training enables students to use online platforms for business activities such as digital marketing, customer engagement, and online transactions. These skills are essential for students to start and manage their own businesses, providing an alternative to the traditional job market.

Similarly, the impact of digital communication skills on career growth is in line with the findings of Adebayo and Iroegbu (2025), who emphasized the importance of these skills in modern workplaces. Digital communication skills such as proficiency in email, social media, and virtual platforms allow students to effectively network, collaborate, and negotiate, all of which are critical for career success in a technology-driven world. This study also supports the work of Okolie, Igwe, and Nwosu (2022), who stressed that combining entrepreneurship with digital skills provides students with the necessary problem-solving abilities, innovation, and business acumen. Through entrepreneurship and digital skills training, students not only enhance their employability but also acquire the skills necessary to succeed in self-employment, which is increasingly important in today's uncertain job market.

Conclusion

This study assessed the effect of entrepreneurial and digital skills training on the career growth of management students in Imo State University, Owerri. The findings revealed that the integration of entrepreneurship training, combined with digital skills such as e-commerce and digital communication, plays a significant role in enhancing students' career growth. Specifically, the study showed that these skills improve students' employability, increase their adaptability to the demands of a technology-driven labor market, and provide them with the ability to initiate and manage businesses. Management students who acquire these competencies are better equipped to seize diverse career opportunities, including self-employment, freelancing, managing online businesses, or securing positions in the corporate world. In essence, entrepreneurship and digital skills serve as a critical foundation for career growth, self-reliance, and success in the digital economy. The study concludes that students with entrepreneurial and digital skill sets are more likely to thrive in today's competitive and technology-dependent workforce.

Recommendations

Sequel on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. The management department of Imo State University (IMSU) should enhance its curriculum by integrating practical e-commerce training, helping students develop skills in setting up, managing, and marketing online businesses, including handling payment processing, logistics, and customer service.
2. The university should prioritize the incorporation of professional digital communication tools, such as email, video conferencing, and social media management, into the management curriculum to improve students' ability to collaborate, network, and engage with clients and employers in a digital environment.

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