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LEVERAGING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: ENHANCING 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS IN NIGERIAN YOUTH

F.K Wahab[1], E.A Akintade[2]
[1]Department of Entrepreneurship, Ahman Pategi University, Patigi, Kwara State, Nigeria
[2]Department of Ecotourism and Wildlife Management, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria.
Corresponding Email: kayodefatai7@gmail.com
Tel: +2348060023726

ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the integration of digital technologies in entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, aiming to enhance the skillset of future entrepreneurs to meet the demands of the 21st-century economy. The study assesses how digital tools and platforms can be leveraged to foster growth-orientated businesses, aligning with frameworks for contemporary skills development. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the research combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews involving educators, students, and entrepreneurs within the Nigerian context. The findings reveal that while digital technology adoption in entrepreneurship education is progressing, significant gaps remain in access, infrastructure, and training. Educators highlight the benefits of digital tools in enhancing interactive learning and real-world problem-solving skills, yet they also emphasize the challenges posed by inadequate resources and support. Students report increased engagement and improved entrepreneurial competencies when digital technologies are integrated into their curriculum. Entrepreneurs underscore the importance of tech-savvy graduates who can navigate and innovate within the digital economy.

The study concludes that for Nigeria to realize the full potential of integrating digital technologies into entrepreneurship education, comprehensive strategies addressing infrastructural deficits, capacity building, and policy support are imperative. It recommends the development of tailored digital literacy programs for educators, investment in technological infrastructure, and collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to create an ecosystem

conducive to entrepreneurial growth. This approach will equip Nigerian students with the necessary skills to thrive in a digitalized business environment, ultimately contributing to the country's economic development.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurs; Entrepreneurship Education; 21st Century Skills; Nigerian Youth.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education is a key driver of innovation, economic development, and job creation, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. The 21st century has witnessed significant transformations in the global economy, characterised by rapid technological advancements and shifting labor market demands. As traditional job markets become saturated, there is a growing need to equip young people with the skills necessary to thrive in a dynamic, global economy. Entrepreneurship education offers a pathway to developing these skills, fostering innovation, and encouraging self-reliance. The National Universities Commission (NUC) and other stakeholders in higher education emphasize that the new narrative on entrepreneurship has evolved from traditional vocational studies, such as bread making and soap making, to fostering innovative mindsets to address local needs in Nigerian universities. Given Nigeria’s large youth population and high unemployment rates, Nwosu & Ohia, (2009) explain that entrepreneurship education has been identified as a crucial pathway to skill development and economic empowerment.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to provide valuable insights into the role of entrepreneurship education in the development of 21st-century skills from the perspectives and experiences of Nigerian youth. Specific objectives include examining the critical challenges confronting the success of entrepreneurship education and identifying strategies for improving entrepreneurship education.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. Does entrepreneurship education help students develop 21st-century skills?
2. What are the critical challenges facing entrepreneurship education?
3. What strategies can improve entrepreneurship education?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Entrepreneurship Education: An Overview

Entrepreneurship education is a transformative educational approach aimed at re-engineering the educational system to address existing deficiencies (Enu, 2012). Fundamentally, it is about instilling an entrepreneurial mindset and skillset in learners, which involves teaching not just the technical aspects of starting and running a business but also fostering creativity, critical thinking, and resilience (Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014). The core objective of entrepreneurship education is to prepare individuals to act on opportunities and manage risks effectively in an uncertain environment.

The concept of entrepreneurship education has evolved significantly over time. Initially, it focused predominantly on practical business skills and was primarily offered in higher education institutions. However, in recent decades, the scope has broadened to include various educational levels, from primary to secondary schools, reflecting a growing recognition of the value of early entrepreneurial exposure (Katz, 2003). In the 20th century, entrepreneurship education began to gain prominence as policymakers and educators recognized its potential to address issues such as unemployment and economic stagnation. Programs were developed to teach students how to create and manage new ventures, and these programs have continued to evolve with advancements in technology and changes in the global economy (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

Pedagogically, entrepreneurship education employs a range of methods to engage students. Traditional classroom instruction is complemented by experiential learning opportunities, such as business simulations, internships, and real-world projects. These hands-on experiences are designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice and give students a practical understanding of entrepreneurship (Lackéus, 2015).

