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## **The Impact of Entrepreneurship Education in Upscaling Entrepreneurial Intention among Undergraduates in Nigeria: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy and Innovation Orientation**

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### **Abstract**

This study assess how entrepreneurship education (EE) increased undergraduates' entrepreneurial intention (EI) in Nigerian higher education, paying special emphasis to the mediating effects of innovation orientation (IO) and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE). Supported by cognitive-behavioral viewpoints and grounded in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach. A stratified random selection technique was used to gather data from 400 final-year business administration students who were selected from six universities in Southwest Nigeria. Four main constructs (EE), (ESE), (IO), and (EI) were included in a standardized and verified questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used to confirm the instrument's reliability, and the results showed excellent internal consistency across constructs ( $\alpha = 0.83-0.89$ ). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to analyze the data. The demographic and construct-related variables of the respondents were summarized using descriptive statistics, frequency counts, and percentages. The hypothesized relationships were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The results showed that EI and EE had a substantial and favorable correlation ( $r = 0.641$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, it was discovered that IO (indirect effect = 0.19,  $p < .01$ ) and ESE (indirect effect = 0.21,  $p < .01$ ) partially mediate this relationship, suggesting that students' orientation toward innovation and confidence in their entrepreneurial skills greatly increase the impact of EE on EI. In total, almost 63% of the variation in EI was explained by the model. The study concludes that while EE provides a vital foundation for developing EI, its effectiveness is significantly strengthened when supported by SE and IO. It recommends that Nigerian tertiary institutions integrate experiential learning, mentorship, and creativity enhancing components into entrepreneurship curricula to foster self-confidence and innovative capacity among students.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship education, Entrepreneurial intention, Self-efficacy, Innovation orientation, Nigerian undergraduates

### **1. Introduction**

In the face of persistent youth unemployment and underemployment in developing economies like Nigeria, entrepreneurship has been widely acknowledged as a viable pathway to upscale economic empowerment and sustainable development. The global economic landscape has undergone significant transformations marked by a shift towards entrepreneurship as a key driver of innovation, economic growth and job creation. Nigeria, with its growing population and constrained job market faces challenges in providing sufficient employment opportunities for its graduates. In response to this, Nigeria tertiary institutions have increasingly embedded entrepreneurship education within their curriculum to prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset required to create and manage ventures.

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) is broadly defined as an individual's conscious and deliberate plan to establish individual's conscious and deliberate plan to establish a new business venture (Bird, 1988). Extant literature affirms a positive correlation between entrepreneurship education (EE) and entrepreneurial intention (EI). Nabi et al. (2017) highlighted how EE contributes to students' attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and ultimately, entrepreneurial aspirations. They emphasize that EE plays a significant role in shaping students' EI by influencing key psychological factors rather than merely transferring business knowledge. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior, they argue that EE enhances students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship by exposing them to entrepreneurial role models, real-life problem-solving, and opportunity recognition activities, which make entrepreneurship seem more desirable and attainable. At the same time, it strengthens perceived behavioral control, often expressed as entrepreneurial self-efficacy, by equipping students with practical skills and experience that increase their confidence in their ability to start and manage a business. As a result, the combination of more positive attitudes and stronger perceived capability leads to higher entrepreneurial aspirations and intentions. They further note that the effect of EE

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is not uniform across all students; its impact depends on factors such as teaching pedagogy and the level of institutional support provided. Thus, EE functions as a catalyst that shapes not only what students know, but how they think, feel, and act toward entrepreneurship. However, other studies indicate that this relationship is not always direct or automatic, suggesting that additional psychological and cognitive mechanisms may influence how education translates into intention (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Rauch & Hulsink, 2015). Hence, the need to systematically examine how entrepreneurship education influence entrepreneurial intention with the moderating effect of self-efficacy and innovation orientation among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria become increasingly important.

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

Despite the growing body of research, few studies have examined how “entrepreneurial self-efficacy” and “innovation orientation” jointly mediate the correlation between “entrepreneurship education” and “entrepreneurial practices”, especially within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Most available studies isolate either self-efficacy (Ismail et al., 2022) or innovation orientation (Altuntas et al., 2022) but overlook how both constructs operate together in an integrated model. This leaves a crucial gap in understanding the combined influence of internal psychological and attitudinal factors on students’ entrepreneurial aspirations in education-driven contexts. Addressing this gap is particularly vital in Nigeria, where entrepreneurship is increasingly promoted as a strategic response to youth unemployment (Afolabi et al., 2021; Osinowo et al., 2020).

