



Effect of Career and Professional Development Course on Undergraduates' Entrepreneurial and Professional Skills Development

**Suglo, Kabinaa Enoch ^{a*}, Samuel Osei ^b, Sherif Ziblim ^c
and Abubakari Mejira ^d**

^a *Department of Education, Regentropfen University College, Bolgatanga, Upper East Region, Ghana.*

^b *Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies, University for Development Studies, Ghana.*

^c *Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies, P.O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana.*

^d *Kpandai Senior High School, Kpandai, Ghana.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Many students enroll in higher education with little exposure to entrepreneurial and career development skills. This gap points out the need to equip undergraduates with professional and entrepreneurial competencies to enhance career readiness in this 21st century. This study aimed to

*Corresponding author: Email: enochsuglo85@gmail.com;

assess the effect of career and professional development courses on undergraduate students' professional and entrepreneurial skills. The study employed a quantitative approach and a descriptive design, guided by the Experiential Learning Theory. A census technique was used to consider 108 undergraduate students who had already been taken through career and professional development courses both in their first and second years of study. A closed-ended questionnaire developed via Google Form was used to collect data, with a response rate of 86.11%. The data collection instrument was piloted and validated, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.88 to 0.98. The results revealed a positive perception among the respondents that the career and professional development courses they have undertaken have a positive effect on their entrepreneurial and professional skills. The study concluded that career and professional development courses implemented by the university college aligned well with industry trends and students' needs and were effective in enhancing their entrepreneurial and professional skills. The study recommended that higher educational institutions should consider introducing their undergraduates to similar career and professional development courses to help develop their entrepreneurial and professional skills.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial skills; professional skills; undergraduate students'; career training; entrepreneurial education; technical and vocational education and training (TVET).*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the days of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first President, one just needed to have a certificate from a higher educational institution to secure a job or gain employment without glitches. Unemployment was an unpopular and uncommon concept among graduates in those days. Today in 2025, the situation is different. The Ghanaian society and the world at large have seen rapid advancement in technology, population growth, globalization, politics and rapidly changing labour market (e.g. Tran et al., 2022). These dynamics have made unemployment become a common and popular concept among university graduates in the modern-day Ghanaian society. Many graduates this year, 2025 come out from higher institutions with various qualifications but with limited and rare employment opportunities. This view is supported by evidence from the World Bank (2023) which reported a 19.7% unemployment rate among Ghanaian youth. It is therefore crucial for higher educational institutions to take a new approach to learning and rebrand their curricular in a way that prepares their graduates not only to meet the needs of the rapidly changing labour market but to also develop 21st century entrepreneurial skills and business intentions alongside their various program of study.

Against this background, a private model university College in Ghana's Upper East Region has gone a step ahead of its counterparts to introduce a "Career and Professional Development Course" to uniquely brand its graduates in a way that will enable them succeed in the rapidly changing job and labour market.

The University where the study was conducted fosters an enabling environment aimed at helping the development of students' entrepreneurial and professional practice skills. According to the school of thought held by the University College of this study which is shared by (Akhmetshin et al., 2019a), higher education institutions should give their students access to knowledge bases and encourage entrepreneurial thinking in order to help them develop their general cognition rather than their personal traits as this creates specialists who are prepared for professional activity. Akhmetshin et al. (2019a) investigated entrepreneurial competencies and ascertained that learning environment influences students' development of these competencies. Students' feedback, which includes self-evaluation of their entrepreneurial thinking level based on higher learning outcomes, must be gathered in order to create educational programs that meet real economic needs (Akhmetshin et al., 2019a). The important thing to remember is that it is imperative that universities develop and offer programs or courses that will act as mentors and motivators for aspiring business owners (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Akhmetshin et al., 2019b).

Graduates are essential to creating an entrepreneurial economy built on creativity, innovation, and competitiveness, so it is of great interest to practice fostering entrepreneurial culture and literacy among university students in developed nations (Nwambam et al., 2018). Expectations are not met because there are not many employees with a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of knowledge (Akhmetshin et al., 2019b). This indicates that individuals with a broad range of abilities and

competencies are needed in the modern world, including the capacity to think and solve problems in novel and creative ways (Dzisi et al., 2018). The link between education and the labor market and the significance of helping students develop core competencies are both emphasized in national education policies in many nations (Chen et al., 2015). For instance, business schools in China are embracing "live education" due to the prevalence of start-ups, encouraging students to develop their own pilot projects, which are occasionally carried out as startups (Akhmetshin et al., 2019a). Since it immediately highlights the prospects in the sector, this kind of motivation promotes the pursuit of effective ideas that work (Lin & Xu, 2017).