The impact of entrepreneurship education can be assessed from various perspectives. For individuals, it can enhance self-efficacy, improve problem-solving abilities, and foster a proactive attitude toward career development (Bae et al., 2014). For society, entrepreneurship education can contribute to economic growth, job creation, and innovation. Several studies have demonstrated the positive outcomes of entrepreneurship education. For example, Miller and Bentley (2013) found that entrepreneurship education significantly increased students' intention to start a business and their confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. Similarly, a review by

Nabi, Liñán, Fayolle, Koenig, and Walmsley (2017) highlighted that entrepreneurship education positively influences entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, and behavior.

The study of entrepreneurship in institutions of higher learning has increased tremendously worldwide (Kuratko, 2005). By 2001, entrepreneurship education was offered at around 1,200 business schools in the United States alone (Katz, 2008). In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education has been integrated into the curriculum at various educational levels to address unemployment and foster economic development (Adeoye & Tayo, 2021). According to Eke, Igwesi, and Orji (2011), entrepreneurship education seeks to provide youth with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to achieve entrepreneurial success in various settings.

2.2 21st-century Skills in the Context of Entrepreneurship Education

The advent of the 21st century has brought about significant transformations in various sectors, including education, driven by rapid technological advancements and globalisation. These changes have necessitated a shift in the skills required to thrive in the modern world. 21st- century skills involve a broad set of competencies required for individuals to thrive in a modern, globalised economy. These skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

21st-century skills are broadly categorised into three main domains: cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, and intrapersonal skills (National Research Council, 2012). Cognitive skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, and information literacy. Interpersonal skills encompass communication, collaboration, and leadership abilities. Intrapersonal skills involve self-management, resilience, and adaptability (Dede, 2010).

According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), 21st-century skills are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern world. These skills are not just about technological proficiency but also about the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively. They argue that education systems need to evolve to equip learners with these skills to prepare them for future challenges.

Integrating 21st-century skills into entrepreneurship education is crucial as it enhances learners' ability to innovate, adapt, and succeed in a rapidly changing environment. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are vital for entrepreneurs to identify opportunities, assess risks, and develop innovative solutions. Communication and collaboration skills enable entrepreneurs to

build networks, negotiate with stakeholders, and work effectively in teams (Cooney, 2012). Self-management and adaptability are essential for navigating the uncertainties and challenges inherent in entrepreneurial ventures (Morris et al., 2013).

Furthermore, digital literacy has become an indispensable component of entrepreneurship in the 21st century. Entrepreneurs need to leverage digital tools and platforms for marketing, sales, customer engagement, and operational efficiency (Kuratko, 2016). Therefore, incorporating digital literacy into entrepreneurship education is critical for preparing future entrepreneurs for the digital age.

2.3 Role of Entrepreneurship Education in the Development of 21st-Century Skills

Entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in developing the skills necessary for achieving entrepreneurial success (Lazear, 2004). At the heart of entrepreneurship are creativity and innovation. Entrepreneurship education nurtures these attributes by encouraging students to think outside the box and develop novel solutions to existing problems. Brian and Norma (2010) highlight that entrepreneurship education provides a framework for students to explore creative ideas and turn them into viable business opportunities. This creative mindset not only benefits entrepreneurs but also contributes to broader economic and social advancements by introducing new products, services, and processes. It also equips learners to adapt to an ever-changing environment and new challenges (Brian & Norma, 2010).