### 1.2 Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine how “entrepreneurship education” influences “entrepreneurial intention” among undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions, while assessing the mediating roles of “entrepreneurial self-efficacy” and “innovation orientation”. Particularly, the study aims to (1) evaluate the direct impact of “entrepreneurship education” on “entrepreneurial intention”, (2) determine whether “entrepreneurial self-efficacy” mediates their correlation, and (3) assess the mediating role of innovation orientation in strengthening the pathway from entrepreneurship education to entrepreneurial intention.

### 1.3 Research Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Entrepreneurship education has no significant impact on the entrepreneurial willingness of undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The correlation between “entrepreneurship education” and “entrepreneurial intention” is not significantly mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** The interaction between “entrepreneurship education” and “entrepreneurial intention” is not

substantially mediated by innovation orientation.

## 2. Literature Review

Empirical research supports the positive impact of entrepreneurship education in upscaling students' entrepreneurial intentions. Considering the work of Deng et al. (2023), they analysed a national sample of Chinese undergraduates and found entrepreneurship education significantly increased the likelihood of entrepreneurial intention (OR = 1.15,  $p < 0.01$ ), with entrepreneurship practice courses also positive (OR = 1.19,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, Ndofirepi (2022) reported, using PLS-SEM with 658 African undergraduates, that entrepreneurship education strongly predicted entrepreneurial self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and that self-efficacy, in turn, significantly predicted entrepreneurial intention ( $\beta = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The indirect effect was also significant ( $\beta = 0.24$ , bootstrapped CI [0.16, 0.33]), with the model explaining  $R^2 = 0.44$  of variance in entrepreneurial intention. Together, these findings affirm that entrepreneurship education fosters favorable attitudes and confidence, which align with the central pathways of TPB.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is said to be an individual's confidence in their capacity to carry out entrepreneurial functions which play a key mediating role in converting education into intention. Supporting this, Ismail et al. (2022), in a Malaysian study with 292 undergraduates, found that “entrepreneurial self-efficacy” strongly influenced entrepreneurial intention ( $\beta = 0.544$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $f^2 = 0.622$ ). In addition, entrepreneurship curriculum and university support exerted both direct effects ( $\beta = 0.416$  and  $\beta = 0.263$ , respectively) and indirect effects via self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.185$  and  $\beta = 0.123$ , both  $p \leq 0.014$ ), with the model explaining a substantial  $R^2 = 0.698$  for entrepreneurial intention. This demonstrates that self-efficacy not only mediates but also strengthens the predictive power of entrepreneurship education in explaining entrepreneurial intention, aligning directly with the perceived behavioral control dimension of TPB. Furthermore, innovation orientation the tendency to embrace novelty, creativity, and calculated risk-taking has been shown to enrich the attitudinal route to entrepreneurial behavior. Ugwueze et al. (2022) found, among Nigerian undergraduates, that innovativeness significantly predicted “entrepreneurial intention” ( $B = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), alongside entrepreneurial alertness ( $B = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Likewise, Martins et al. (2023) emphasized that innovation orientation is an integral component of students' entrepreneurial orientation, which in turn explains their propensity for venture creation and opportunity recognition.

The influence of entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial intention, particularly through key psychological antecedents is also supported by the study of Abdullahi et al. (2021) which examined the effect of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention among university students using a survey

design and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that attitude toward entrepreneurship had a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial intention, indicating that students who developed favorable perceptions of entrepreneurship through educational exposure were more inclined to consider entrepreneurial careers. In addition, subjective norms significantly influenced entrepreneurial intention, highlighting the importance of social approval and encouragement from family, peers, and significant others in shaping students' entrepreneurial aspirations. Conversely, perceived behavioral control did not exhibit a significant relationship with entrepreneurial intention. This suggests that although entrepreneurship education may improve students' attitudes and social acceptance of entrepreneurship, it may be insufficient in enhancing their perceived capacity to successfully start and manage a business. The study therefore underscores the need for entrepreneurship education programs to move beyond theoretical instruction by integrating experiential learning, practical training, and institutional support mechanisms that can strengthen students' perceived behavioral control, self-confidence to facilitate the translation of entrepreneurial intention into actual entrepreneurial behavior (Abdullahi et al., 2021).