Higher education institutions must recognize that the learning environment has a significant impact on students' acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies and skills (Akhmetshin et al., 2019a). For this reason, a required course on career and professional development is offered at the University College with the goal of assisting students in acquiring professional and entrepreneurial skills. It is important to note that cultivating entrepreneurial skills necessitates initiative and self-direction, and that educational institutions hoping to follow this path must be able to plan and enhance the application of these abilities (Akhmetshin et al., 2019b). Universities must offer entrepreneurship education (EE) courses to equip people with entrepreneurial skills and get them ready to engage in entrepreneurial activities, despite the fact that the increasing number of studies on the impact of EE yield conflicting and seemingly contradictory findings (Hahn et al., 2020).

Furthermore, as evidenced by China's dynamic market economy, higher education institutions ought to give students a thorough understanding of how professional education programs can influence career development in addition to emphasizing the development of their entrepreneurial skills (Cheng, 2025).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Research evidence suggests that a majority of students who enroll into higher educational institutions are unfamiliar with entrepreneurial training and career development skills courses. Researchers such as Dzisi et al., (2018) highlighted this problem by indicating that students in Ghana are unfamiliar with hands-on entrepreneurial training even though entrepreneurial training is noted as being crucial

to entrepreneurs' success (Dzisi, et al., 2018). In response to addressing this problem identified, the university college where this study was conducted started an initiative known as the "Career and Professional Development Course," which is overseen by the university's Business and Career Development Center (BCDC). The "Career and Professional Development Course" introduces courses such as personal branding, product branding, office practice and applications, networking and teamwork, project management etc. The university shares the belief that providing its students with experiential entrepreneurial training will better equip them with the necessary entrepreneurial and professional practice skills to start their own businesses even while they are still in school. Following several years of initiating and implementing the "Career and Professional Development Course," there has not been any cited study which assessed its effect on professional and entrepreneurial skills development among level 100 and 200 students. Therefore, this current study was conducted with the aim to address this gap by assessing the effect of the Career and Professional Development Course on students' professional and entrepreneurial skills development in the upper east region.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study:

1. explored the effect of students' participation in career and professional development courses on their entrepreneurial skills development.
2. found out how students perceive the value of the career and professional development course in terms of their professional skills and personal career development.
3. examined students' perceptions of how well the curriculum of the career and professional development course aligns with their current and emerging needs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Model

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) ideology served as a guide for this study. One of the most well-known educational theories in higher education is Kolb's ELT, according to Healey and Jenkins (2000). Kolb (1984, p. 41) postulated that ELT is a process where knowledge is

produced by transforming experiences, with knowledge outcomes arising from the combination of understanding and changing experiences. Additionally, it is an educational philosophy that stems from John Dewey's demand that educational innovation be guided by a theory of experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Kolb's model provides a clear analysis of theoretical courses in which students' past knowledge or experience is irrelevant (Healey & Jenkins, 2000). Jenkins (1997) asserts that ELT is a critical component of activities in which students are not given adequate preparation for the experience or a chance to practically consider the experience and how it relates to a more theoretical component of the course. According to Healey and Jenkins (2000), the two main dimensions of the learning process that relate to two important ways that students learn are reflected in the model's two primary axes: the abstract conceptualization-concrete experience (AC-CE) dimension and the active experimentation reflective observation (AE-RO) dimension (Al-Qahtani & Al-Gahtani, 2014). While the AE-RO dimension concentrates on how students process or transform what they perceive, the AC-CE dimension is mainly concerned with how students perceive or comprehend new information or experiences (Kolb et al., 2014).

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been used by a number of academics to investigate issues pertaining to students' career development and entrepreneurial abilities. For instance, Sukavejworakit et al. (2018) investigated how an entrepreneur's educational process influences their intention. Sukavejworakit et al.'s. (2018) study argued that entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a key factor in economic prosperity by governments and academics worldwide. According to the authors, this is the reason why entrepreneurship research has been attempting to comprehend the conception and implementation of entrepreneurial activity over the past few decades, with entrepreneurial intention emerging as a highly reliable indicator of entrepreneurial activity and its ensuing outcomes (Sukavejworakit et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Novaess (2024) looked into how entrepreneurship education affected students' acquisition of soft skills. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and active learning models served as the foundation for the investigation. This theory emphasizes the

development of soft skills and offers a strong basis for comprehending how learning happens through experience. The author used an exploratory and qualitative methodology, gathering data through participant observation and bibliographic review. Using Kolb's experiential learning cycle, the study was carried out in entrepreneurship courses with an emphasis on observing students' soft skills. According to the author, using ELT in entrepreneurship education encourages the growth of soft skills. The author emphasized the significant implications of the study's findings for the domains of entrepreneurship and education, arguing that experiential learning can be a useful strategy for cultivating critical behavioral skills for the workforce.