In the entrepreneurial world, collaboration and teamwork are indispensable. Entrepreneurs often work with diverse teams to achieve their business objectives. Entrepreneurship education emphasizes the importance of working effectively with others, managing team dynamics, and leveraging collective skills and knowledge. According to ASTEE (2014), entrepreneurship education fosters these collaborative skills by involving students in group projects and entrepreneurial ventures, thereby preparing them for collaborative environments in their future careers. The entrepreneurial journey is often fraught with uncertainty and challenges. Entrepreneurship education helps students build resilience and adaptability, enabling them to persevere through setbacks and adapt to changing circumstances (Wahab, 2023). This skill set is particularly relevant in the 21st century, where rapid technological advancements and market shifts require individuals to be flexible and resilient. As noted by Tidd and Bessant (2018),

entrepreneurship education equips learners with the mindset to embrace change and turn challenges into opportunities.

Entrepreneurship education also contributes significantly to economic and social development. By equipping individuals with essential 21st-century skills, it fosters economic growth and job creation. It helps bridge the skills gap in the labor market and supports the development of a new generation of innovators and leaders. Nwosu and Ohia (2009) emphasize that entrepreneurship education is a strategic tool for policymakers and governments to enhance socio-economic activity and address unemployment challenges, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. Considering the importance of 21st-century skills, entrepreneurship education serves as a strategic tool for policymakers and governments to promote socio-economic activity and job creation (Komarkova, 2015).

2.4 Strategies for Improving Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is pivotal in fostering innovative thinking and business acumen among students. To effectively cultivate entrepreneurial skills, several strategies can be employed to enhance the quality and impact of entrepreneurship education. These strategies include curriculum design, teaching methodologies, institutional support, and collaboration with the business community.

i. Curriculum Design and Content

One of the most effective strategies is incorporating practical experience into the curriculum. This can be achieved through internships, project-based learning, and entrepreneurial simulations (Jones & Iredale, 2010). These hands-on experiences allow students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, enhancing their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

Entrepreneurship education should not be confined to business schools alone. An interdisciplinary approach, involving faculties from engineering, sciences, arts, and social sciences, can provide a well-rounded perspective. This integration helps students understand the diverse applications of entrepreneurial skills across various fields (Kuratko, 2005).

Developing soft skills such as leadership, communication, and teamwork is crucial. These skills are essential for entrepreneurial success and should be emphasized alongside technical and business knowledge (Gibb, 2002).

ii. Teaching Methodologies

Experiential learning methods, such as case studies, business plan competitions, and entrepreneurial workshops, can significantly enhance the learning experience. These methods encourage active participation and allow students to learn from their successes and failures (Neck & Greene, 2011). Connecting students with successful entrepreneurs through mentorship programs can provide valuable insights and guidance. Mentors can share their experiences, offer advice, and help students navigate the challenges of starting and running a business.

Leveraging digital technologies, such as online courses, virtual incubators, and simulation software, can make entrepreneurship education more accessible and engaging. These technologies can facilitate interactive learning and provide students with resources and tools to develop their entrepreneurial ventures.

iii. Institutional Support

Educational institutions should strive to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports and encourages students to pursue entrepreneurial activities. This includes providing access to funding, incubation centers, and networking opportunities (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). Investing in faculty development is essential for improving entrepreneurship education. Teachers should be provided with training and resources to stay updated with the latest trends and practices in entrepreneurship. Implementing robust assessment and evaluation methods to measure the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs is critical. Feedback from students and alumni can help institutions identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.

v. Collaboration with the Business Community

Forming partnerships with local businesses and industry leaders can provide students with exposure to real-world business environments. These collaborations can lead to internship opportunities, guest lectures, and industry-sponsored projects (Morris et al., 2013). Engaging alumni who have successfully started their own businesses can be highly beneficial. Alumni can serve as role models, mentors, and guest speakers, sharing their entrepreneurial journeys and inspiring current students (Siegel & Wright, 2015).

Encouraging students to engage with the local community can help them identify opportunities for social entrepreneurship. This involvement can foster a sense of social responsibility and drive the creation of businesses that address community needs.