Collectively, these empirical studies validate the interaction of key constructs in the TPB framework: entrepreneurship education strengthens students' attitudes and self-efficacy; self-efficacy influences their perceived control; and innovation orientation enriches both their cognitive appraisal and creative readiness to act entrepreneurially. These variables ultimately shape entrepreneurial intention, which is the immediate antecedent to entrepreneurial behavior, according to TPB. Thus, this study adopts an integrated TPB-based model where entrepreneurship education is treated as an exogenous variable, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and innovation orientation serve as mediating variables, and entrepreneurial intention is the outcome variable. This framework not only reinforces TPB's validity but also extends it by incorporating innovation as a crucial, yet often under-examined, attitudinal factor in entrepreneurship research. Within the Nigerian tertiary education context characterized by unemployment, limited resources, and a volatile business climate, this model provides a robust explanation of how cognitive and educational factors converge to shape entrepreneurial aspirations.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine how entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial intention, self-efficacy, and innovation orientation relate to one another among undergraduate students. The cross-sectional approach is appropriate because it gathers data from many respondents at one time, making it suitable for studying current attitudes and psychological variables. Surveys were chosen because they are widely accepted in entrepreneurship

research for reliably measuring self-reported constructs such as intentions and self-efficacy.

The target population consists of final-year Business Administration students from tertiary institutions across the six states in Southwest Nigeria. Final-year students were selected because they are close to entering the workforce, making them ideal for assessing entrepreneurial intention. A stratified random sampling method was used, with each state serving as a stratum to ensure fair representation. A total of 400 students were sampled (about 67 per state), with slight variations due to differences in class size and response rates. The institutions selected represent both federal and state universities, ensuring diversity in academic environment, funding, and access to entrepreneurship programs. This variation enhances the generalizability of the findings across different higher education contexts in the region.

#### 3.2 Research Instrument

Data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire, which was carefully designed to capture both demographic information and the main constructs under investigation. The instrument was divided into five sections and employed previously validated scales to ensure reliability and comparability with existing literature. All items were evaluated using five (5) point Likert scale with *1 denoting Strongly Disagree* to *5 denoting Strongly Agree*.

#### 3.3 Validity of Instrument.

In ensuring the validity of the research instrument, Content validity was established through expert review, two scholars in entrepreneurship education department and business management assessed the questionnaire items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study constructs. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

#### 3.4 Reliability of Instrument

A pilot study was conducted with 30 final-year undergraduate students who were part of the study population but not included in the main survey. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with a threshold of  $\geq 0.70$  considered acceptable for internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). As indicated in Table 1, all the constructs met the recommended benchmark, confirming that the items were internally consistent and suitable for the main study.

### 4. Result

This section presents the descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and inferential statistics used to test the study hypotheses. A total of 400 responses were analysed. The mean scores and Standard deviation for the major constructs were as follows:

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the central tendencies and variability of the study

Table 1: Reliability of Instrument

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Entrepreneurship Education	7	0.82
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	9	0.87
Innovation Orientation	7	0.79
Entrepreneurial Intention	6	0.85

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Entrepreneurship Education	4.12	0.62	0.84
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	3.95	0.70	0.87
Innovation Orientation	3.88	0.68	0.83
Entrepreneurial Intention	4.21	0.55	0.89

