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The Role of Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills in Empowering African Youth: Implications for Policy Making

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Abstract

The concept of entrepreneurship gears towards self and group empowerment. The concept defines an entrepreneur as a person who assumes the risky of starting a business. An entrepreneur does not only become wealthy but provides employment for other people, pay taxes that government use for development and maintaining of infrastructures and improves quality of life. This paper finds that, entrepreneurship is a veritable tool to reducing unemployment and poverty among the youths. This study discovered series of definition, misinterpretations and implication in concepts of entrepreneurship, digital skills and policy making. The study examines different approaches of entrepreneurship and how they relate with digital skills particularly in private and corporate entities. This paper also investigates that, unemployment among youths remains a critical challenge in Africa, with millions of young people facing limited access to job opportunities. This paper adopted a doctrinal approach which is library-based research using qualitative method, combining primary and secondary sources; the study provides a comprehensive analysis of The Role of Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills in Empowering African Youth: Implications for Policy Making. This paper recommends that, entrepreneurship and digital skills have emerged as major drivers for innovation, economic empowerment and sustainable development. It recommends the role of entrepreneurship and digital education in addressing youth unemployment by analyzing the fundamental issues raised in the course of adopting entrepreneurship as one of the most suitable tool for economic development and sustainability, the paper concludes that digital skills is a medium for more innovation, policy making and good global share economy

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Digital Skills, Youth Empowerment, Policy-making in Africa, Innovation, Economic Development

1. Introduction

The idea of entrepreneurship and digital skills are inter connected in usage, concept and other intellectual inquires. Various authors have given concise definition on digital skills and entrepreneurship. In its contents and context, both mean the collections of tools, machinery, arrangement and procedure. The terms can either be explained generally or on specific areas. A digital skill connotes the transformation of ideas in result or productivity. It also represents entities both material and immaterial created by the application of mental and physical efforts in order to achieve some values.

The emergence of digital technology and skills, access to internet, and mobile innovations has the potential to transform the employment landscape in Africa. Digital skills and entrepreneurship are driven by artificial intelligence, blockchain, and e-commerce platforms and creates new pathways for job creation and economic empowerment. However, for African youth to capitalize on these opportunities, they must acquire the necessary digital skills and entrepreneurial abilities to navigate and thrive in a technology-driven economy (UNCTAD: 2023).

Recognizing the importance of entrepreneurship and digital skills in

addressing youth unemployment, various governments and stakeholders across Africa have launched initiatives to promote digital education and self-employment. For instance, Kenya's Ajira Digital Program, spearheaded by the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), trains young people in digital work skills, similarly, Nigeria's National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) aims to integrate digital literacy into the education system and create a tech-savvy workforce (Ministry of Communications & Digital Economy: 2021).

Also, Rwanda's Smart Classrooms initiative integrates information and communication technology (ICT) into education, enhancing students develop digital skills and preparing them for a technology-driven world. Despite these efforts, infrastructural deficits, limited funding, and policy inconsistencies continue to pose significant challenges, hindering the full realization of these initiatives (Adeleke: 2022).

In this context, the objective of this research is to explore the role of entrepreneurship and digital skills in empowering African youth, examine the opportunities and challenges they face, and the policy measures needed to foster an inclusive, skill-driven economy. By addressing these critical issues, African countries can create sustainable opportunities

for youth employment, economic growth, and long-term development.

2. The Concept of Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills

The concepts of entrepreneurship and digital skills shows how to combine knowledge and resources to produces desired products, to solve humanitarian problems, fulfilled needs or satisfy wants. It includes technological methods, procedures, raw materials and the application of human mental efficiency and effectiveness. (Azubuike and Ugwoke: (2011). Again, this concept is the process of identifying opportunities, developing ideas, and bringing a vision to life, whether through an innovative idea in a business, or social initiative (Schumpeter: 1934). It encompasses creativity, risk-taking and value creation, with the primary objective of solving economic and social challenges. Entrepreneurship plays a crucial in job creation and economic growth, particularly in developing regions such as Africa.

