



## VOCAPRENEURSHIP SKILLS TRAINING AS CORRELATE OF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING AMONGST UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN SOUTH-SOUTH ZONE OF NIGERIA

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

This study ascertained the relationship among vocapreneurship skills training, sustainable business development and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South Geo-political Zone, Nigeria. Theory-based learning offers limited graduate self-employment opportunities, surging mass unemployment rate in the Zone with grave consequences on society. Four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. Null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level. Related literatures were reviewed. Correlational survey design was adopted. Population of the study was infinite and sample was 384 lecturers from public and private universities. Stratified sampling technique was adopted. 12-item structured questionnaire of 4-point Likert-type rating scale was used for data collection. Reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.83. The instrument was administered by the researchers and six (6) research assistants. Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to test null hypotheses for strength and direction of relationships. P-value was used to establish statistical significance of  $r$ . Findings showed strong positive relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development ( $r = 0.87$ ); and weak positive relationships between vocational skills training and lifelong learning ( $r = 0.14$ ); and between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development ( $r = 0.07$ ), and moderate positive relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning ( $r = 0.51$ ); significant statistical relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development,  $r(373)=0.87$ ,  $p.11(p<.05)$ ; significant statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development,  $r(373)=0.14$ ,  $p.07(p<.05)$ ; insignificant statistical relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning,  $r(373)=0.07$ ,  $p.31(p>.05)$ ; and significant statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning,  $r(373)=0.51$ ,  $p.17(p<.05)$  amongst university graduates in South-South Nigeria. It was therefore recommended that vocapreneurship skills training be sustained in universities because of the relationship it has with sustainable business development and lifelong learning.

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#### Introduction

Vocational skills are essential practical competencies in various occupations. Investing in vocational skill development is key to fostering overall effectiveness. Entrepreneurship is fundamentally an aspect of vocation (Sirico, 2010; Saulawa, 2023). Markman and Baron (2003) and Rosado-Cubero et al. (2022) noted that entrepreneurship is vital for success since any individual who creates a new business venture or expands an existing one is enterprising. The amalgam of vocational and entrepreneurial skills is “vocapreneurship” skills. Vocapreneurship prepares individuals with essential competencies and mindset needed to successful launch a venture within a specific trade or area. Integrating sustainability into vocational training aligns with global environmental goals and prepares entrepreneurs to meet the growing demand for eco-friendly business practices, products and services. Vocapreneurship skills training fosters a culture of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning encourages individuals to continuously seek out competencies’ development (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). Through vocapreneurial training, learners stimulate innovative thinking for employability (McGrath & MacIntyre, 2019; Ugwu, Kekeocha, & Njoku, 2024).

Vocapreneurship skills training has become a decisive component in handling societal encounters in the form of mass unemployment and graduate underemployment, particularly in communities located in South-South Zone of Nigeria. The lack of access to sustainable business development resources further deteriorates the concerns, leading to cycles of poverty and limited economic mobility in the Geo-political Zone. Moreso, the importance of lifelong learning cannot be overemphasized; as

industries evolve, individuals must adapt their skills to remain relevant in the job market (Williams, 2022). So, vocapreneurship is most needed for thriving in today's competitive landscape where vocational skills can easily provide food on the table if the skills are manipulated entrepreneurially that is, with an entrepreneurial mindset. In spite of this, no research work has been conducted on the relationship among the combined effect of vocational and entrepreneurship skills, sustainable business development and lifelong learning. Furthermore, despite the graduate unemployment challenges in South-South Geo-political Zone of Nigeria, within the scope of our knowledge derived from literature reviewed, the Zone seems to suffer some sort of research neglect in the areas of vocapreneurship skills training, sustainable business development and lifelong learning. This study was conducted in lieu of this background.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Nigerian University System currently uses Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) published in 2023 by National Universities Commission (NUC). Programme-specific entrepreneurship replaced entrepreneurship in CCMAS showing NUC's desire to graduate students with self-employment abilities to reduce the current massive graduate unemployment rate (NUC, 2023). In South-South Nigeria specifically, graduate unemployment rate is surging resulting to oil bunkering, drug peddling, rapping, criminality, smuggling, kidnapping, hostage-taking, pipeline vandalism, human trafficking, etc. These vices negatively impact on the well-being of humanity and the social and economic progress of the Zone. It is on this note therefore, that this study was designed to fulfil the stated purpose.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of the study is to ascertain the relationship among vocapreneurship skills training, sustainable business development and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South Zone, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the:

1. Relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.
2. Relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.
3. Relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.
4. Relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are stated to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria?
4. What is the relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H01 – No significant statistical correlation exists in the weighted responses of lecturers in public and private universities on the relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.

H02 – No significant statistical correlation exists in the weighted responses of lecturers in public and private universities on the relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.

H03 – No significant statistical correlation exists in the weighted responses of lecturers in public and private universities on the relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.

H04 – No significant statistical correlation exists in the weighted responses of lecturers in public and private universities on the relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning amongst university graduates in South-South, Nigeria.

### **Design and Methods**

This study was conducted in South-South Zone, Nigeria. Correlational design was adopted. The population of study was infinite hence; the sample size was determined using the formula:

$$m = \frac{t_{\alpha/2} \times p \sqrt{1-p}}{e^2} \text{ (Uzoagulu, 1998; PennState Eberly College of Science, 2019).}$$

Where  $m$  = sample size to be calculated;  $1$  = a constant;  $t_{\alpha/2}$  = value of normal curve associated to confidence level (for 95%, this value is 1.96);  $p(1-p)$  = expected percentage of the response variable (probability of success/proportion); and  $e^2$  = accepted margin of error (usually 5% in education research) squared. This gave a sample of 384 lecturers. Stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the subjects on the basis of equality of State; and in the ratio of 6:4 for public and private universities, respectively.

**Table 1: Sample Distribution by State and University Status in South-South Zone, Nigeria**

| Akwa Ibom State                |         | Bayelsa State |         | Cross River State |         | Delta State  |         | Edo State    |         | Rivers State |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------------|---------|-------------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|
| Universities                   |         | Universities  |         | Universities      |         | Universities |         | Universities |         | Universities |         |
| Public                         | Private | Public        | Private | Public            | Private | Public       | Private | Public       | Private | Public       | Private |
| 38                             | 26      | 38            | 26      | 38                | 26      | 38           | 26      | 38           | 26      | 38           | 26      |
| 64                             |         | 64            |         | 64                |         | 64           |         | 64           |         | 64           |         |
| <b>Total Universities: 384</b> |         |               |         |                   |         |              |         |              |         |              |         |

Researchers-made, 12-item structured questionnaire of 4-point Likert-type rating scale was used for data collection. It was face-validated. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument and yielded a coefficient of 0.83. The instrument was administered by the researchers and six (6) research assistants. The response rating scale and their corresponding values of questionnaire items were: Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 points, Agree (A) - 3 points, Disagree (D) – 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 point. Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to test null hypotheses for strength and direction of relationships at 0.05 level of significance.  $p$ -Value was used to establish significance of the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ).

**Results**

**Research Question 1**

**Table 2: Pearson’s Coefficient ( $r$ ) between Vocational Skills Training and Sustainable Business Development amongst University Graduates in South-South Zone, Nigeria**

| Variables                        | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) | Remarks                        |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Vocational Skills Training       | 0.87                                      | Strongly positively correlated |
| Sustainable Business Development |                                           |                                |

$df = 373, P > .05$

Table 2 shows Pearson’s  $r$  (373) as 0.87 at 0.05 significance level, indicating strong positive relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development.

