

Assessment of Entrepreneurial Innovativeness and Private Universities Sustainability in North-Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This research highlights the entrepreneurial innovation of programme managers in private universities in North-Central Nigeria. The population of the study was made up of all the senior academic and non-academic staff of the nine private universities in North-Central Nigeria. A sample of four hundred and fifty (450) respondents was purposively selected for data collection. Questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The study had one hypothesis with entrepreneurial innovativeness as independent variable and university sustainability as dependent variable. The sustainability indices of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university community relations and university corporate image formed the sub-variables for the research. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used for statistical analysis. The result of the analysis showed that there was a strong and significant relationship between entrepreneurial innovation and private university sustainability. It is therefore concluded that the university programme manager, as an entrepreneur, needs a lot of energy, passion and drive to be able to coordinate all the factors that develop the capacity for successful ventures. It is recommended that entrepreneurial elements such as innovativeness, creativity, risk-taking propensity, information search, social investment and collaboration must be seriously considered in the effort to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities.

Keywords: entrepreneurial, behaviour, innovation, creativity, sustainability

Introduction

Innovativeness entails having novel perceptions and being open to completely different ways of seeing the world in the continuous search for survival. Creativity has been perceived as the generation of new ideas, and innovation as the translation of a new idea into a new company or a new mode of service (Stoner, Freeman & Gilbert, 2000). It is pertinent to note that the private university environment is rigidly controlled by rules

and regulations officially designed by the proprietor(s) which the university administrators or programme managers must follow. The accumulation and multiplication of standard procedures to be followed seem to leave no room for a programme manager to exercise his or her creative and innovative instincts. Literature in entrepreneurship offers many ways of innovating as suggested by Burch (2000). Though the following types of innovation are particularly applicable in the manufacturing industries, the private university programme manager can adjust it to suit the university situation. These include adoption of new methods to increase productivity, establishment of a new market, search for the source of raw materials and the creation of new business outfits.

The insatiable desire for university education has increased the challenges and complications associated with the provision and management of university education in Nigeria. The demand for university education in particular, has led to the liberalization and consequent increase in the establishment of public and private universities. Pressure continues to increase in spite of the phenomenal expansion in the publicly owned universities in Nigeria; from 1 in 1948 to 95 in 2019 (43 Federal and 52 state universities) (National Universities Commission (NUC), 2019). It has become obvious that government alone cannot provide the much needed university education to the teeming applicants seeking admission yearly; hence the involvement of the private sector (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010). There are 174 universities in Nigeria, including 79 private universities; and the number keeps increasing (NUC, 2019). University education in Nigeria, according to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2010), was deregulated essentially to increase access to university education, address the problem of scarce educational resources, raise alternative ways of funding the university, improve the quality of university education, enhance efficiency, align with practices in other parts of the world, and to check irregular academic calendar.

Sustainability has become one of the key issues in most private universities in Nigeria. The ability of most of the proprietors and programme managers of these private universities to effectively fund and build capacity has been called to question. The lack of entrepreneurial skills on the part of programme managers has led to over dependence on tuition fees, leaving wide gaps in the funding of the institutions. The provision of adequate facilities, employment of qualified and experienced academic and non-academic staff, payment of commensurate salaries, as and when due, and the basic functions of teaching, research and community development, internal and external linkages, and many other functions, form the core expectations of every university, whether public or private. Poor funding, poor infrastructural development, recruitment of unqualified personnel, sub-standard academic programmes and many other problems have persisted in spite of the exorbitant fees charged by the private universities (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010). It is assumed that the sustainability of private universities in the North-Central Nigeria would depend, to a large extent, on the entrepreneurial creativity,

innovation, pro-activeness, alertness and risk-taking propensity of the managers. Based on the above consideration, the problem of this study therefore borders on the relationship between entrepreneurial innovativeness of programme managers and private universities sustainability.

Entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability of a person to identify or seek out business idea(s) or investment opportunities, and to establish and run the venture successfully (Fasua, 2007). Various authorities have propounded theories on entrepreneurship. These theories, according to Fasua (2007), are constructed from either psychological or sociological elements. This study was anchored on M. G. Evans' Path-goal theory of leadership, propounded by Evans and House in 1970 and 1971; and later fine-tuned and expanded by House and Dessler in 1974 (Ukpabio, 2009). The theory is based on the expectancy model of motivation of Victor Vroom which states that 'an individual's motivation depends on his or her expectation of reward and the valence or attractiveness of the reward'. It proposes that the leader is a key individual in bringing about subordinate's motivation, satisfaction and performance. Peretomode (1999) suggests that the most important factor is the leader or manager's ability to provide rewards and specify what employees must do to earn them.