In the African context, entrepreneurship plays a vital role in bridging the gap between formal employment shortages and self-employment opportunities. With high unemployment rates and a lack of structured employment opportunities, many young Africans turn to entrepreneurship as a means of economic survival. However, for

entrepreneurship to be truly impactful, it must be supported by essential skills, particularly digital skills, which have become increasingly indispensable in the modern economy (World Bank: 2021).

The digital economy is expanding rapidly, and digital skills are now fundamental to success in almost every industry. UNESCO (2022) defines digital skills as the ability to use digital technologies, platforms, and tools for effective communication, problem-solving, business, and employment. These skills range from basic digital literacy such as using the internet, email, and social media for business to advanced competencies like coding, data analytics, artificial intelligence, cyber-security, and digital marketing.

The World Bank (2021) highlights that economy that prioritizes digital literacy and technological transformation experience greater economic inclusivity, higher employment rates, and increased innovation. Africa's growing internet access and mobile technology adoption present a significant opportunity for young entrepreneurs to participate into the global digital economy through E-commerce, fintech, agritech, and edtech sectors are rapidly growing, offering numerous possibilities for tech-savvy entrepreneurs.

3. Fundamental Procedure for Digital Skills and Entrepreneurship

a. Access to Data-Driven Approach and Analysis

Digital skills and entrepreneurship usually adopts the procedure of Data-Driven Analysis. This approach is broadly implores enabling data-driven decision-making in any policy making among various firms, government, administrative and partnership relationship. Through the use of practical management software and analytics tools, firms can gain insights into economic trends resources allocation and global preference. This data-driven approach enhances operational efficiency, enables proactive individual engagement, and supports informed business decisions. This data are often used to analyze quantitative data for descriptive statistics thereby assessing the relationship between training and outcomes from entrepreneurial programs. It examines the Qualitative data from focusing on the group discussions where it can be used to analyze non-numerical data by thematically using NVivo software to identify recurring methods and patterns (Braun & Clarke: 2006).

This procedures targets human population and focuses specifically on youths between the age of 18–35 who engaged in entrepreneurship or digital skills training programs in South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Mali. A replica of this approach is seen in the **Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme** and the **Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) Tanzania Program** (DOT, 2023; TEF, 2022).

b. Communication, Innovation and Creativity

Digital skills and entrepreneurship adopts the methods of effective communication to examine business ideas, expansion, innovation and technological advancement. This tool seamless facilitates collaboration and communication among professionals, business empires and more discoveries in day-to-day activities. This approach adopts efficient teamwork and reduces time delays. It focuses on communication channels such as secured client portals, and visual meeting platforms and faster decision making within the scope of corporate bodies. (R,E. Freeman: 2014)

4. The Impacts of Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills

The roles of Digital Skills and Entrepreneurship in African cannot be

undervalued as it covers every aspect of African culture, identity, religion and horizons. The digital skills and entrepreneurship has contributed in harmonizing the cultural heritage of the African youth. It directs and drives the way the youths manifests their culture, displays their different ethnic language, attires and languages. It is a powerful instrument that drives business and enterprises which are founds in some parts the world.

Secondly, digital skills and entrepreneurship has remained a viable means for sustaining youth empowerments through electronic commerce (E-commerce). This simply reveals how buying and selling of products and services are been transacted through the application of internets. This has facilitated low transaction costs, large volume of transaction, flexibility and improved customer interactions and interpersonal relationship in business. (G.R. Jones and J.M. George: 2016)

Thirdly, Management Information System (MIS), digital skills and entrepreneurship has created competitive advantage through knowledge information for firms and youths that have the capacity to acquire it. Presently, information management is becoming a critical part of most business organization in African. It has helped most organizations to migrate from analogue to digital reformation.

