

INFLUENCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION ON STUDENTS' ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The persistent challenge of youth unemployment in Nigeria has necessitated a strategic shift toward entrepreneurship education (EE) within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This study investigated the influence of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) of students in South-eastern Nigerian HEIs. Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and the Entrepreneurial Competency Model, the research examined three primary dimensions of EE: Course Content, Pedagogy, and Facilitator Competence. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, utilizing a structured survey to collect data from a sample of 343 students across selected institutions. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and multiple regression analysis. The findings of the study revealed that entrepreneurship education significantly predicts entrepreneurial self-efficacy, though the model explained a modest 12.8% of the total variance ($R^2 = .128$). Specifically, Course Content emerged as the sole significant individual predictor ($\beta = .331$, $p < .05$), suggesting that students derive their confidence primarily from the structured knowledge and technical information provided in the syllabus. Conversely, Pedagogy and Facilitator Competence did not show statistically significant influences, indicating a "delivery gap" in current instructional methods. These results imply that while students value the theoretical foundations of entrepreneurship, the current practical and instructional frameworks are under-optimized. The study concludes that for HEIs to effectively foster entrepreneurial resilience, curriculum developers must prioritize action-oriented learning and industry-aligned content. It is recommended that the National Universities Commission (NUC) and institutional leaders shift toward competency-based training and recruit facilitators with practical venture experience to bridge the gap between academic theory and market reality.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, self efficacy, higher education, entrepreneurship education

Introduction

The global push for sustainable economic development has positioned entrepreneurship as the primary engine for job creation, poverty alleviation, and innovation. In the face of fluctuating global markets, international bodies like the World Bank (2023) and UNESCO (2022) have advocated for the integration of entrepreneurship education into formal schooling to prepare youth for a rapidly changing labor landscape. According to UNESCO (2008), entrepreneurship education is characterized as a form of education that enables students to develop and apply their creativity, while also fostering initiative, responsibility, and risk-taking. This type of education has garnered increasing global interest from a diverse range of stakeholders, including policymakers, academic scholars, business schools, as well as middle and high schools, due to its significant contributions to economic growth, job creation, and overall social development (Kavita, 2020; Longva, 2019; Beriman, 2019; Alanazi, 2018; Chea, 2017; Oguntimehin and Olaniran, 2017; Valerio, Brent, and Kobb, 2014; Rea, 2010). There is a broad consensus

among scholars that entrepreneurship education and training are essential for cultivating the necessary entrepreneurial attitudes, skills, and competencies (Gi Zhang and Matlay, 2003; Erkilli, 2000).

In the African context, the necessity of entrepreneurship education is severely heightened by high youth unemployment rates and an exponentially bulging youth population. The African Development Bank (2024) reports that while the continent has a high rate of necessity-driven entrepreneurship, there remains a significant efficacy gap where individuals possess the desire to start businesses but lack the confidence or skills to scale them or survive the initial years of operation. This structural vulnerability is compounded by traditional educational models across the continent that prioritize wage-employment preparation rather than fostering entrepreneurial mindsets, risk tolerance, and critical problem-solving capabilities needed to thrive in a volatile economic landscape (Anis & Brière, 2024). Consequently, millions of young Africans enter informal markets out of economic survival, attempting to navigate micro-enterprises without the requisite financial literacy or strategic planning training. Consequently, modern entrepreneurship education within the continent must be structurally reimagined to foster high-growth "opportunity-driven" entrepreneurial mindsets rather than mere necessity-driven survival strategies.

In Nigeria, the Federal Government, through the National Universities Commission (NUC), made entrepreneurship education a compulsory requirement for all undergraduates in 2006 (Agu et al., 2022). This policy was designed to shift the mindset of Nigerian graduates from 'job seekers to job creators. However, despite two decades of implementation, the impact of these programs on student confidence remains a subject of intense debate. Scholars such as Maina (2021) and Ojo (2022) argue that while students are exposed to the mechanics of business, the current instructional frameworks often fail to influence their core self-efficacy, leaving them technically informed but psychologically unprepared for the Nigerian business environment.