The leader's job is seen as being one of clarifying the tasks to be performed by the subordinates, and clearing the path for reaching the goals. Stoner, et al. (2000) stress that leadership strategies play the role of influencing the rewards available to employees and their perception of the paths to those rewards. The theory, according to Peretomode (1999) suggests four specific kinds of leadership styles. These include: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented styles. He further maintains that these styles are used by the same leader in different situations.

The path goal theory is relevant to this study as transforming innovation into investment or venture requires strategic leadership skills in employing and managing human and material resources that guarantee profits and rewards. It is the responsibility of the leader to clarify tasks and set paths that lead to expected goals.

Funding of schools has recently found an innovation as reported in a research carried out by Kafka and Stephenson (2006) (cited in Ukpabio 2009:52) while writing on self-sufficiency in schools and how to foster entrepreneurship to finance sustainable education. They posit that "innovative methodology, combining entrepreneurship and vocational education, not only increases the relevance of learning, but through school-based business provides both a training ground for students and means of finance for the school." The research which centred on the use of agriculture, especially in rural areas as a form of training for students and raising money for schools reported two case studies in South America and West Africa on the issue of school financing. Profits from sale of goods and services could almost cover the recurring cost of production. Business

outcomes indicated that the school was already reaping the fruits of its efforts thus indicating a relationship between innovation and institutional sustainability. People with entrepreneurial inclination see opportunities where others see problems, and when they actually identify a problem, they apply creative problem-solving technicality as held by Burch (2000).

Innovation does not necessarily mean developing something new, earth-shaking and profound. It does not, in the view of Burch (2000), have to be new gadgets or service. Simple adjustment to something old can do the trick. Henry Ford, an American car maker did not invent the automobile but he applied new ways of mass production that turned out cars cheaply enough for most people to afford. Ford performed not only manufacturing and product innovation, but also market innovation. He brought about car production, using assembly lines. Sometimes innovation comes through the process of creative imitation as posited by Chan (2008). This happens when one applies a method which is already in use elsewhere to a new location or market segment untouched by that product. A university programme manager who, therefore, applies a particular method of fundraising or school facilities maintenance which may have been successful in Japan to Nigeria is innovative.

Kanther (1983) in Ukpabio (2009) feels that certain individual and organizational factors can stifle innovative ventures in an organization. Some of these attitudes include suspicion of new ideas, especially those coming from low ranking members of staff, unnecessary bureaucratic procedures and autocratic administrative styles. Sometimes managers may create a situation where subordinates monitor and criticize the ideas generated by other workers to gain advantage and possibly attract recognition and reward from the organization. Suspicious situations such as this do not encourage innovativeness on the part of programme managers as they may not have the freedom to identify and exploit opportunities. People find it difficult to be creative when they are constantly kept on their toes. There is a pervading sense of insecurity when members of staff know that they can be fired at any time, even without committing any offence. Another obstacle to innovativeness occurs when people are punished for accepting problems in their areas of operations. The university programme manager who perceives that failure may lead to termination of his appointment and other sanctions may not be willing to take the risk involved in business set-ups.

Creativity and innovation are critical in the face of proliferation of private universities, stiff competition and acute shortage of funds as a result of dwindling national economy. Economists, according to Kirzner (1973), suggest that entrepreneurial opportunities exist where there is misallocation of resources leading to “social waste”. Entrepreneurial opportunity connotes a “pre-existing waste” in the environment. This supports the emphasis on the need for business managers to be sensitive to business information. Managers should be able to search for vital business information to

effectively exploit profit opportunities. Economic growth and development depends greatly on the above entrepreneurial function (Baumol, 1968; Hornaday & Bunker, 1970; Casson, 1982). Increased productivity and per capita income in the economy depends, to a large extent, on the success of entrepreneurial activities at different business levels (Baumol, 1986; Hamilton & Harper, 1994). Evidence from advanced economies like United Kingdom, United States and Germany, however shows that only a minute proportion of businesses have the capacity for wealth creation and employment generation (Reynolds, 1998; Storey, 1982). This has given rise to stiff agitation for equitable distribution of resources within the economy. It is believed that efficient resource management would be more beneficial than increasing the supply of entrepreneurs who may not be competent in enterprise management. Support should be given to high-flying businesses to match skills, abilities and contributions provided by such businesses. Support can be given in terms of finance, information and consultancy (Porridge, 1998). This view expresses great support for networking and collaboration among stakeholders in the management of the university system. Organizations, groups, individuals and communities have a lot to offer to ensure sustainability of the university, whether public or private. It is pertinent to realize that the entrepreneur is a major force in economic growth and development and should be considered as an indispensable unit of policy analysis in economic planning. An examination of the potential contributions of “winning entrepreneurs” has been neglected in most of our institutions, especially the universities. This research addresses this gap in the knowledge base by evaluating the entrepreneurial behaviour of programme managers and private universities sustainability in North-Central Nigeria, with some degree of emphasis on the unit of policy and academic analysis.