**Research Question 2**

**Table 3: Pearson’s Coefficient ( $r$ ) between Vocational Skills Training and Lifelong Learning amongst University Graduates in South-South Zone, Nigeria**

| Variables                  | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) | Remarks                      |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Vocational Skills Training | 0.14                                      | Weakly positively correlated |
| Lifelong Learning          |                                           |                              |

$df = 373, P > .05$

Table 3 shows Pearson’s  $r$  (373) as 0.14 at 0.05 significance level, indicating weak positive relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning.

**Research Question 3**

**Table 4: Pearson’s Coefficient ( $r$ ) between Entrepreneurship Skills Training and Sustainable Business Development amongst University Graduates in South-South Zone, Nigeria**

| Variables                        | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) | Remarks                      |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Entrepreneurship Skills Training | 0.07                                      | Weakly positively correlated |
| Sustainable Business development |                                           |                              |

$df = 373, P > .05$

Table 4 presents  $r$  (373) as 0.07 at 0.05 significance level, indicating weak positive relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development.

**Research Question 4**

**Table 5: Pearson’s Coefficient (r) between Entrepreneurship Skills Training and Lifelong Learning Amongst University Graduates in South-South Zone, Nigeria**

| Variables                        | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient (r) | Remarks                          |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Entrepreneurship Skills Training | 0.51                                  | Moderately positively correlated |
| Lifelong Learning                |                                       |                                  |

df = 373, P > .05

Table 5 shows Pearson’s r (373) as 0.51 at 0.05 significance level, indicating moderate positive relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning.

**Hypothesis 1**

**Table 6: Pearson’s Coefficient (r) of Significance between Vocational Skills Training and Sustainable Business Development amongst University Graduates in South-South, Nigeria.**

| Variables                        | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient (r) | p-Value | Remarks |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Vocational Skills Training       | 0.87                                  | .11     | Sig.    |
| Sustainable Business Development |                                       |         |         |

df = 373, p < .05

Table 6 presents Pearson’s r (373) as 0.87 at 0.05 significance level and a p-value of 0.11; indicating significant relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development.

**Hypothesis 2**

**Table 7: Pearson’s Coefficient (r) of Significance between Vocational Skills Training and Lifelong Learning Amongst University Graduates in South-South, Nigeria.**

| Variables                  | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient (r) | p-Value | Remarks |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Vocational Skills Training | 0.14                                  | .07     | Sig.    |
| Lifelong Learning          |                                       |         |         |

df = 373, p > .05

Table 7 shows Pearson’s r (373) as 0.14 at 0.05 significance level, and a p-value of 0.07; indicating significant relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning.

**Hypothesis 3**

**Table 8: Pearson’s Coefficient (r) of Significance between Entrepreneurship Skills Training and Sustainable Business Development Amongst University Graduates in South-South, Nigeria.**

| Variables                        | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient (r) | p-Value | Remarks  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Entrepreneurship Skills Training | 0.07                                  | .31     | Not Sig. |
| Sustainable Business Development |                                       |         |          |

df = 373, p < .05

Table 8 reveals Pearson’s r(373) as 0.07 at 0.05 significance level, and a p-value of 0.31; indicating no significant relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development.

**Hypothesis 4**

**Table 9: Pearson’s Coefficient (r) of Significance between Entrepreneurship Skills Training and Lifelong Learning Amongst University Graduates in South-South, Nigeria.**

| Variables                        | Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient (r) | p-Value | Remarks |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Entrepreneurship Skills Training | 0.51                                  | .17     | Sig.    |
| Lifelong Learning                |                                       |         |         |

df = 373, p < .05

Table 8 presents Pearson’s r (373) as 0.51 at 0.05 significance level, and a p-value of 0.17; indicating significant relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings with respect to research question one and hypotheses one indicates a strong positive relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development. It also shows significant statistical relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development. These findings are consistent with Okeleke (2017), Kibitanyi and Ismail (2024), Eze, Ezenwafor and Igberaharha (2016) and Iriobe (2022) results. The findings also relate with the results of Dixit and Ravichandran (2023). Taken collectively, these findings indicate that as vocational skills training is given prominence, so it relates with the development of sustainable businesses. Although these findings clearly support relationship between vocational skills training and sustainable business development., it is expedient to recognize that acquisition of vocational skills alone cannot guarantee successful sustainable business development. Lack of ability to transform acquired vocational skills into profitable venture is a red flag in that direction. In spite of this limitation, the findings have potential intervention implications for combined vocational and entrepreneurship skills training.