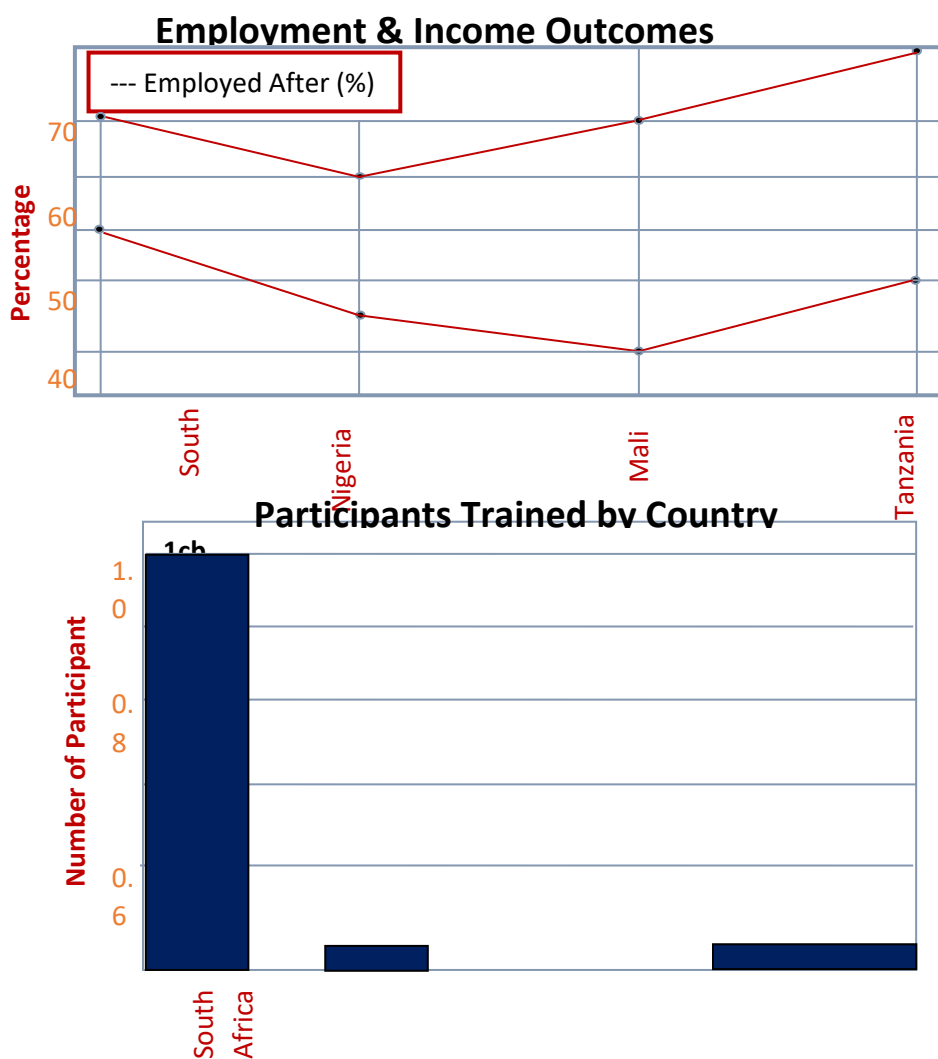
(Weirich .H. Cannice: 2009) It has helps the industrialist to embarked on business and products finality to repackaging.

Again, according to Tom Byer, (2019) digital skills and entrepreneurship shares ideas and business links. Both ventures requires dynamic leader who understands vision, strategy, risk and tactics. The two concepts are value creation that captures the mind of the youths. Both are primarily based on opportunities recognition which implies that supplies and demand exist predominantly. Both involves opportunity discovery and they creates opportunity for human developments. Tom Byer noted that, digital skills enables the entrepreneur to minimize unit cost, to improvise substitutes from no available skills and materials, to adapts new technologies, to acquire, and modify the existing large stocks of proven innovations already available in developed countries and to manage human relations among persons in business transactions