3.0 MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method research design to investigate the integration of digital technologies in entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. The mixed-method approach combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, and data is collected from academic journals, government reports, and firsthand accounts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state and impact of digital tools in this educational context.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study includes educators and students within three selected universities in Kwara State, and entrepreneurs in Ilorin metropolis. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who have direct experience or interest in entrepreneurship education and digital technologies. The sample comprises:

Educators: 30 lecturers from various universities and polytechnics offering entrepreneurship courses.

Students: 150 students enrolled in entrepreneurship programs across three selected universities in Kwara State.

Entrepreneurs: 20 entrepreneurs who have engaged with educational institutions for mentorship or collaborative projects.

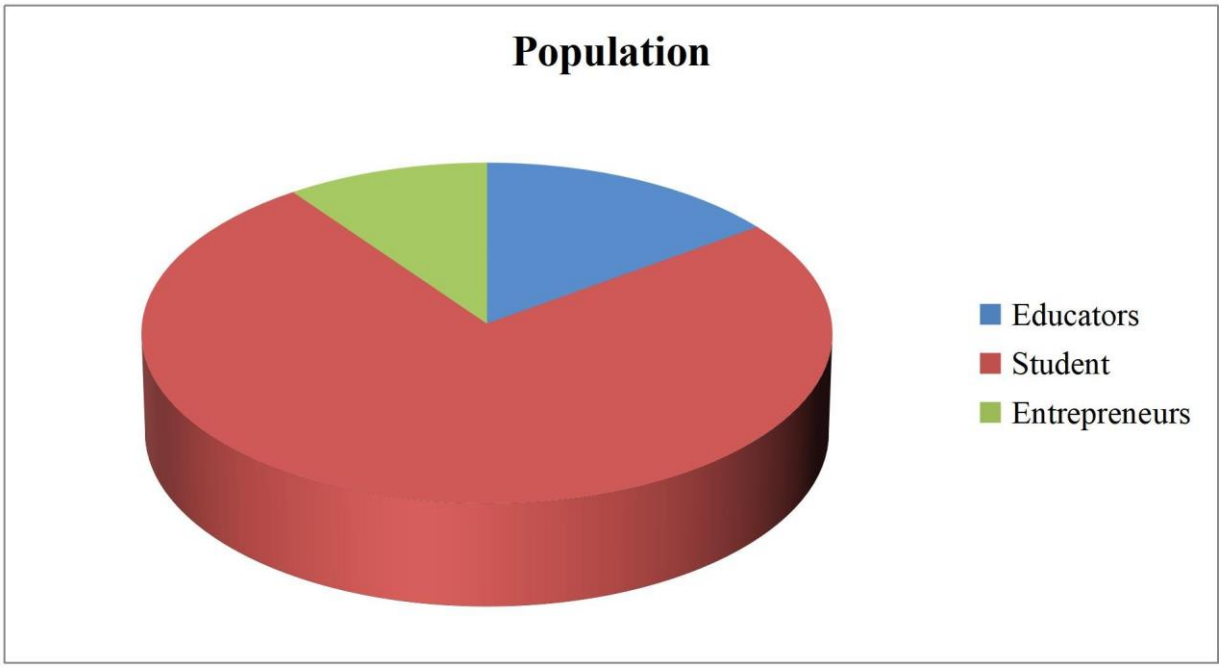

Figure 1: Population of the Study

Sources: Field Survey, 2024

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Structured questionnaires were administered to students and educators. The survey focused on assessing the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of digital tools in entrepreneurship education, as well as identifying challenges and benefits. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of educators (10) and entrepreneurs (15) to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives on integrating digital technologies in entrepreneurship education.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize the data. Inferential statistical tests, including Chi-square tests and t- tests, were employed to examine the relationships between access to digital tools, perceived benefits, and demographic factors.

1. Chi-square tests were used to assess the relationship between categorical variables, such as access to digital tools and respondent status (educators, students, entrepreneurs).
2. Independent samples t-tests were performed to compare differences in access and perceived effectiveness between groups (e.g., educators vs. students, educators vs. entrepreneurs).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Characteristics (Univariate Analysis)

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study area, including gender, teaching or mentoring experience, and years of study. Also, questions related to access to digital tools, the effectiveness of digital tools, and challenges encountered were also analysed.

