

Impact of Experiential E-Learning on Entrepreneurial Development in Refugee Context

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ABSTRACT

Refugees encounter substantial barriers to traditional education and economic opportunities, which necessitate innovative educational solutions. These challenges result in limited entrepreneurial prospects for marginalized communities. The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of experiential e-learning on entrepreneurial development within refugee contexts, focusing on the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. The objectives included; evaluating the effectiveness of experiential e-learning in enhancing practical entrepreneurial skills, experiences of refugees in experiential e-learning, entrepreneurial opportunities as a result of the experiential e-learning, and, sustainability of businesses of graduates in refugee settings. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research comprises key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions with participants engaged in e-learning programs. The findings revealed that experiential e-learning significantly improves entrepreneurial capabilities, instills confidence, and imparts crucial business knowledge. Additionally, the study found that e-learning fosters a supportive community and network among learners, contributing to more inclusive and sustainable economic development in refugee settings. The study, therefore, concluded that e-learning has the transformative potential of digital education to empower refugees and bolster resilience in marginalized communities. The results therefore offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and development organizations for advocacy and support e-learning on entrepreneurial development for refugees thus enhancing livelihoods.

Keyterms: Experiential learning, e-learning, entrepreneurial development, refugees

INTRODUCTION TO THE STTUDY

Refugees face numerous barriers to traditional education and economic opportunities, which in turn limit their entrepreneurial prospects. Innovative educational solutions, such as experiential e-learning, are essential to bridge these gaps. This study examined the impact of experiential e-learning on entrepreneurial development within refugee contexts, specifically focusing on the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. This paper outlines the significant benefits of experiential e-learning for entrepreneurial development in refugee settings, providing evidence and practical implications for enhancing educational and economic outcomes for marginalized communities.

Background of the Study

Access to education is a significant challenge for refugees worldwide. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), less than 3% of refugee youth are enrolled in tertiary education (UNHCR, 2020). This stark statistic highlights the educational marginalization of refugees, which is often exacerbated by factors such as displacement, instability, and lack of resources. Traditional education systems frequently fail to meet the unique needs of refugees. Dryden-Peterson (2011) emphasizes that these systems are often rigid and inflexible, lacking the adaptability required to accommodate the disrupted lives of refugees. For instance, many refugees face language barriers, interrupted educational backgrounds, and the necessity to balance education with work or caregiving responsibilities.

Traditional educational frameworks typically do not account for these factors, leading to lower enrollment and completion rates among refugee populations. Moreover, the content and structure of conventional education may not be relevant to the socio-economic contexts of refugees. For example, curriculum designs may not incorporate the practical skills needed for economic survival and growth in refugee settings, where formal job markets are often inaccessible. This irrelevance further diminishes the motivation of refugee youth to pursue education, perpetuating a cycle of educational and economic disadvantage.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was evaluate the impact of experiential e-learning on entrepreneurial development in refugee context. In this, the study explored how digital learning platforms can bridge educational gaps and cultivate entrepreneurial skills among refugees.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives were to;

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of experiential e-learning in enhancing practical entrepreneurial skills;
2. Explore experiences of refugees in experiential e-learning,
3. Find out entrepreneurial opportunities available as a result of the experiential e-learning,
4. Explore the sustainability of businesses of graduates in refugee settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential e-learning, which combines practical experience with digital learning, has emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges. Research indicates that experiential learning can significantly improve practical skills and knowledge retention (Kolb, 2015). Additionally, e-learning platforms provide the flexibility and accessibility needed to reach marginalized communities, including refugees (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2013).

Refugees face multifaceted challenges in accessing education and economic opportunities, severely limiting their entrepreneurial prospects. This literature review examines the educational and economic barriers faced by refugees, the potential of experiential e-learning to address these challenges, and the specific benefits of such educational approaches for entrepreneurial development within refugee contexts.