In South-eastern Nigeria, the entrepreneurial landscape is deeply influenced by a rich cultural history of commerce and the "Igba-Boi" (apprenticeship) system. This creates a unique educational dynamic where formal classroom instruction meets a socially ingrained business-first mindset. However, modern HEIs in the region face challenges such as lack of practical pedagogical approaches, and facilitators who may lack real-world venture experience. This raises critical questions about whether the formal entrepreneurship education being delivered is actually moving the needle on students' self-efficacy, or if students are deriving their confidence from external socio-cultural factors instead.

Ideally, Entrepreneurial Education should move beyond theoretical instruction toward competency-based models that foster the psychological resilience and self-belief necessary to navigate the unique challenges of emerging markets. Central to this educational shift is the concept of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) –an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform the various roles and tasks of entrepreneurship. Unlike mere technical knowledge, ESE acts as a psychological catalyst that determines whether an individual will actually initiate a new venture (Newman et al., 2019). However, haven implemented the programme for almost two decades, unemployment, and unemployability among Nigerian graduates has continued to soar (Dumani, 2021). According to Jovanovic (1982), high level of joblessness in a society is often an indication of scarcity of entrepreneurial activities. The increasing rate of graduate unemployment in the country which is attributed largely to unemployability (Dumani,

2021) raises questions bordering on the success of the entrepreneurship education been implemented in the HEIs. poses serious threat to the nation's economic security, growth and sustainability. The problem of lack of employment in a currently poorly performing economy should be a matter of deep concern to all stakeholders. Meanwhile, not much is known about the possibility of a causal relationship between some entrepreneurship educational components (content of the course, past entrepreneurial experience, pedagogical methods, teachers' qualification and competence, etc.) and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, intention and/or behavior particularly in developing countries (The ANZISHA PRIZE, 2020; Beriman, 2019; Nabi, Linan, & Fayolle, 2017; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Chinenye et al., 2015). This has left a significant knowledge gap. Therefore, this study contributes to filling this knowledge gap by investigating the potential causal link between pedagogical methods, course contents, facilitators' competence with students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy in Nigerian HEIs.

Purpose of the Study

The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To assess the influence of pedagogical approaches (teaching methods) used in entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy.
2. To examine the influence of the course content of entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy.
3. To investigate the influence of the competencies of entrepreneurship education facilitators on students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

Methods

This study employed cross-sectional survey design and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were utilized. The population of this study comprised of 7,192 students enrolled in the third and final years in the three federal tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. Sample size was determined using the sample size formula by Yamane (1967), bringing the study's sample size to 378 participants. Additionally, simple random sampling technique was employed for sample selection, as all final-year students in the selected higher education institutions (HEIs) met the criteria for participation in the study, specifically having completed the Entrepreneurship Education program. The research instrument utilized in this study was adapted from prior studies. The instrument for assessing student entrepreneurial self-efficacy was adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009), while the evaluation of entrepreneurship education was based on the work of Lawal and Omorodion (2021). The instrument comprised a total of 28 items, all of which were measured using a 5-point Likert-type response scale, where lower scores represented disagreement with the statements included in the instrument. Test-retest using data from pilot study was done to determine Cronbach's alpha values which was used to test the instrument for reliability. This was decided based on the recommended minimum benchmark of no less than 0.7 according to Hair et al., (2011). The validity on the other hand was confirmed through expert validation of the instrument. Three experts in the field of Education and Measurement & Evaluation were consulted to validate the instrument that was used for the study and their suggested corrections were integrated accordingly to improve the quality of the instrument. The reliability values of the adapted instrument for assessing student entrepreneurial self-efficacy range from .773 to .943 (Liñán & Chen, 2009), where as that of the entrepreneurship education fell within .76 to .88 (Lawal & Omorodion, 2021).