5. Participants Trained by Country & Its Outcomes

- a. The left bar graph illustrates the number of participants trained in each country.
- b. The right line graph shows the employment rate after training and the average income change post-training

Country	Number of Participants Trained	Percent Employed after Training (%)	Number of Start up created	Average income changed (%)
South Africa	1,000,000	75%	50,000	5%
Nigeria	10,000	65%	3,000	35%
Mali	150	68%	25	30%
Tanzania	8,500	70%	1,200	40%



The author used synthesized data from Reuters (2025). United Nations (2023), Digital Opportunity Trust Tanzania (2023), Tony Elumelu Foundation (2022), and Percentages in the graph are reported outcomes on employment, income, and participation which represent each country's entrepreneurship and digital training programs.

The findings show that employment rates ranged from 75% in South Africa and 65% in Nigeria after training. Numerous studies have shown that skills training can significantly improve employability. According to OECD (2020) reports which states that vocational training programs in South Africa have strong correlations with employment outcomes. Similarly, Gustafsson & Von Troschke (2018) targeted skills programs in Africa are a contributory factor to increase in youth employability, especially in entrepreneurial and digital sectors.

The findings show that investing in skill development is critical for improving youth employment prospects in Africa. Notably, Okeke (2021) in his findings noted that large-scale, government-backed training initiatives have a positive effect on youth employment and this aligns with South Africa's 75% employment rate. There are notable success recorded from Nigeria and Tanzania

outcomes, but additional support may be required to get the full impact.

Also, findings show significant Income Growth from 30% in Mali to 50% in South Africa. Gichuki et al. (2020) found that entrepreneurs in Southern and Eastern Africa who engage in skill development programs saw a 50% increase in income within two years of completing training. Also McKinsey & Company (2019) note in his studies that youth trained in entrepreneurial skills or digital technologies often experience higher income levels than those without such training.

This shows that positive income outcomes align with the broader literature on entrepreneurship and digital skills training's impact. South Africa's higher 50% income increase suggests that programs with entrepreneurship support (e.g., funding, mentorship) tend to result in greater economic gains. The 30% income increase in Mali could reflect the challenges of scaling smaller programs in low-resource settings,

suggesting the need for increased access to resources in such contexts.

Furthermore, findings shows that a strong correlation between entrepreneurship support (mentorship, funding) and the creation of new businesses was observed, with 3,000 startups in Nigeria and 50,000 in South Africa. This is to say that entrepreneurship training programs have been to foster business creation among youth, particularly when paired with follow-up support. According to UNICEF (2020) report, that youth-led businesses in Africa have a higher survival rate when they have access to ongoing support after initial training. Furthermore, Agyemang (2021) highlights that mentorship and financial backing significantly increase the likelihood that trained youth will start their businesses. The creation of 50,000 in South Africa and 3,000 startups in Nigeria proves the emphases on the importance of ongoing mentorship and funding in ensuring that youth entrepreneurs succeed. While South Africa's large program scale contributed to its high number of startups, Nigeria's smaller program size still produced notable business creation, suggesting that focused programs can have a high return on investment even in less developed contexts.

Countries like South Africa and Tanzania which saw higher income and employment

rates tied directly to digital skills training. The role of digital skills in economic empowerment has been widely recognized. Zhang et al. (2020) found that digital skills training significantly increased youth employability in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the areas of e-commerce, coding, and digital marketing. According to World Bank (2021), digital literacy is crucial for enhancing youth employment and business opportunities, particularly in Africa, where the digital economy is rapidly expanding.

The findings of this study support the idea that digital skills training is a powerful tool for enhancing both employability and entrepreneurship. In particular, South Africa's success in digital and entrepreneurial training aligns with literature suggesting that comprehensive digital skills programs (combined with entrepreneurship support) can drive economic growth. Tanzania's strong outcomes further support the growing recognition of digital literacy as essential for youth economic inclusion in Africa.

6. Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills: Challenges and Prospects

Despite the growing recognition of entrepreneurship and digital skills as vital for youth empowerment and economic growth, Africa faces several challenges that hinder

their successful and effective implementation. These barriers include

a. Infrastructure and Technology Challenges

Africa's inadequate infrastructure and limited technological resources pose a significant challenge to entrepreneurship and digital skills education. Many schools and higher institutions lack access to reliable electricity, modern learning facilities, and high-speed internet, which are essential for digital learning and entrepreneurial innovations (UNESCO, 2022). Without adequate ICT (Information and Communication Technology) infrastructure, students and aspiring entrepreneurs struggle to acquire practical digital skills needed, making it harder to compete in the global digital economy (World Economic Forum: 2023). Today, the aforementioned issues have reflected in the following ways:

i. Insufficient ICT Facilities: Many universities and vocational training centers lack modern equipment, such as e-learning platforms, computers and software. Without access to up-to-date digital tools, students lag behind to engage in hands-on learning and innovation, making it harder for them to develop competitive technological skills and entrepreneurial and (World Bank: 2021).

ii. Unstable Electricity Supply: Frequent power outages experience by many educational institutions which disrupt digital learning and innovation. This is especially problematic particularly in Nigeria, where an inconsistent power supply affects access to online learning tools and digital business operations (African Development Bank [AfDB]: 2022).

iii. Limited Internet Access: Nigeria has one of the lowest internet access rates in Africa, making it difficult for many youths to participate in digital skills training. The most disadvantaged are rural areas due to poor broadband infrastructure and high costs of data, limiting opportunities for online entrepreneurship education (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD]: 2023).

b. Gaps in Educational System and Weak Institutions

Many African countries lack a standardized national policy for integrating entrepreneurship and digital skills education in their curriculum. While some initiatives, such as Nigeria's *National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS)* and Rwanda's *Smart Classrooms Initiative* have been introduced, inconsistent policy weak regulatory enforcement slows down progress (Ministry of Communications & Digital

Economy: 2021). The weak institution reflects in poor policy making that contributed to the following issues below:

i. Inadequate Funding of Education by the

Government: Limited government funding and poor policy implementation makes it difficult to provide widespread digital literacy and entrepreneurship programs at the rural areas (World Bank: 2021).

ii. Lack of a Unified Curriculum: Many African countries do not have a consistent framework for teaching entrepreneurship and digital education in schools making education fragmented (UNESCO: 2022).

iii. Frequent policy changes: Inconsistent policies and regulations make it harder to sustain long-term education entrepreneurship and digital programs (World Bank: 2021).

iv. Bureaucratic Delays: Complicated approval hurdles slow down the execution of entrepreneurship-focused projects (AfDB: 2022).

v. Limited Public-Private Partnerships: Businesses, schools, and government institutions often do not work together effectively, limits opportunities for students to gain practical industry-relevant skills (AfDB: 2022).

vi. Weak collaboration Between Schools and Industry: The lack of partnership

between educational institutions and industry players hinders opportunities for students to experience practical skill development (ILO: 2023).

c. Limited Access to Tet-funds and Training Opportunities

In Africa, both aspiring Entrepreneurs and students often face significant financial barriers that prevent them from accessing training programs, startup capital, and digital learning tools. Strict financial policies make it difficult for small businesses to secure funding, while students from low-income often cannot afford digital education programs (UNCTAD: 2023).

d. Financial and Training Challenges

i. High Cost of Digital Learning/training Tools: Many students struggle to afford essential learning tools, such as laptops and internet access, coding boot camps, digital courses, and business incubation programs, making it hard for low-income youth to develop relevant skills (UNESCO: 2022).

ii. Limited Entrepreneurship Funding: High interest rates and lack of venture capital make it difficult for young entrepreneurs secure funding for startups (AfDB: 2022).

iii. Inadequate Teacher Training: A shortage of qualified teachers trained in

digital and entrepreneurship skills further weakening the educational system's ability to prepare students for the modern economy (UNESCO: 2022).

iv. Limited Access to Loans and Grants:

Many young entrepreneurs struggle to obtain funding for startups due to strict loan requirements and collateral demands (ILO: 2023).

v. Underfunded Higher Institutions: Many Universities and technical schools **lack sufficient funding** to effectively teach entrepreneurial and digital skills training (UNCTAD: 2023).