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) offers a robust framework to assess the effect of the Career and Professional Development Course on undergraduate students' entrepreneurial and professional skills. It emphasizes the shift from experience to knowledge and fits with the course aim of attainment of students' practice skills through experiential learning. The two axes; abstract conceptualization – concrete experience (AC-CE), active experimentation – reflective observation (AE-RO), help to provide a clearer picture of how students are understanding and processing entrepreneurial paradigms as the course explores practical training (product branding, project management, etc.) for which students must engage with, and reflect upon experiences. In addition, previous literature by Sukavejworakit et al. (2018) and Novaess (2024) supports that ELT is an effective approach to developing entrepreneurial skills, and soft skills, reinforcing that experiential learning is a necessary component for student market preparation. Therefore, developing our study within an ELT framework will help to show the transitional process the Career and Professional Development Course offers to students' professional readiness and entrepreneurial skills.

2.2 Empirical Review

Akhmetshin et al. (2019b) conducted research to assess how entrepreneurial skills and competencies are being developed for curriculum development and assessment in higher education. Their study included 513 fourth-year students. The authors used a questionnaire tool to collect data. The results show that 32% of respondents who are employed in their field combine work and additional education

(trainings, seminars, etc.) with learning, and more than half of them believe that their curriculum should include new subjects that can help develop students' skills to match up their job descriptions. Only 23% of students without jobs make the same decision, and 54% think their skills and knowledge are sufficient, whereas 23% of students with jobs think their level of entrepreneurial thinking is insufficient for a successful launch.

Akhmetshin et al., (2019a) recruited a sample of 251 students from the Elabuga Institute of the Kazan Federal University. The authors collected data using a survey questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The study found that students lacked confidence in their skills and competences and found it difficult to assess their strengths and weaknesses. Students specialising in economics had the highest level of entrepreneurial aptitude (31%), while those specialising in vocational education had the lowest (18%). The authors' findings also showed a strong correlation between the level of entrepreneurial aptitude and the quality of the learning environment. Their study concluded that the future growth of professionals in society is highly influenced by the level of education and training.

Literature highlights the importance of entrepreneurship education for the success of entrepreneurs, as Dzisi et al. (2018) mentioned. In their article, the authors explored the concept of providing hands-on entrepreneurial education and skills development to African students. According to their findings, Ghanaian students are not familiar with the concept of tuition-free trade courses. The authors added that the small number of students who had received hands-on entrepreneurship training had developed entrepreneurial skills and were able to start their own businesses. They proposed that higher education institutions set up a hands-on entrepreneurship centre, thinking that the results of their studies would have an impact on growth and development by creating new and creative jobs, ultimately reducing unemployment.

The aim of Lin and Xu's (2017) study was to identify the variables that influence the growth of entrepreneurship education and to try to develop a theoretical framework. The authors illustrated the impact of several factors by using vertical and horizontal data on entrepreneurship education in China. Two types of elements

influence the development of entrepreneurship education: supply and demand. Research shows that the growth of entrepreneurship education has been positively linked to the expansion of business schools and policy schools, while the development of academia and the reduction of pressure on employment have been negatively linked.

Cheng (2025) looked into how career growth programs affected each person's career advancement. This study aimed to assess how well professional programs fill the skills gap in the market and how well they connect with China's evolving business climate. The author used a mixed research approach, including qualitative interviews with quantitative data from an alumni survey. Employment status, pay advancement, job title, and satisfaction with the program's influence on career development were among the quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews with teachers, industry partners, and alumni were part of the qualitative data collection process. The findings from the quantitative data revealed that more than 70% of respondents believe that professional education programs are extremely helpful for their job advancement.

Nnadozie et al. (2013) carried out a study to determine how entrepreneurship education affects the career aspirations of prospective library assistants at a Nigerian polytechnic. The results showed that, although only 8.4 percent of the surveyed graduates considered the course of study to be unique for librarianship, most (84.6 and 82.5) considered entrepreneurship education to be innovative and useful. However, a large majority of respondents agreed that these classes increased their knowledge (50.5) and job opportunities (71.2). The survey revealed a paradigm shift in Librarians-in-Training (LIT) careers, with many respondents opting for self-employment or private sector jobs instead of waiting for the limited number of traditional LIT jobs.

One consequence of the ongoing curriculum improvements in Nigeria's polytechnic sector, according to Nnadozie et al. (2013), is the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in all programs and disciplines. To find out how these courses on entrepreneurship affected the career goals of para-professional Librarians-in-Training (LIT), Nnadozie et al. (2013) study's findings led to suggestions for fixing some of the shortcomings found in the planning and execution of entrepreneurship

education within the field of library and information science.

With a sample of 427 college students who took part in two successive waves of the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS), Hahn et al. (2020) carried out a quasi-experimental study. According to the study, both forms of Entrepreneurship Education (EE) help students develop their entrepreneurial abilities; however, the effect of EE in required courses depended on how students viewed their parents' business acumen. Universities offer entrepreneurship education (EE) courses to equip people with entrepreneurial skills and get them ready to participate in entrepreneurial endeavors (Hahn et al., 2020).