Educational Challenges Faced by Refugees

Access to education is a significant challenge for refugees worldwide. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), less than 3% of refugee youth are enrolled in tertiary education (UNHCR, 2020). This stark statistic highlights the educational marginalization of refugees, which is often exacerbated by factors such as displacement, instability, and lack of resources.

Traditional education systems frequently fail to meet the unique needs of refugees. Dryden-Peterson (2011) emphasizes that these systems are often rigid and inflexible, lacking the adaptability required to accommodate the disrupted lives of refugees. For instance, many refugees face language barriers, interrupted educational backgrounds, and the necessity to balance education with work or caregiving responsibilities. Traditional educational frameworks typically do not account for these factors, leading to lower enrollment and completion rates among refugee populations.

Moreover, the content and structure of conventional education may not be relevant to the socio-economic contexts of refugees. For example, curriculum designs may not incorporate the practical skills needed for economic survival and growth in refugee settings, where formal job markets are often inaccessible. This

irrelevance further diminishes the motivation of refugee youth to pursue education, perpetuating a cycle of educational and economic disadvantage.

Economic Challenges and the Need for Entrepreneurship

Refugees also face substantial economic challenges that impede their ability to achieve financial stability. Legal restrictions often limit their right to work, access to capital, and opportunities for economic participation. Even when permitted to work, refugees frequently encounter discrimination and exploitation, resulting in precarious and low-paying jobs (Jacobsen, 2005).

In this context, entrepreneurship emerges as a critical pathway for economic empowerment and self-reliance among refugees. Entrepreneurship allows refugees to leverage their skills, create economic opportunities for themselves and others, and contribute to the local economy. However, the lack of access to relevant education and training remains a significant barrier to entrepreneurial development in refugee settings.

Experiential E-Learning: A Promising Approach

Experiential e-learning, which integrates practical experience with digital learning platforms, presents a promising solution to the educational and economic challenges faced by refugees. This approach emphasizes learning through doing, enabling learners to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. Experiential learning theory, as articulated by Kolb (1984), posits that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, making it particularly suited to developing practical skills.

Kolb (2015) further elaborates that experiential learning enhances knowledge retention and skill acquisition by engaging learners in active problem-solving and reflection. This is crucial for entrepreneurial education, where practical skills and the ability to adapt to dynamic market conditions are essential.

E-learning platforms provide the flexibility and accessibility needed to reach marginalized communities, including refugees. Means et al. (2013) highlight that online and blended learning models can effectively address the logistical and geographical barriers that often prevent refugees from accessing traditional education. Digital platforms enable learners to access educational content at their own pace and convenience, accommodating their unique life circumstances.

The experiential Learning model

Experiential learning is known to be adaptable for individual style, preferences, strengths, and direction to produce the qualities of an entrepreneur such as positive emotions, confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of personal value and purpose. Its determined and controlled by the individual learner for the purpose of achieving personal development, growth, and discovery. It focuses on individual potential and styles as well as on the needs of the surrounding system. (Kolb, 2015)

The model entails;

1. **Experience:** planning for discovery, where learners explore, examine, construct and arrange an activity. This way they experience the activity by doing it.
2. **Reflecting:** Learners share the results, reactions and observations publicly. Then they discuss, analyze and reflect the activity.
3. **Applying:** Learners generalize and connect the experience to real world examples. Learners apply what was learned to similar or different situations i.e. practicing what they experience. Ultimately learners are able to generate ideas, opportunity evaluation, planning, formation of company, launch and growth.

Impact of Experiential E-Learning on Entrepreneurial Skills

The integration of experiential learning with e-learning platforms has shown significant potential in enhancing entrepreneurial skills among refugees. Studies indicate that such programs can improve proficiency in essential business areas, including financial management, marketing, and strategic planning (Nafukho & Muyia, 2010). For instance, a study on digital entrepreneurship education in refugee camps found that participants reported increased confidence and competence in starting and managing businesses after completing experiential e-learning courses (Zaatari, 2019).