Research hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between programme managers' entrepreneurial innovativeness and private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, staff motivation, linkages, university community relations and university corporate image.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was the *Ex Post Facto design*. The study explored the possible cause and effect relationship between the entrepreneurial innovativeness of programme managers and private universities sustainability in North-Central Nigeria. This design was selected because the events studied already existed before the conduct of the research and could not be manipulated. The study was conducted in a zone made up of the following states: Benue, Kogi, Plateau, Niger, Kwara, Nasarawa and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). The study had a population of six hundred respondents which included senior academic and non-academic staff of the nine private universities in the zone. Table 1 shows the distribution of the target population.

Table 1: Study population distribution

S/N	Name of University	Population
1	Al – Hikmah University, Ilorin Kwara state	68
2	Bingham University, Auta Baleri Karu Nassarawa state	68
3	University of Mkar, Mkar Gboko Benue state	68
4	Salem University, Lokoja Kogi state	66
5	Veritas University, Abuja FCT	66
6	African University of Sci. & Tech., Abuja FCT	66
7	Nigerian Turkish University, Abuja FCT	66
8	Baze University , Abuja FCT	66
9	Landmark University Omu-aran, Kwara state	66
Total		600

The private universities were stratified into two categories: Organizational and Sole proprietorship. This was done to draw a distinction between the universities that were built by corporate or religious organizations and those established by individual entrepreneurs (sole proprietorship). Purposive sampling technique was used to select sample for the study. Fifty (50) administrative staff, 35 males (70%) and 15 females (30%) were selected from each of the nine universities to evaluate the entrepreneurial behaviour of ten (10) randomly selected heads of department/unit in each university. A total of 450 (315males and 135 females) administrative staff were obtained to provide responses for the study. A census of all the departments/units was conducted and a sample of 450 respondents was obtained through purposive sampling. Five (5) respondents were randomly selected to assess the entrepreneurial behaviour of each of the ten (10) randomly selected programme managers in the sampled universities. Table 2 shows the proportional distribution of the purposively selected sample of the study.

Table 2: Proportional sample distribution

S/N	Name of University	Sample
1	Al – Hikmah University, Ilorin Kwara state	50
2	Bingham University, Auta Baleri Karu Nassarawa state	50
3	University of Mkar, Mkar Gboko Benue state	50
4	Salem University, Lokoja Kogi state	50
5	Veritas University, Abuja FCT	50
6	African University of Sci. & Tech., Abuja FCT	50
7	Nigerian Turkish University, Abuja FCT	50
8	Baze University , Abuja FCT	50
9	Landmark University Omu-aran, Kwara state	50
Total		450

The main instrument used for data collection in this study was a questionnaire called Entrepreneurial Behaviour of Programme Managers and Private Universities Sustainability Questionnaire (*EBPMPUSQ*). The questionnaire was divided into three: A, B, C. Section 'A' was designed to collect demographic information on the private universities assessed; Section B dealt with the areas of Programme Managers Entrepreneurial Behaviour, while Section C dealt with private universities sustainability.

Most of the items on Section B were developed through an adaptation of self-rating questionnaire of Sethi and Saxena (2008) on Entrepreneurial Competencies, Motivation, Performance and Rewards. There are ten variables in section B, and six in section C. Each variable was broken down into six sub-variables. The responses were graded using four-point (1-4) Likert rating scale as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) 4points, Agree (A) 3points, Disagree (D) 2points, Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point. The university sustainability sub-variables of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university community relations and corporate image were rated on the scales of (very high-4), (High-3), (low-2), (very low-1).