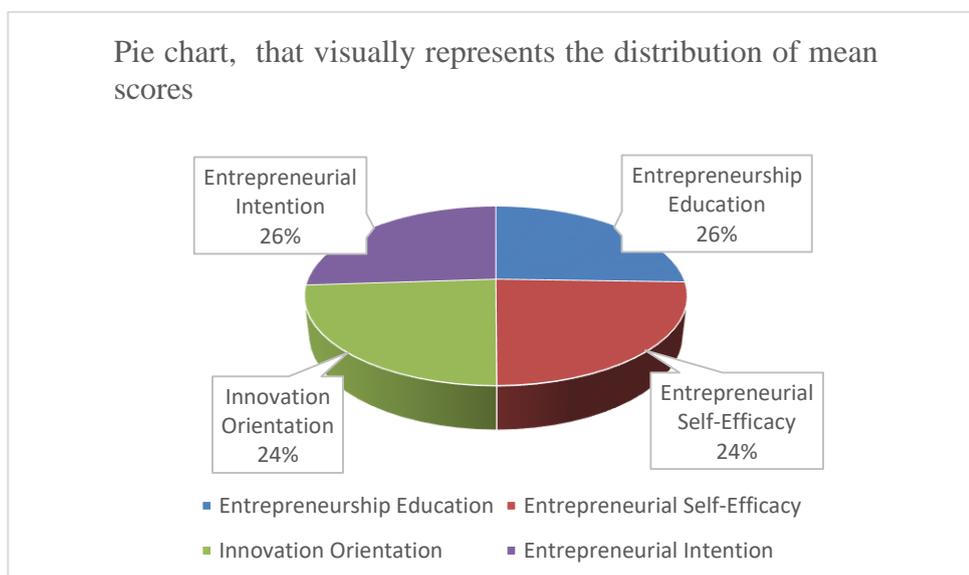


Figure 1: Pie-chart showing the mean distribution of constructs.

Table 3: Testing for relationship between Entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention of undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Entrepreneurship Education (EE)	400	4.12	0.62	0.641	0.000	Reject H <sub>01</sub>
Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)	400	4.21	0.55	—	—	—

Note:  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed);  $r$  = Pearson correlation coefficient

Table 4: Testing for the correlation between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention with the mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

Path	Standardized Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower–Upper)	Decision
EE → ESE	0.56	0.04	13.91	0.000	[0.48–0.63]	Significant
ESE → EI	0.38	0.06	6.33	0.000	[0.26–0.50]	Significant
EE → EI (Direct)	0.41	0.05	8.20	0.000	[0.31–0.51]	Significant
Indirect Effect (EE → ESE → EI)	0.21	0.06	—	0.000	[0.09–0.34]	Reject H <sub>02</sub>

$R = 0.771$ ,  $R^2 = 0.595$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.592$ ,  $F(2, 397) = 291.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$

Table 5: Testing the interaction between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention with the mediating role of innovation orientation.

Path	Standardized Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI (Lower–Upper)	Decision
EE $\rightarrow$ IO	0.53	0.05	11.60	0.000	[0.43–0.61]	Significant
IO $\rightarrow$ EI	0.35	0.05	6.12	0.000	[0.25–0.45]	Significant
EE $\rightarrow$ EI (Direct)	0.41	0.05	8.20	0.000	[0.31–0.51]	Significant
Indirect Effect (EE $\rightarrow$ IO $\rightarrow$ EI)	0.19	0.05	—	0.001	[0.08–0.29]	Reject H <sub>03</sub>

Model Summary: R = 0.793, R<sup>2</sup> = 0.630, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.625, F(3, 396) = 225.41, p < 0.001

constructs. Table 2 presents the mean values, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for EE, ESE, IO, and EI. 2Reliability values ( $\alpha = 0.83\text{--}0.89$ ) exceed the 0.70 benchmark (Nunnally, 1978), confirming satisfactory internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results of the mean scores distributions were also represented on the pie chart in percentage across the constructs (Fig. 1).

#### 4.1 Test of Hypotheses

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Entrepreneurship education has no significant impact on the entrepreneurial willingness of undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.641$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in Table 3 shows a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates. This implies that as students receive more effective entrepreneurship education, their willingness to practice entrepreneurial activity increases. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) is rejected, confirming that entrepreneurship education significantly influences EI.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** The correlation between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention is not significantly mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

This mediation analysis in Table 4 reveals that ESE significantly stimulates the correlation between EE and EI (indirect effect = 0.21, 95% CI [0.09, 0.34]). These results are statistically significant, indicating partial mediation. This suggests that while entrepreneurship education directly enhances intention, it is more effective when it builds students' confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. Therefore, H<sub>02</sub> is rejected.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** The interaction between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention is not substantially mediated by innovation orientation.

Table 5 shows that IO partially mediates the correlation between EE and EI (indirect effect = 0.19, 95% CI [0.08, 0.29]). The results are significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that entrepreneurship education promotes innovative thinking, which in turn enhances students' entrepreneurial intentions. Thus, the null

hypothesis (H<sub>03</sub>) is rejected.