According to Parker et al. (2025), entrepreneurship education (EE) is essential for job creation, human development, and boosting the entrepreneurial intentions (EI) of the growing number of graduates in Ghana. The authors, however, were concerned that previous research had only examined the direct correlation between EE and EI, ignoring additional cognitive and integrative abilities that may have an indirect impact on EI.

Using Ghana as a case study, Parker et al. (2025) investigated the direct and indirect effects of EE on three sets of entrepreneurial outcomes among university students. The findings showed that the strong correlation between EE contents and EI can be weakened by neglecting the indirect effects of entrepreneurial mindset (EM) and entrepreneurial skills (ES). University students' EI is significantly impacted directly by ES and EM. According to Parker et al. (2025), EE strategies have to concentrate on creating effective practices and pedagogies that improve the cognitive and transversal abilities of college students.

In order to investigate the current state of entrepreneurship education and the impact of entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial knowledge, and entrepreneurial competence on entrepreneurial intention, Ni and Ye (2018) distributed questionnaires to 730 secondary vocational school students. The findings of the study support the following. First of all, more than half of the secondary vocational students reported that, having received entrepreneurship education of various kinds, making secondary vocational schools far more likely than their

academic counterparts to offer entrepreneurship education. Second, despite responding "unclear" to questions about entrepreneurial knowledge and education, students assessed themselves with comparatively high entrepreneurial competence and intention. Third, the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention is mediated by enterprise knowledge, motivation, and leadership.

Former students' advisees' career development and professional achievements have been shown to benefit from professional development seminar series, particularly in regard to advisor/mentor relationships, communication skills, and acquaintance with career paths (Zueger et al., 2014).

Zueger et al. (2014) carried out a study to evaluate the results and perceived advantages of a series of professional development seminars among alumni. To evaluate the impact of the seminar series on alumni advisees' perceived outcomes and professional development since graduation, a survey instrument comprising 39 Likert-type scale items, 2 open-ended questions, and a 10-item demographic survey was developed and content-validated. Advisees from the graduating classes of 2005–2012 received the survey electronically, and Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, was used to gather response data. The survey received responses from 36% of alumni. Benefits of the seminar series mentioned by respondents included networking, exposure to career options and opportunities, improvement of presentation and communication skills, and the significance of advisor/mentor relationships.

Getachew et al. (2020) also conducted a study to evaluate the impact of soft skill training on students' career development in higher education institutions. It utilized a quasi-experimental study design. The study involved 402 students in total. For analysis, both descriptive (frequency, percentage) and inferential (paired t-test, chi square) statistics were employed. A noteworthy correlation was observed between the improvement of skills prior to and following training. After receiving soft skill training, the students' understanding of their professional growth areas improved from 29 to 5 percent before to 57 to 8 percent. The mean score before training was just 9 points. After the training, it rose noticeably to 12.09. On the skill development items, there were notable variations

among the graduating class ($t(11.34) = df, 396, p = 0.00$).

According to Choate et al. (2016), Monash University students took part in focus groups to discuss how they felt about their employability. They believed that their employability skills were lacking, and they were not aware of the non-medical/research career options available to them. A group of academics and career counselors created a professional development program in response to these problems with the goal of enhancing students' career development abilities, career knowledge, and capacity to communicate their skills to potential employers. Students have an employability lecture and a careers development activity (assessed) connected to the creation of an electronic portfolio every semester (beginning in year one). By the end of the program, students had created a transferable profile that showcased their experiences, abilities, knowledge, and skills, as well as lifelong career management skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

We employed a quantitative research approach and a descriptive design. The target population of the study was 108 levels 100 and 200 students at the University College. We employed a census technique and considered all the target population members as respondents in this study. Data was collected using a closed-ended questionnaire designed using Google form and shared with students to fill in. The instrument was initially piloted with 10 percent of respondents. Pilot data were analysed and a Cronbach's confidence coefficient for the construct in relation to objectives one, two and three were 0.91, 0.98 and 0.88 respectively. The instrument was reviewed by multiple experts to enhance its validity. In order to ensure the legitimacy of the research process, ethical issues of consent, confidentiality and withdrawal have been adequately addressed. The questionnaires were shared with all 108 respondents. Of the 108, only 93 filled in their responses, representing 86.11 percent response rate. The analysis was carried out using the data from 86.11 percent of respondents. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise and interpret the respondents' responses. All ethical considerations were faithfully observed during the data collection process. The data collection

procedure and the students' role were clearly explained to them. The students therefore gave their consent and the students voluntarily agreed to participate as respondents in this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the study captures the results which emanated from the analysis. The section captures results relating to the study demographic information and the research objectives. Results on demographic information are presented using Figs. 1, 2 and 3.