Face validity was established for the instrument of the study. Face validity refers to the way the Questionnaire items appear or take care of relevant content in the subject area of interest. Reliability is the degree of consistency that an instrument demonstrates in the measurement of items. The reliability of the instrument (questionnaire) was tested using the Test-retest Reliability Test. This model of statistical testing scrutinizes the variables used in a study to establish its internal consistency. The questionnaire was administered to hundred (100) respondents outside the study area to complete, and after two weeks they were given the same questionnaire to complete. The test-retest reliability coefficient of between 0.79 and 0.91 was obtained. The data generated for this study were coded and analyzed using Pearson's product moment co-relation analysis.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between programme managers' entrepreneurial innovativeness and private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, staff motivation, linkages, university community relations and university corporate image.

The independent variable of this hypothesis is programme managers' entrepreneurial behaviour in terms of innovativeness while the dependent variable is private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, staff motivation, linkages, university community relations and university corporate image. Using the Pearson product moment co-relational analysis, this hypothesis was tested at 0.05 alpha level

and 398 degree of freedom. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 3.

The result presented in Table 3 showed that there was a significant positive relationship between programme managers' entrepreneurial behaviour of innovativeness and private universities sustainability in terms of finance ($r=0.360$; $p<.05$), facilities maintenance ($r=.356$; $p<.05$); linkages ($r=.348$; $p<.05$); staff motivation ($r=0.400$; $P<.05$), university/community relations ($r=0.346$; $P<.05$); university corporate image ($r=0.289$; $P<.05$).

Table 3: Pearson product moment co-relational analysis of relationship between programme managers' entrepreneurial behaviour of innovativeness and private universities sustainability. (n= 400)

Variable	\bar{X}	SD	r_{xy}
Entrepreneurial Behaviour of Innovativeness (X)	19.64	2.39	
Finance (y_1)	17.60	4.12	.360**
Facilities Maintenance (y_2)	16.34	2.72	.356**
Linkages (y_3)	18.39	2.63	.348
Staff Motivation (y_4)	18.98	2.36	.400**
University Community Relations (y_5)	16.68	3.41	.346**
University Corporate Image (y_6)	19.59	3.02	.289**

* Significant at .05 df = 398; critical r = 0.13

The null hypothesis that speculated a no significant relationship between programme managers' entrepreneurial innovativeness and private universities sustainability was rejected because the calculated ratio of .360; .356; .348; .400; .346 and .289 were found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.13 at 0.05 alpha levels and at 398 degree of freedom; thus the alternate hypothesis was retained. This finding indicates that programme managers' entrepreneurial behaviour of innovativeness is significantly related to private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university community relations and university corporate image. The positive r-value obtained in this result indicates that the higher the programme managers' entrepreneurial behaviour of innovativeness, the higher the universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university community relations and university corporate image. Conversely, the lower the entrepreneurial behaviour of innovativeness of programme managers, the lower the private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university community relations, and university corporate image. In other words, the more the increase of innovativeness of programme managers, the greater the private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university community relations, and university corporate image, and vice versa.

Discussion of findings

The hypothesis of this study sought to test the relationship between programme managers innovativeness and private universities sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, staff motivation, linkages, university community relations and university corporate image. The positively significant relationship obtained in the result showed that innovativeness as an entrepreneurial behaviour contributes immensely to the growth and development of every university through enhancement of financial capacity. The positive responses by the respondents reflected the wide acceptance of entrepreneurship as a key development strategy for sustainability. This result also gives credence to the view of Adetayo (2012) “that entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision, change and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion for creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions.

Conclusion

Attempts were made in this study to understand the concept of behavioural innovativeness in relation to entrepreneurship in private universities in Nigeria. The findings of this study led the researchers to conclude that there is a strong and significant relationship between programme managers' entrepreneurial innovativeness and private universities' sustainability in terms of finance, facilities maintenance, linkages, staff motivation, university/community relations and university corporate image. Much of the management challenges faced by private universities in North-Central Nigeria would be mitigated if the programme managers in these universities adopt the right entrepreneurial attitude to enhance funding capacities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations have been made to stimulate innovativeness and creativity in Nigerian private universities:

1. Programme managers in private universities should be given the opportunity of entrepreneurial training through seminars, workshops and conferences locally and internationally to build skills and improve internal funding capacities.
2. Academic and administrative freedom should be allowed in private universities to stimulate innovativeness and creativity in the system.
3. Programme managers in private universities should be involved in the management of existing university enterprises to build confidence, trust and commitment.
4. Emphasis on competition among private universities should be played down for collaboration/networking to thrive. This would encourage sustainability through cooperation and the sharing of collective risks.
5. Business information database should be created in all universities for effective management of business information.
6. Routine needs assessment should be conducted to monitor changes in customer behaviour.

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