The three hypotheses were rejected, indicating that EE significantly predicts EI both directly and indirectly through the mediating roles of ESE and IO. This supports the extended Theory of Planned Behavior framework, emphasizing that cognitive (SE) and attitudinal (IO) factors strengthen the influence of education on EI among undergraduates. The result aligns with prior studies of (Ndofirepi, 2020; Ismail et al., 2022; Sajuyigbe et al., 2023), confirming the theoretical assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Crucially, this study also demonstrates that the correlation between EE and EI is largely mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy. In particular, the component of perceived behavioral control, which reflects self-efficacy in entrepreneurial research, is supported by Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Prior research has shown that students who internalize a conviction in their entrepreneurial capacity are more likely to act on their educational exposure (Zhao et al., 2005; Ndofirepi, 2020; Ismail et al., 2022). Therefore, the degree to which entrepreneurship education fosters competence, self-assurance, and a sense of control over possible business outcomes is more important than just the curriculum.

Moreover, the study highlights the significant mediating role of innovation orientation an attitudinal trait that emphasizes creativity, proactiveness, and openness to novelty. This dimension adds critical value to the entrepreneurship-intention equation by showcasing how students' willingness to generate and apply new ideas enhances their entrepreneurial drive. In a complex and rapidly evolving Nigerian market environment marked by regulatory challenges, infrastructural deficits, and fluctuating consumer demands innovation orientation can make the difference between entrepreneurial success and stagnation. These findings echo those of Sajuyigbe et al. (2023) and Altuntas et al. (2022), who found that innovation capabilities serve as strategic tools for competitive advantage and resilience in emerging economies.

The findings is particularly impactful due to the

demonstration of joint mediating effects of self-efficacy and innovation orientation. This suggests that the influence of entrepreneurship education is neither direct nor uniform; instead, it operates through multiple psychological and attitudinal mechanisms. The complexity revealed here indicates that simply teaching entrepreneurial concepts may not suffice unless educational models are redesigned to enhance both confidence (self-efficacy) and creative drive (innovation orientation). This integrated understanding not only validates TPB in a multi-mediator structure but also contributes theoretically by enriching its application to educational and economic development agendas in Nigeria.

Collectively, these findings point to the necessity of reforming entrepreneurial curricula in Nigerian tertiary institutions to adopt a more holistic and student centered approach one that goes beyond theoretical knowledge to engage emotional, cognitive, and innovative dimensions. It also offer actionable insights for policymakers and university administrators aiming to build a generation of youth who are not only job-ready but job creators in their own mind-set.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings confirmed that “entrepreneurship education” significantly predicts “entrepreneurial intention”, while “entrepreneurial self-efficacy” and “innovation orientation” partially mediate this relationship. This suggests that students’ confidence in their entrepreneurial capabilities and their openness to innovation jointly enhance the impact of entrepreneurship education in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations. Theoretically, this extends TPB by incorporating dual mediators into a more comprehensive framework, while practically, it underscores the need for curricula that go beyond conventional instruction to include experiential learning, mentorship, and creativity-driven pedagogy. Lastly, while entrepreneurship education provides the foundation for nurturing entrepreneurial aspirations, its true impact is amplified when students are empowered with strong self-efficacy and an innovation-oriented outlook. For Nigerian tertiary institutions seeking to develop future job creators, policies and curricula must integrate both psychological and innovative components. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track the evolution of these mediators and explore how contextual factors such as institutional support and family background interact with students’ cognitive variables to further shape entrepreneurial intention.

## 6. Recommendation

The following recommendations were made for the practical and policy level in light of the study’s findings:

1. **Curriculum Redesign:** Tertiary institutions should enhance entrepreneurship education curricula to include experiential and

innovation-driven modules, such as business simulations, startup internships, and hackathons.

2. **Focus on Self-Efficacy Building:** Educators should integrate confidence-building tasks such as pitching competitions, mentorship programs, and real-world problem-solving that enable students to test their entrepreneurial abilities.
3. **Encouraging Innovation Culture:** Schools should establish innovation hubs, incubation centers, and maker spaces that provide students with the tools, resources, and environments to experiment with new ideas.
4. **Institutional and Government Support:** Policy-makers and education stakeholders should collaborate to scale national entrepreneurship programs and provide funding or grants to student-led startups, especially those emerging from tertiary institutions.
5. **Longitudinal Tracking:** Future interventions should include mechanisms for tracking students’ entrepreneurial activities post-graduation to assess the long-term effect of entrepreneurship education.

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