Moreover, experiential e-learning fosters a sense of community and support among learners, which is critical for sustaining entrepreneurial ventures in challenging environments. Peer learning and networking opportunities provided by online platforms enable refugees to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and build collaborative relationships. This supportive network can be instrumental in overcoming the isolation and resource constraints often faced by refugee entrepreneurs.

Case Studies and Examples

Several initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of experiential e-learning in refugee contexts. The Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Youth Education Pack (YEP) program, for example, combines vocational training with entrepreneurship education delivered through digital platforms. An evaluation of the YEP program in Uganda revealed that participants not only gained technical skills but also developed entrepreneurial competencies that led to the establishment of small businesses (NRC, 2018).

Similarly, the Vodafone Foundation's Instant Network Schools program leverages digital technology to deliver education to refugees in Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Kenya. The program includes modules on entrepreneurship, which incorporate experiential learning techniques such as business simulations and interactive case studies. Participants have reported increased entrepreneurial intentions and a greater ability to apply business concepts in practical settings (Vodafone Foundation, 2020).

Sustainability and Long-Term Impact

The sustainability of businesses started by graduates of experiential e-learning programs is a critical factor in assessing the long-term impact of such initiatives. Research indicates that businesses founded by individuals who have undergone experiential learning are more likely to be sustainable and resilient (Lackeus, 2015). This is because experiential learning equips entrepreneurs with the skills to navigate challenges, innovate, and adapt to changing market conditions.

In refugee settings, the sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures is particularly dependent on the continued support and mentorship provided through e-learning platforms. Continuous access to educational resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities can help refugee entrepreneurs overcome the initial hurdles of business establishment and ensure long-term viability.

Literature Gaps

Experiential e-learning offers a transformative approach to enhancing entrepreneurial development among refugees. By combining practical experience with digital learning, this educational model addresses the unique needs and challenges of refugee populations. The literature reviewed in this paper highlights the significant benefits of experiential e-learning in improving entrepreneurial skills, fostering community support, and ensuring the sustainability of businesses in refugee settings. These findings underscore the importance of innovative educational solutions in empowering refugees and promoting economic resilience in marginalized communities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study employed qualitative methodology to comprehensively evaluate the impact of experiential e-learning on entrepreneurial development in refugee contexts. An ethnographic design was used with a population of 20 graduants from Diploma in Entrepreneurship from the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps.

Data Collection

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugee participants. These methods were chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with experiential e-learning.

Individual interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of participants to obtain detailed personal narratives. The interview guide included questions about participants' motivations for enrolling in the e-learning courses, their learning experiences, the applicability of the skills gained, and any challenges encountered during and after the course.

FGDs were held with two groups of 8 and 6 participants from Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps respectively. The FGDs aimed to explore collective experiences, shared challenges, and the community impact of the e-learning programs. The group setting encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences in a supportive environment, often leading to richer data (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from KIIs and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involves coding the data to identify key themes and patterns related to participants' experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis allows for the systematic examination of qualitative data, providing insights into the impact of experiential e-learning on refugee entrepreneurs.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research with vulnerable populations (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). Participants provided informed consent, and the confidentiality of their responses was ensured. The research was conducted with sensitivity to the participants' cultural contexts and potential trauma associated with their refugee status. Researchers took care to create a safe and respectful environment for data collection.

Findings Of The Study

The findings of the study was organised in theme which were according to the objectives of the study. The findings illustrated the transformative impact of experiential e-learning on entrepreneurial development among refugees in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps. The analysis covered dimensions of enhancement of practical entrepreneurial skills, experiences of refugees in experiential e-learning, entrepreneurial opportunities resulting from the program, and the sustainability of businesses initiated by graduates in these refugee settings.