Due to financial constraints, data collection was done online. The link to the questionnaire was shared on the WhatsApp groups of the third and final year classes of the sampled institutions. Descriptive statistics, precisely, frequency tables were utilized to provide a clear and concise summary of the respondents' demographic characteristics. However, to test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was utilized to assess the predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Data

Variable	Categories	Frequencies	Percentages (%)
Gender	Male	182	55.8
	Female	144	44.2
Level of Study	Final year	174	53.4
	300 Level	152	46.6
Major	Engineering	48	14.7
	Business	109	33.4
	Medicine	21	6.4
	Humanities	85	26.1
	Others	63	19.3

The demographic profile of the participants presented in table 1 reveals a diverse representation of students across various academic disciplines and levels of study within Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Out of an initial target sample of 378, the study achieved a final participation of 326 students, representing a robust response rate of approximately 86.2%. Gender distribution shows a slight majority of male participants at 55.8% (n = 182), compared to female participants at 44.2% (n = 144). In terms of academic seniority, the sample is relatively balanced but slightly skewed toward senior students, with 53.4% (n = 174) in their final year and 46.6% (n = 152) at the 300 level. This concentration of upper-level students is particularly relevant for assessing the impact of entrepreneurship education, as these individuals are nearing graduation and are more likely to be contemplating their immediate professional or entrepreneurial paths.

The distribution across academic majors further highlights the interdisciplinary scope of the research, which is essential given that entrepreneurship education is often a mandatory general course in many Nigerian institutions. Students from Business backgrounds constitute the largest single group at 33.4% (n = 109), followed by those in the Humanities at 26.1% (n = 85). Engineering students represent 14.7% (n = 48) of the cohort, while Medicine and other varied disciplines account for 6.4% (n = 21) and 19.3% (n = 63) respectively. This cross-disciplinary spread allows the study to capture a wide range of entrepreneurial self-efficacy levels, potentially reflecting how different academic rigors and vocational orientations influence a student's belief in their ability to launch a business venture. The inclusion of non-business majors is especially critical, as it provides insight into the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education for students whose primary training is not intrinsically commercial.

Table 2: Results of Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		Betta	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.733	0.347		2.608	0.021
	Pedagogical approach	0.052	0.038	0.029	1.532	0.157

Course content	0.382	0.062	0.331	6.278	0.000
Facilitators' competence	0.084	0.031	0.080	0.748	0.100

$$R^2 = 0.128 (**p < 0.05)$$

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the influence of entrepreneurship education (represented by pedagogical approach, course content, and facilitators' competence) on the entrepreneurial self-efficacy of students in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The results of the regression presented in table 4.2. above indicates that the model explained 12.8% of the variance in students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = .128$, $p < .05$). Course Content was the only significant predictor in the model, exerting a positive influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = .331$, $t = 6.278$, $p < .001$). Pedagogical Approach did not significantly influence entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = .029$, $t = 1.532$, $p = .157$). Similarly, Facilitators' Competence also did not significantly influence the students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = .080$, $t = 0.748$, $p = .100$).

Discussion

The findings from the study shows that Course Content is the only significant predictor of entrepreneurial self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.331$, $t = 6.278$, $p = 0.000$) in this study. This suggests that what is being taught i.e. the curriculum itself, is the most influential factor in building students' belief that they can successfully launch and manage a business venture. In the Nigerian context, this finding aligns with the work of Maina (2014) who argued that a curriculum rich in practical business planning and opportunity recognition is fundamental to student confidence. However, it diverges from the broader action-oriented debate in entrepreneurship education, which often prioritizes how a subject is taught over what is taught. The significance of content here may reflect the theory-heavy nature of Nigerian HEIs, where students place high value on the acquisition of concrete, syllabus-based knowledge as their primary source of self-efficacy. Contrary to many contemporary studies, the Pedagogical Approach was found to be a non-significant predictor. This is a surprising result, as much of the literature such as (Mwasalwiba, 2010) suggests that active learning, simulations, and experiential methods are the heart of effective entrepreneurship education. However, while this finding diverges significantly from the Learning by Doing school of thought, the non-significance may suggest a predominance of pedagogical methods that are purely traditional (lectures and rote memorization) which may fail to stimulate the self-efficacy required for the risk-taking inherent in entrepreneurship.

Facilitators' Competence also appeared as a non-significant predictor in this model. This suggests that, in the eyes of the students, the instructor's perceived expertise or delivery does not translate directly into an increase in their own entrepreneurial self-belief. This finding contrasts with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes Social Persuasion and Vicarious Learning from mentors/facilitators as key pillars of self-efficacy. This divergence may have occurred due to students' perception of facilitators in these HEIs as pure academics rather than practitioner entrepreneurs. If students perceive that their teachers have never run a business, the instructor's competence may be viewed as purely theoretical, thus failing to inspire the confidence needed for real-world application. This analysis reflects a common situation in the most Nigerian Higher education institutions according to Umukoro, and Omade, (2022). On a general note, the low R^2 of 12.8% is a critical finding in itself. It suggests that 87.2% of the factors influencing a Nigerian student's entrepreneurial self-efficacy lie outside the classroom.