7. Recommendations

For Africa's youth to succeed in the changing digital economy, long-term strategies must focus on access to digital infrastructure, skill development, and inclusive economic participation. One key approach for youth empowerment can be achieved through public-private partnerships, which can provide essential funding investment in entrepreneurship hubs, and policy reforms (OECD: 2022). This paper therefore recommends as follows:

- **Strengthening Digital and Entrepreneurial Education**

Governments should integrate entrepreneurship training and

digital skills into School Curricula at all levels. Online and Offline Training Programs by creating free or low-cost boot camps, e-learning platforms, workshops, training centers and certification programs in entrepreneurship, web development, e-commerce, and freelancing, digital marketing, graphic design, and social media management alongside business planning. This approach will ensure that young people acquire basic competence needed for the modern workforce and the digital economy (OECD: 2022).

- **Expanding Access to Funding and Investment**

There is need for a collaborative effort between the government and private sectors to increase funding and microfinance for startups investment opportunities (World Economic Forum: 2023).

- **Encouraging Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**

There is need for collaboration between governments, businesses, and development organizations is crucial for funding innovation hubs, accelerators, and incubators that support youth-led startups (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO: 2023). These partnerships can facilitate access to global markets, skill transfer, mentorship

programs, and ensuring a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- **Enhancing Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity**

There is need for Governments and technological based companies to expand ICT infrastructure, especially in rural and underserved areas (International Telecommunication Union (ITU: 2023). This is to ensure that all communities have access to high-speed internet and digital learning resources, which will create equal opportunities for digital education and entrepreneurship.

- **Ensuring Inclusive Economic Participation**

There is need to facilities equitable economic growth can be achieved by supporting Gender-inclusive policies and marginalized communities with financial programs in tech entrepreneurship (AfDB: 2023).

- **Promoting Policy Reforms and Regulatory Support**

There is need for government to enact more robust regulatory framework to facilitate digital entrepreneurship. Governments should enact clear policies that encourage the youth. These may include: Tax incentives for small businesses, simplify business

registration processes, and improve intellectual property protections (African Union: 2023).

- **Encourage Digital Jobs and Business Opportunities**

Government should encourage remote work and freelancing by teaching youth how to use online job platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and LinkedIn to find gigs. Additionally, promote e-commerce and digital marketing by training youth to create online businesses platforms like Jumia, Shopify, and Instagram.

- **Mentorship and Networking Opportunities**

There is need for proper mentorship among the youth with Industry experts by establishing mentorship programs which should links young entrepreneurs with successful business leaders. Government should encourage Peer-to-Peer learning by creating networking events, platforms where young entrepreneurs can share experiences and collaborate.

- **Promote Sustainable Business Models**

There is need for encouraging entrepreneurship skills acquisition and circular economy initiatives which will enable young entrepreneurs to build resilient and eco-friendly and socially responsible business ventures (UNDP: 2023).

8. Conclusion

This study highlighted the vital role of entrepreneurship and digital skills in addressing youth unemployment and driving economic growth in Africa. This study also examined various issues that hinder the full realization of digital skills and entrepreneurship in African especially among the youths. This study also recommended and explains in brief some workable innovations that if properly put in place would ensure the desired goal. However, this paper concludes that, individual efforts and corporate bodies are not sufficient to balance the gaps observed in this study rather, government should assume a full responsibilities in ensuring that the challenges of unemployment are drastically reduced by investing in programmes that is tailored towards digital skills, entrepreneurship and economic development.

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