With respect to research question two and hypothesis two, the findings revealed a weak positive statistical relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning. It also shows no significant statistical relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning. The result of research question one is congruent with the claim of Aspin, Chapman, Evans and Bagnall (2012), Dandara (2014). Whereas past researches like Afeti and Adubra (2012) and European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2011) established the significance of vocational training and lifelong, the present study has shown insignificant statistical relationship between vocational skills training and lifelong learning. This research outcome may not be unconnected with the fact that, to our understanding, this investigation is a novel attempt to address this relationship. Be it as it may, this result suggests practical implications for structured vocational skills training as a way of lifelong learning for self-dependence, economically.

Findings with regard to research question three and hypothesis three shows a weak positive statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development. It also correspondingly shows insignificant statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development. This is in agreement with the findings of Eze et al. (2016), and Ohagwu, Nwanesi and Hassan (2023). Although findings pertaining to this research question shows a weak positive statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development, it is interesting that the hypothesis result shows significant statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and sustainable business development.

Findings concerning research question four and hypothesis four shows a moderate positive statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning, which is supported by Gultekin and Erdogan (2016), Aykan, Karakuş and Karakoç (2019) and Asgariyazdi, Fard and Tirgoon (2019); and significant statistical relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning, which is also reported by Garipagaoglu (2013), Eksioglu, Eksioglu, Tarhan and Çetin-Gündüz. (2017), Aykan et al. (2019) and Asgariyazdi et al. (2019). These results merit comments. Firstly, the weak positive connection may have resulted from the perception that entrepreneurship skills acquired by university graduates' overtime has not manifested in lifelong learning due to their inability to be self-employed in the phase of acute shortage of paid jobs. Again, it may be a pointer to the inadequacy of entrepreneurial education offered in the university system which lacks sustainable knowledge for livelihood. Secondly, although the relationship between entrepreneurship skills training and lifelong learning is found as positively weak, its significant outcome on the other hand reveals promising evidence that entrepreneurial education relates with graduate economic self-reliance amidst high rate of graduate mass unemployment.

### **Recommendations**

Drawing from the findings made and the conclusion reached, it is recommended that:

- Vocational skills training should be sustained in universities for its relationship with sustainable business development, and lifelong learning.
- Entrepreneurship skills training should be sustained in universities for its relationship with sustainable business development, and lifelong learning.
- Vocapreneurship skills training should be sustained in universities for its relationship with sustainable business development, and lifelong learning.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to ascertain the connection among vocational skills training, sustainable business, and lifelong learning. Interestingly, on the average, the relationships among the variables were statistically significant. Although the findings clearly supported the relationships among vocational and entrepreneurship skills training, sustainable business development; and lifelong learning, it is expedient to recognize that acquisition of vocational skills alone cannot guarantee successful sustainable business development. In spite of this limitation, the findings have potential intervention implications to include venture formation principles in vocational skills training programmes. Vocational skills training is also implied as a way of lifelong learning for graduate economic self-dependence. Implication from the findings is also that the sustenance of entrepreneurship skills training would bring out corresponding sustainable business development. The promising evidences from this study ushers in vocational skills training as a relational construct with sustainable business development and lifelong learning. There is need to expand the frontiers of knowledge around this subject-matter. Accordingly, further research on vocational skills

training and venture formation intentions of university graduates should be explored. Research lens could also be extended to vocapreneurship skills training and business risk-taking willingness amongst university students. This is expedient to deepen scholarship of discovery on vocapreneurship skills development and utilization so to bring out the combined effect of vocational skills and entrepreneurship skills on self-employability, entrepreneurial intention, etc.

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