Empirical literature on Nigerian entrepreneurship such as Fatoki (2014) points toward external variables such as access to capital, family background, and the hostile macroeconomic environment. The findings here suggest that while the university curriculum provides a base-level of confidence, the overwhelming majority of a student's belief in their success is determined by their perception of the external Nigerian market and personal resilience factors not captured by traditional educational metrics.

The results of this study present a clear picture of alignment with local studies that emphasize curriculum reform, but divergence from global trends that favor pedagogy over content. For instance, the findings align with Suleiman (2010), who found that Nigerian students prioritize content mastery for exam success, which they equate with professional readiness. On the other hand, there seem to a divergence from European studies such as Pittaway & Cope, (2007), which argue that the facilitator-student relationship is the primary driver of entrepreneurial intent. In this study, though the facilitator was not a significant factor, it does not negate the pivotal role of the facilitators as asserted in previous studies in line with Social Cognitive theory. Rather, the non-significance of the Pedagogical Approach and Facilitators' Competence indicates a critical disconnect in the classroom experience. Despite the diverse academic backgrounds of the participants ranging from Business and Humanities to Engineering and Medicine the methods used to deliver instruction, and the perceived expertise of the lecturers failed to significantly influence the students' self-belief. This highlights a delivery gap where traditional teaching methods may not be effectively translating into the inspiration or social persuasion required to foster a true entrepreneurial spirit.

Conclusion

The findings of this study offer a compelling look into the structural dynamics of entrepreneurship education within Nigerian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This study provides a statistically robust foundation for understanding how students develop the confidence necessary to pursue business ventures. The most significant revelation is that Course Content serves as the primary engine for building student confidence, acting as the sole significant predictor within the regression model. This suggests that in the current Nigerian academic climate, the content of the curriculum carries more psychological weight for students than the methods or lecturers teaching the course. The statistical dominance of Course Content underscores a knowledge-based approach to self-efficacy. Students appear to derive their sense of readiness from the mastery of theoretical frameworks, business planning, and technical knowledge provided in their syllabi. In conclusion, while the existing entrepreneurship curriculum in Nigeria provides a necessary baseline of knowledge, it is currently insufficient as a standalone tool for empowering students. To bridge the gap between classroom theory and practical success, HEIs must reform the curriculum to be more instrumentally relevant while simultaneously re-skilling facilitators to become better sources of inspiration. Future efforts should focus on a more holistic model of education that addresses the significant unexplained factors, ensuring that the next generation of Nigerian entrepreneurs possesses not just the knowledge of the 'what,' but the resilient 'how' of business success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings which showed that Course Content is the sole significant driver of self-efficacy, while pedagogy and facilitator competence currently lack impact, the following practical recommendations are proposed for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the Ministry of Nigerian Education.

1. Given that Facilitators' Competence was found to be non-significant, re-skilling of facilitators through relevant trainings on pedagogies needed for effectively of the entrepreneurial courses. This can be supplemented with Practitioner Integration. Practitioner integration will require universities supplementing academic staff with Visiting Entrepreneurs –actual business owners– who can provide the Social Persuasion and vicarious experience currently missing from the classroom. Furthermore, it is recommended that the HEIs transition from purely theoretical content (which is typical of Nigerian HEIs according to the literatures) to live case studies involving successful local entrepreneurs to provide students with relatable vicarious experiences.
2. To address the non-significance of the Pedagogical Approach, institutions should move away from traditional lecture halls and invest in Entrepreneurship Hubs/Labs where students can prototype products and engage in simulated business negotiations. This could involve establishing on-campus Incubation Hubs where students can apply course content to actual business prototypes, bridging the gap between classroom knowledge and practical execution.
3. Content-Driven Workshops: Since students rely heavily on course content for their confidence, the faculties and departments should organize specialized Mastery Workshops focused on high-demand skills (e.g., digital marketing, financial technology, and supply chain management) to reinforce the significant positive impact of content on student self-efficacy.

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