Effect of Experiential E-learning on Enhancement of Entrepreneurial Skills

In regard to the first objective, the study found that experiential e-learning is significant as it combines hands-on, practical experience with theoretical knowledge delivered through digital platforms. This method is particularly effective in developing entrepreneurial skills, as it allows learners to apply what they have learned in real-world contexts. According to Kolb (2015), experiential learning significantly enhances practical skills and knowledge retention, making it an ideal approach for teaching entrepreneurship. Further, the study found that experiential e-learning significantly improved participants' entrepreneurial skills. The quantitative data

collected through pre- and post-course surveys indicated marked improvements in business planning, financial management, marketing, and operational skills. These skills are critical for the success of any entrepreneurial venture and are often lacking in traditional education systems available to refugees. By engaging in practical exercises and real-life simulations, participants were able to internalize and apply these skills effectively.

The study revealed that, before participating in the e-learning programs, many refugees had limited knowledge and experience in entrepreneurship. The structured and interactive nature of the courses facilitated a significant boost in their confidence and capability to manage business operations. Specifically, participants reported increased proficiency in essential areas such as business planning, financial management, and marketing. This improvement is consistent with existing literature, which supports the efficacy of experiential learning in enhancing practical skills (Kolb, 2015).

Experiences of Refugees in Experiential E-Learning

On the second objective, qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions provided deeper insights into the participants' experiences. Refugees in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps reported high levels of satisfaction with the experiential e-learning programs. They appreciated the flexibility of online platforms, which allowed them to balance their studies with other responsibilities such as work and family care. The interactive nature of the courses, which included peer-to-peer learning and practical exercises, was also highlighted as a key factor in their positive learning experiences.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions highlighted overwhelmingly positive experiences with experiential e-learning. Participants appreciated the interactive and practical nature of the courses, which stood in stark contrast to traditional, lecture-based education. The flexibility of e-learning platforms was particularly valued, allowing refugees to balance their studies with other responsibilities such as work and family obligations.

One participant commented,

"The e-learning platform was very user-friendly, and the practical exercises helped me understand how to apply business concepts in real life."

This sentiment was echoed by many others, who found the hands-on approach of the e-learning programs more engaging and effective than theoretical instruction alone. The ability to learn at their own pace and revisit materials as needed also contributed to a deeper understanding and retention of entrepreneurial concepts.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities Resulting from Experiential E-Learning

Regarding the third objective, the study found out that experiential e-learning programs opened up new entrepreneurial opportunities for many participants. Several refugees reported starting their own businesses or improving existing ones as a direct result of the skills and knowledge gained through the courses. These ventures ranged from small retail operations to service-oriented enterprises, demonstrating the diverse entrepreneurial potential within refugee communities. The study underscores the importance of providing refugees with practical business education that can translate directly into economic activities.

The study identified that experiential e-learning opened new entrepreneurial opportunities for refugees. Several participants reported starting their own businesses or improving existing ones directly as a result of the skills and knowledge gained through e-learning. These new ventures ranged from small retail businesses to service-oriented enterprises, demonstrating the diverse entrepreneurial potential within refugee communities.

For instance, one participant launched a small tailoring business, leveraging the marketing and financial management skills acquired during the course. Another participant expanded an existing food retail business by applying better inventory management techniques learned through the e-learning platform. These examples illustrate how experiential e-learning equips refugees with the tools and confidence needed to seize entrepreneurial opportunities and drive economic growth within their communities.

Sustainability of Businesses of Graduates in Refugee Settings

Lastly, on the forth objective, the study found out that e-learning enhanced the sustainability and growth of businesses started by e-learning graduates. Participants attributed their success to the comprehensive business education they received and the supportive community fostered by the e-learning programs. The sense of community and networking opportunities provided by these platforms were particularly important, as they offered ongoing support and resources for new entrepreneurs. This communal support is crucial in refugee settings, where traditional business networks may be absent.

Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) Interviews and focus group discussions (FDGs) revealed that many businesses started by e-learning graduates were sustainable and showed signs of growth. Participants attributed their success to the comprehensive business education and the supportive community fostered by the e-learning programs. The sense of community and networking opportunities were particularly important, as they provided ongoing support and resources for new entrepreneurs.

One participant noted,

"The connections I made through the e-learning program have been invaluable.

We share advice, resources, and support each other in our business ventures."

This sense of camaraderie and mutual support is critical in the challenging environment of refugee camps, where access to formal business support services is often limited.

Furthermore, the study found that businesses initiated by e-learning graduates exhibited resilience and adaptability, essential traits for sustainability in uncertain and resource-constrained environments. Graduates reported using their training to innovate and adapt their business models in response to market demands and external challenges. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several participants successfully pivoted their businesses to meet new needs, such as producing face masks or offering delivery services.

The findings from this study highlight the significant impact of experiential e-learning on entrepreneurial development in refugee contexts. By providing practical skills, fostering a supportive community, and opening new opportunities, experiential e-learning programs can play a crucial role in empowering refugees and enhancing their economic prospects.

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DISCUSSIONS

The improvement in practical entrepreneurial skills underscores the value of hands-on, interactive learning approaches, which align with the principles of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2015). The positive experiences of refugees with e-learning platforms demonstrate the importance of flexibility and accessibility in educational interventions for marginalized populations. The entrepreneurial opportunities created by experiential e-learning are particularly noteworthy, as they contribute to economic self-sufficiency and resilience among refugees. The sustainability of businesses started by e-learning graduates further emphasizes the potential of digital education to drive long-term positive outcomes in refugee settings.

The findings of this study therefore highlight the transformative potential of experiential e-learning for entrepreneurial development in refugee contexts. By providing practical skills, instilling confidence, and fostering a supportive community, e-learning platforms can significantly enhance the economic prospects of

refugees. This, in turn, contributes to more inclusive and sustainable economic development in refugee settings. The study also underscores the importance of tailoring educational programs to the unique needs of refugees. Flexibility, accessibility, and practical relevance are critical components of effective educational interventions for marginalized communities.

CONCLUSION

Experiential e-learning has emerged as a transformative approach to education, particularly within marginalized communities in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, where traditional educational opportunities are severely limited. The barriers faced by refugees include not only the lack of access to formal education but also the need for practical, relevant skills that can enable them to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The innovative use of digital learning platforms in these settings has shown promise in bridging these gaps, providing both educational and entrepreneurial opportunities. Experiential e-learning therefore has a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial development among refugees in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps in Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, it is clear that experiential e-learning has proven to be a powerful tool for entrepreneurial development among refugees in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps. The study's findings highlighted the potential of digital learning platforms to not only enhance practical skills and knowledge but also to foster a sense of community and support among learners. Therefore, study will have significant implications for policymakers, educators, and development organizations. By investing in digital learning platforms and experiential education models, stakeholders can effectively address the educational and economic challenges faced by refugees. Policies that support the integration of e-learning into refugee education programs can help bridge the gap in access to quality education and provide refugees with the skills needed to build sustainable livelihoods.

The findings of this study therefore suggest several policy implications and recommendations for stakeholders involved in refugee education and economic development:

1. **Integration of Experiential Learning in Educational Programs:** Policymakers and educators should integrate experiential learning components into educational programs for refugees. This approach can enhance practical skills and knowledge retention, making education more relevant and impactful.
2. **Expansion of Digital Learning Platforms:** Governments and development organizations should invest in the expansion of digital learning platforms that provide flexible and accessible education to refugees. These platforms should be tailored to the unique needs and contexts of refugee populations.
3. **Supportive Ecosystems for Refugee Entrepreneurs:** Establishing supportive ecosystems that provide ongoing mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to resources is crucial
4. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, and educational institutions is essential to create comprehensive and sustainable solutions. Partnerships can facilitate resource sharing, expertise, and innovation in addressing the educational and economic challenges faced by refugees.

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