The data indicates that among the undergraduate respondents there was a fairly equal representation of participants from each year-level of study, particularly Level 100 students (51% of participants) and Level 200 students (49% of participants). Given this comprehensive distribution, we can conclude that both first- and second-year students engaged in the study in order to get a decent overview of the career and professional development course(s) they had experienced so far. The overwhelming number of Level 100 students in the sample may indicate that early in their degree, these students wanted to begin developing career skills as soon as possible. Certainly, this demographic data suggests that due to the varying experiences and expectations of students at different year-levels in their studies, the career development course(s) needs to be constructed precisely to ensure the different niches of the cohort's specific needs are satisfied.

Upon looking at the gender spread of the study's responses, female-led responses were dominant, with 77% respondents identifying as female, and 23% identifying as male. The increased representation of female respondents may indicate that women have higher levels of interest in entrepreneurship and professional development programs or may simply indicate larger trends around enrollment at the university. This demographic piece of our research is significant, and it should be recognized that gender-based needs and interests need to be considered when designing and implementing career development offerings. Additionally, the findings may indicate opportunities for further research to explore the rationale for this gender imbalance related to engagement with entrepreneurial training.

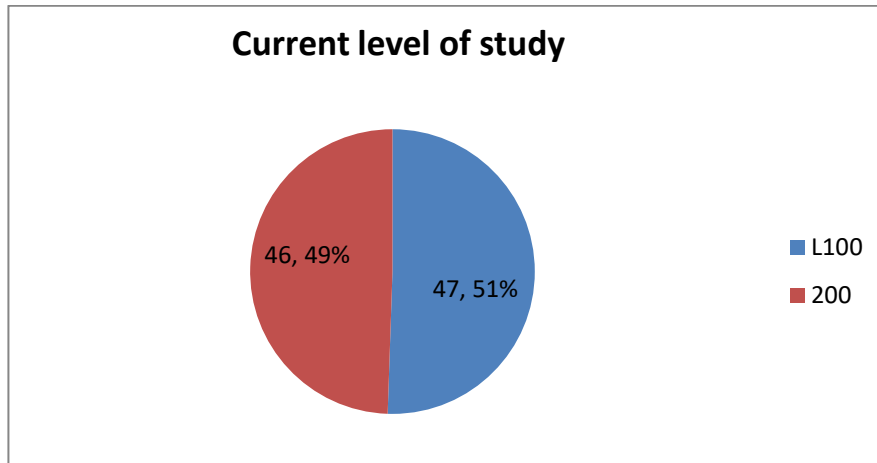


Fig. 1. The various level of study among respondents

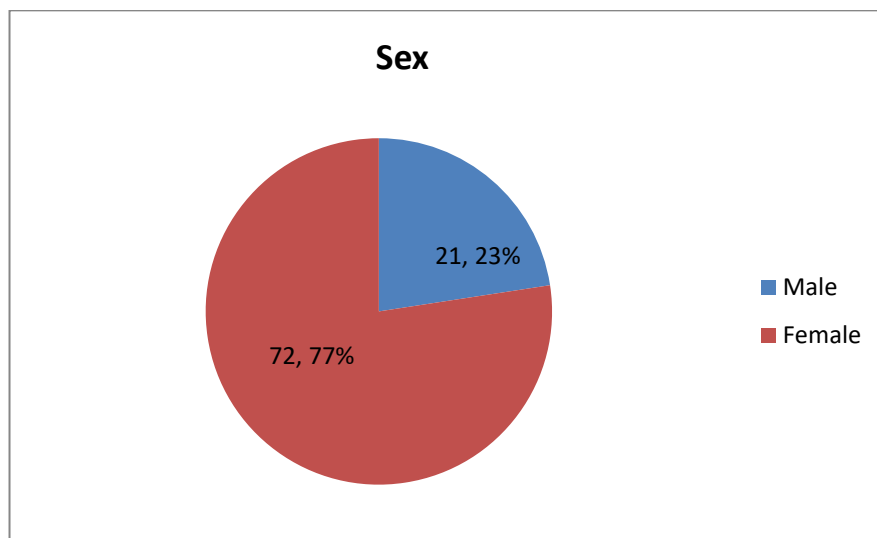


Fig. 2. The gender distribution of the respondents

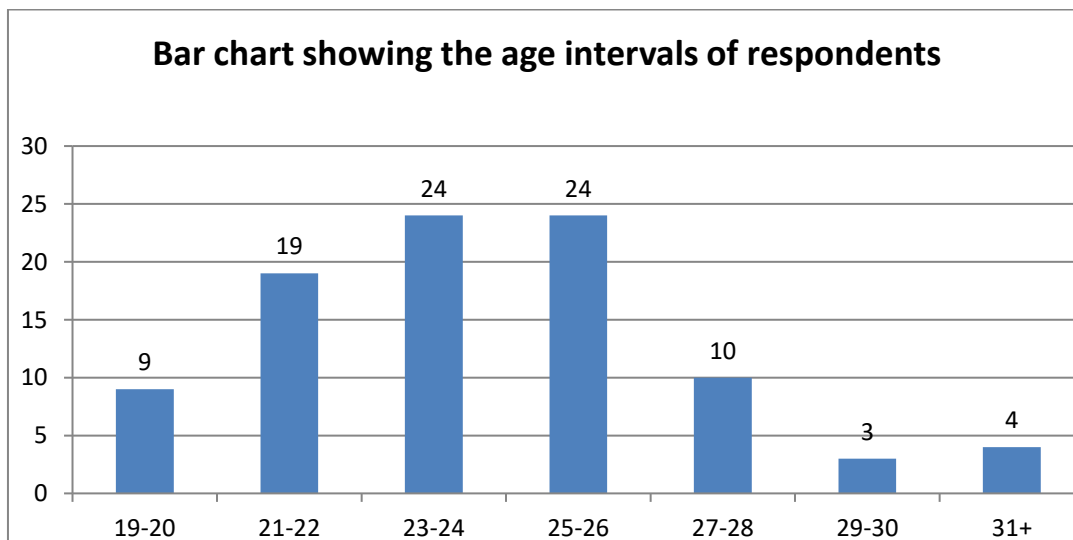


Fig. 3. The age distribution of respondents

Age distribution of respondents indicated variability in the respondents, with the largest number of respondents found in the brackets of ages 23-24 and 25-26 with the respective proportion of 25.8%. A combined percentage of 30.1% of respondents were 19 to 22 years old, demonstrating that there was a large representation from younger students in the study. In contrast, there was a very small number of respondents aged 29 years or older, with 3.2% in the 29-30 and 4.3% being 30 years of age or older. It is noteworthy that the distribution of the demographic indicated that most of the respondents are in the early stages of their respective academic and professional journeys which may affect their perceptions of career and entrepreneurship development. The age distribution and prevalence of younger respondents suggest that younger students may be more malleable and receive more information with greater open-mindedness in comparison to older respondents. Subsequent to younger students receiving greater information than older respondents, younger