4.2.1 Gender Distribution of the Respondents

The study revealed that 60% of the respondents were male, while 40% were female. This disparity suggests a higher proportion of male participants in the study, potentially reflecting broader gender trends in the educational and entrepreneurial sectors surveyed.

Table 1: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	120	60.0%
Female	80	40.0%
Total	200	100%

4.2.2 Teaching, Mentoring, and Years of Study of the Respondents

An analysis of years of teaching experience revealed that 63.4% of educators had over five years of teaching experience. 70% of entrepreneurs had not more than five years of mentoring experience, and 54.7% of the students were in their final year of study.

Table 2: Educators' Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 5	7	23.3%
5 – 10	19	63.4%
10 – Above	4	13.3%
Total	30	100%

Table 3: Students' Years of Study

Level	Frequency	Percentage
100	10	6.7%
200	23	15.3%
300	35	23.3%
400	82	54.7%
Total	150	100%

Table 4: Entrepreneurs' Years of Mentoring Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 5	14	70.0%
5 - 10	6	30.0%
10 - Above	0	0.0%
Total	20	100%

4.3 Access to Digital Tools

Access to digital tools was crucial for understanding respondents' engagement with digital technologies. The analysis revealed that 76.7% of educators, 60% of students, and 75% of entrepreneurs reported regular access to digital tools such as online courses and virtual incubators. Limited access was reported by 40% of students, 25% of entrepreneurs, and 23.3% of educators due to inadequate infrastructure.

Table 5: Access to Digital Tools

Status of Respondents	Regular Access	Limited Access
Educators	23 (76.7%)	7 (23.3%)
Students	90 (60.0%)	60 (40.0%)
Entrepreneurs	15 (75.0%)	5 (25.0%)

The Chi-square test conducted to determine the association between access to digital tools and the status of respondents revealed a significant relationship ($p<0.05p < 0.05p<0.05$).

Table 6: Chi-square Test for Access to Digital Tools

Variable	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	p-value
Access to Digital Tools & Status of Respondents	9.56	2	0.008

The result shows a significant difference in access to digital tools across different respondent groups, indicating that access varies among educators, students, and entrepreneurs.

4.4 Effectiveness of Digital Tools in Enhancing Interactive Learning

The study also assessed the perceived effectiveness of digital tools in enhancing interactive learning and skill development. A majority of respondents, including 90% of educators, 85.3% of students, and 65% of entrepreneurs, agreed that digital tools enhanced interactive learning.

Table 7: Digital Tools Enhance Interactive Learning

Status of Respondents	Agreed	Disagreed
Educators	27 (90.0%)	3 (10.0%)
Students	128 (85.3%)	22 (14.7%)
Entrepreneurs	13 (65.0%)	7 (35.0%)

A Chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between the respondents' status and their perception of the effectiveness of digital tools. The results were statistically significant ($p<0.05p < 0.05p<0.05$).

Table 8: Chi-square Test for Effectiveness of Digital Tools

Variable	χ^2 (Chi-square)	df	p-value
Effectiveness of Digital Tools & Status of Respondents	8.23	2	0.016

This result suggests that the perception of the effectiveness of digital tools varied significantly among the different respondent groups.

4.5 Challenges in the Use of Digital Tools

Respondents identified several challenges, including insufficient funding (80%), lack of trained personnel (70%), and poor internet connectivity (68%), which limited the effective use of digital tools in entrepreneurship education.

Table 9: Major Challenges Reported

Challenges	Agreed	Disagreed
Insufficient Funding	160 (80.0%)	40 (20.0%)
Lack of Trained Personnel	140 (70.0%)	60 (30.0%)
Poor Internet Connectivity	136 (68.0%)	64 (32.0%)

The thematic analysis of interview transcripts corroborated these findings, highlighting the inadequate infrastructure and limited availability of trained personnel as key obstacles.