students may be more receptive to new innovative educational programs like the Career and Professional Development Course, as a result of being open to choreography of new practices. Recognition of this demographic variable is important to note as it shows the necessity of where interventions might be implemented as well as to their degree of appropriateness relative to younger students' professional development aims. These implications have a practical significance that can inform the rationale for the creation of new pedagogical interventions and methodologies specifically designed for the working professional development of younger students which leads to career focused persistent professionals.

4.1 Objective 1: To Explore the Effect of Students' Participation in Career and Professional Development Courses on Their Entrepreneurial Skills Development

Our aim with this objective was to find out from students how their participation in the career and professional development course had affected their entrepreneurial and professional skills development. Through this objective, we aimed to determine whether students after they had been taken through the course by the university had been able to acquire or develop entrepreneurial and professional skills since that

was the main aim of the course as designed by the university. The results from the analysis in relation to this objective are displayed in Table 1.

The results presented in Table 1 illustrate students' views on how participation in career and professional development courses enhance their entrepreneurial skills, specifically in areas such as innovation, risk management, and business planning. The mean scores for all statements indicate a positive perception of the courses, with the highest mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.82) reported for the applicability of skills learned to real-world problems (Santana & de Deus Lopes, 2024), suggesting that students feel well-equipped to tackle entrepreneurial tasks. Additionally, students expressed confidence in their ability to generate innovative ideas (M = 4.08, SD = 1.09) and improved understanding of risk management (M = 4.13, SD = 0.92). The overall negative skewness in the responses further emphasizes the favorable views held by students regarding the courses' effectiveness in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills. These findings are crucial as they align with the objective of exploring student perspectives and indicate that career development courses significantly contribute to their preparedness for entrepreneurial endeavors. This study's finding in Table 1 is consistent with the conclusions of other investigations. For example, Rodriguez and Lieber (2020) discovered a favorable correlation between perceptions of future job success and improvements in entrepreneurial mentality. Ashour (2016) also emphasized how future business owners might be made more socially conscious by including social entrepreneurship into university entrepreneurship education programs.

4.2 Objective Two: To Find Out How Students Perceive the Value of the Career and Professional Development Course in Terms of Their Professional Skills and Personal Career Development

Ten statements were designed to measure students' perceptions of the value of the career and professional development course in relation to their professional skills and personal career development, using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Views expressed by students regarding objective one

| S/n | Statement | Min | Max | M | S.D | SK | S.E |
|-----|---|------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| 1 | I feel more confident in my ability to generate innovative ideas after participating in career development courses | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.08 | 1.09 | -1.82 | .250 |
| 2 | The career development courses have improved my understanding of risk management in entrepreneurial ventures | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.13 | 0.92 | -1.96 | .250 |
| 3 | I have developed better business planning skills as a result of the career development courses. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.99 | 0.83 | -1.63 | .250 |
| 4 | Participating in career development courses has enhanced my ability to identify viable business opportunities | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.03 | 0.79 | -1.43 | .250 |
| 5 | I believe that the skills I learned in career development courses are applicable to real-world entrepreneurial challenges | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.15 | 0.82 | -1.86 | .250 |
| 6 | The courses have motivated me to pursue entrepreneurial projects or initiatives | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.91 | 0.82 | -1.55 | .250 |
| 7 | I feel more prepared to create a business plan after completing the career development courses | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.11 | 0.88 | -1.40 | .250 |
| 8 | I have gained valuable networking skills through the career development courses that will help me in entrepreneurship | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.91 | 0.89 | -1.52 | .250 |
| 9 | The feedback and mentorship provided in career development courses have improved my entrepreneurial skills | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.94 | 0.80 | -1.67 | .250 |
| 10 | I am more aware of the financial aspects of running a business due to the knowledge gained in career development courses | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.05 | 0.79 | -1.75 | .250 |

Source: Field data, 2025

Key: Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum, M=Mean, S.D=Std. Deviation, S.E=Std. Error, SK=skewness

The results in Table 2 provide insights into students' perceptions of the value of the career and professional development course concerning their professional skills and personal career development. The mean scores for all statements reflect a generally positive perception, with the highest mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.91) indicating that students believe the course has significantly enhanced their ability to work effectively in teams. Additionally, students reported increased confidence in networking (M = 3.97, SD = 0.80) and the belief that the skills acquired will aid their future job searches (M = 4.03, SD = 0.83). Most notably, the overall perception of the course's contribution to personal and professional growth yielded a mean of 4.01 (SD = 0.85), underscoring its perceived effectiveness. The negative skewness values across the statements suggest that students primarily viewed the course favorably, aligning with the objective of assessing its impact on their professional development. These findings

indicate that the course is perceived as a valuable tool in preparing students for their career pursuits. This finding of the study connects to the finding of Reese and Miller (2006) study. According to the findings of Reese and Miller (2006), students who finished the career course demonstrated higher levels of overall professional decision-making and self-efficacy, particularly in the areas of planning, establishing goals, and acquiring occupational information.

4.3 Objectives Three: To Examine Students' Perceptions of How Well the Curriculum of the Career and Professional Development Course Aligns with Their Current and Emerging Needs

The study formulated 10 statements designed to measure how well the curriculum of the

professional program aligns with the current and emerging needs of participants, using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree). The results in relation to this objective three are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Measure of students' perceptions of the value of the career and professional development course in relation to their professional skills and personal career development

| S/n | Statements | Min | Max | M | S.D | Sk |
|-----|---|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1 | The career and professional development course has significantly improved my communication skills. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.09 | 0.87 | -1.80 |
| 2 | I believe the course has enhanced my ability to work effectively in teams. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.15 | 0.91 | -1.82 |
| 3 | Participating in the course has increased my confidence in networking with professionals. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.97 | 0.80 | -1.63 |
| 4 | I feel that the skills I gained from the course will be beneficial in my future job search. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.03 | 0.83 | -1.71 |
| 5 | The course has provided me with valuable insights into industry trends relevant to my career. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.91 | 0.80 | -1.90 |
| 6 | I have developed a clearer understanding of my career goals as a result of this course. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.66 | 0.97 | -1.36 |
| 7 | The feedback I received during the course has helped me identify areas for personal growth. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.90 | 0.86 | -1.17 |
| 8 | I feel more prepared to navigate the job market after completing the course. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.91 | 0.86 | -1.43 |
| 9 | The course has equipped me with practical tools for personal branding and self-promotion. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.95 | 0.89 | -1.51 |
| 10 | Overall, I believe that the career and professional development course has greatly contributed to my personal and professional growth | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.01 | 0.85 | -1.74 |

Source: Field data, 2025

Key: Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum, M=Mean, S.D=Std. Deviation, S.E=Std. Error, SK=Skewness