4.6 T-tests on Access and Effectiveness of Digital Tools

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare access to digital tools and perceived effectiveness between respondent groups:

1. Access to Digital Tools (Educators vs. Students): The t-test showed a significant difference in access between educators and students ($t=3.45, p<0.05t = 3.45, p < 0.05t=3.45, p<0.05$). Educators reported higher levels of regular access to digital tools than students.
2. Effectiveness of Digital Tools (Educators vs. Entrepreneurs): The t-test comparing the perceived effectiveness of digital tools between educators and entrepreneurs also indicated a significant difference ($t=2.79, p<0.05t = 2.79, p < 0.05t=2.79, p<0.05$).

Educators perceived digital tools as more effective for interactive learning and skill development than entrepreneurs.

Table 10: T-test Results for Access and Effectiveness of Digital Tools

Comparison	t-value	p-value	Mean Difference
Educators vs. Students (Access)	3.45	0.001	0.47
Educators vs. Entrepreneurs (Effectiveness)	2.79	0.005	0.32

These results suggest that access to and the perceived effectiveness of digital tools differ significantly among educators, students, and entrepreneurs.

4.7 Discussion of Findings

The results of the inferential analysis highlight that access to digital tools and their perceived effectiveness are critical factors in determining the success of digital integration in entrepreneurship education. Educators generally have better access to and more favorable perceptions of digital tools compared to students and entrepreneurs. The significant differences across groups indicate the need for targeted interventions to improve access and training, particularly for students and entrepreneurs.

Addressing the identified challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of trained personnel, and poor internet connectivity, could enhance the integration of digital technologies in entrepreneurship education and contribute to improved learning outcomes. The findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of infrastructure and training in maximizing the potential of digital tools.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria has gained momentum in recent years, with the NUC introducing mandatory entrepreneurship courses in universities (NUC, 2011). Various government and non-governmental organizations have launched programs to promote entrepreneurial skills among youth, such as the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN) program, which supports young entrepreneurs through training and funding. Studies have shown that entrepreneurship education contributes to economic growth and helps youths develop real-world skills necessary for leading successful lives in a rapidly changing world.

The findings reveal that while the adoption of digital technologies in entrepreneurship education is progressing in Nigeria, significant gaps remain in terms of access, infrastructure, and training.

Both educators and students recognize the benefits of digital tools in enhancing entrepreneurial skills, yet they also face substantial challenges that hinder effective integration. Comprehensive strategies addressing these challenges are essential for Nigeria to fully leverage digital technologies in entrepreneurship education and equip students with the necessary skills to thrive in a digitalized business environment. Entrepreneurship education has demonstrated significant potential in developing 21st-century skills among Nigerian youth. Participants in these programs often exhibit enhanced problem-solving abilities, increased creativity, and improved communication and collaboration skills. These programs encourage experiential learning, where students engage in real-world business challenges, fostering critical thinking and innovation.

Despite its benefits, entrepreneurship education in Nigeria faces several challenges, including inadequate funding, a lack of trained educators, insufficient infrastructure, and a curriculum that does not always align with industry needs. Cultural attitudes toward entrepreneurship and the fear of business failure also discourage young people from pursuing entrepreneurial ventures.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in developing 21st-century skills among Nigerian youth, several strategies should be adopted:

1. Align the curriculum with industry requirements and incorporate practical, hands-on experiences to make entrepreneurship education more relevant and impactful.
2. Foster an innovative research mindset that aligns with the new narrative of 21st-century skills and entrepreneurship.
3. Invest in the professional development of educators to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively teach entrepreneurship.
4. Increase funding for entrepreneurship education programs and provide adequate resources and infrastructure to support learning activities.
5. Encourage collaborations between educational institutions, government agencies, and private sector organizations to create opportunities for internships, mentorship, and real-world business exposure.
6. Promote a positive cultural attitude toward entrepreneurship and reduce the stigma associated with business failures through public awareness campaigns and success stories.

7. Review and update the curriculum to reflect the new narratives of what entrepreneurship education entails.

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