Table 3. Curriculum of the career and professional development course

| S/n | Statements | Min | Max | M | S.D | Sk |
|-----|--|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1 | The curriculum of the professional program addresses the latest trends in my field of study. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.86 | 1.21 | 0.24 |
| 2 | I believe the content of the program is relevant to the current job market demands. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.66 | 1.04 | -0.94 |
| 3 | The course materials incorporate emerging technologies and practices relevant to my profession. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.16 | 1.13 | -0.19 |
| 4 | The curriculum effectively prepares me for future challenges in my industry. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.82 | 1.13 | 0.28 |
| 5 | I feel that the skills taught in the program are applicable to real-world scenarios I may encounter. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.98 | 1.04 | -1.43 |
| 6 | The program includes topics that are essential for professional growth in my field. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.77 | 1.10 | -1.12 |
| 7 | I believe the curriculum is regularly updated to reflect changes in industry standards. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.04 | 1.11 | -0.09 |
| 8 | The professional program provides opportunities to develop competencies that are in high demand. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.82 | 1.06 | -1.07 |
| 9 | I am confident that the knowledge gained from this program will enhance my employability. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.43 | 1.13 | -0.54 |
| 10 | Overall, I think the curriculum aligns well with both current and future needs of professionals in my field. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.94 | 0.91 | -1.48 |

Source: Field data, 2025

Key: Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum, M=Mean, S.D=Std. Deviation, S.E=Std. Error, SK=Skewness

The results presented in Table 3 reflect students' perceptions of how well the curriculum of the career and professional development course aligns with their current and emerging needs. The mean scores for the statements indicate a mixed perception, with the highest mean of 3.98 (SD = 1.04) suggesting that students feel the skills taught are applicable to real-world scenarios. However, other statements, such as the alignment with the latest trends (M = 2.86, SD = 1.21) and preparation for future challenges (M = 2.82, SD = 1.13), received lower mean scores, indicating concerns for improvement in those areas. The overall mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.91) for the alignment with both current and future needs suggest a generally positive perception, but the skewness values indicate a range of opinions among students. These findings highlight that while some aspects of the curriculum are perceived positively, there are critical areas where students feel improvements are necessary to better meet their emerging professional needs. The results are consistent with research by Elmore (2002) that emphasizes the value of career education enhancements to better address their changing professional needs.

5. KEY FINDINGS

1. **Impact on Entrepreneurial Skills:** The analysis reveals that students perceive career and professional development courses as significantly enhancing their entrepreneurial skills. High mean scores for statements related to confidence in generating innovative ideas (M = 4.08) and understanding risk management (M = 4.13) indicate a positive impact. This suggests that these courses effectively prepare students for real-world entrepreneurial challenges.
2. **Professional Skills Development:** Students reported a favorable perception of the course's contribution to their professional skills and personal career development. The highest mean score of 4.15 was attributed to the enhancement of teamwork abilities, while overall perceptions (M = 4.01) indicate that students feel well-equipped for their future career paths. This underscores the value of the course in fostering essential professional competencies.
3. **Curriculum Alignment with Needs:** The findings show a mixed perception regarding the alignment of the curriculum

with current and emerging needs. While students felt that skills taught were applicable to real-world scenarios (M = 3.98), lower mean scores for alignment with industry trends (M = 2.86) and preparation for future challenges (M = 2.82) highlight areas needing improvement. This suggests that while the curriculum has strengths, it must evolve to better meet the dynamic demands of the job market.

6. CONCLUSION

This research has provided valuable insights and evidence to conclude that career and professional development courses positively affect development of students' entrepreneurial and professional practice skills. The findings indicate that these courses significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial skills and professional competencies, thereby contributing positively to their career preparedness. The objectives of the study were effectively achieved, as evidenced by the positive feedback regarding the enhancement of entrepreneurial skills, the value of the courses in developing professional competencies, and the alignment of the curriculum with students' current and emerging needs.

The implications of these findings are significant for both the institution and the students. For the institution, the results underscore the importance of continually updating the curriculum to reflect industry trends, ensuring that courses remain relevant and effective in preparing students for the dynamic job market. For students, the positive perceptions highlight the value of engaging in career and professional development courses as a means to build essential skills needed for their future careers. In summary, this study not only confirms the effectiveness of the career and professional development courses but also emphasizes the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation to maximize their impact on student success.

7. ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Curriculum Review and Update:** Regularly review and update the curriculum of the career and professional development courses to incorporate emerging trends and technologies in the industry. Engaging industry professionals in this process can help ensure that the content remains relevant and practical.

2. **Enhanced Focus on Practical Applications:** Higher educational institutions should increase the emphasis on real-world applications within the course structure. This could include more case studies, simulations, and hands-on projects that reflect current market challenges and opportunities.
3. **Diverse Learning Opportunities:** Implement a variety of learning modalities, such as workshops, guest lectures, and mentorship programs, to engage students more effectively and cater to different learning preferences.
4. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish robust feedback mechanisms that allow students to voice their experiences and suggestions regarding the curriculum. This can ensure continuous improvement and alignment with their needs.
5. **Future Research:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of career and professional development courses on students' career trajectories. Additionally, exploring the gender imbalance in course participation could provide deeper insights into engagement strategies tailored for diverse student populations.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

CONSENT

As per international standards or university standards, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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