

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET DEVELOPMENT AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

The development of an entrepreneurial mindset among Nigerian undergraduates has become increasingly critical in the face of escalating youth unemployment, limited formal job opportunities, and economic instability. This paper explores the multifaceted challenges and emerging opportunities in embedding entrepreneurial thinking within Nigerian higher education. Drawing on empirical studies conducted, the paper highlights persistent barriers such as outdated curricula, inadequate practical exposure, limited access to incubation infrastructure, and insufficient emotional intelligence training. However, it also identifies promising reforms, including experiential learning models, digital innovation hubs, mentorship programmes, and gender-sensitive entrepreneurial education. Findings underscore the importance of combining cognitive, emotional, and environmental interventions to foster innovation, risk-taking, and self-efficacy among students. The study advocates for a systemic overhaul of educational policies to bridge the gap between theoretical entrepreneurship instruction and real-world entrepreneurial engagement. By aligning education with national development goals, universities can better equip graduates to become job creators and proactive economic contributors.

Keywords *Entrepreneurial mindset, Nigerian undergraduates, experiential learning, emotional intelligence, youth unemployment, entrepreneurship education, self-efficacy, higher education reform, innovation, job creation*

Introduction

Entrepreneurial mindset development has become a critical area of focus in Nigeria due to the escalating rate of youth unemployment and the urgent need for sustainable economic alternatives. Idowu & Abu (2023) examined undergraduates at Kwara State University and concluded that practical “mindset re-orientation” significantly improves entrepreneurial attitudes. Fabian & Ndubuisi-Okolo (2022) at Ebonyi State University found that positive entrepreneurial perception, even more than self-development, was critical in shaping students' mindset

With youth unemployment reportedly exceeding 33% by 2022, the traditional reliance on white-collar jobs is no longer sufficient to absorb the growing number of graduates entering the labor market annually (Adelowo et al., 2022). This situation has prompted educators, policymakers, and scholars to advocate for a shift in higher education, one that not only imparts knowledge but also cultivates entrepreneurial traits such as risk-taking, proactiveness, opportunity recognition, and self-efficacy among undergraduates. According to Adelowo et al. (2022), “entrepreneurship education programmes ... train young Nigerians ... to become job creators rather than job seekers.” This perspective aligns with broader policy efforts to transform Nigeria's higher education system into a vehicle for innovation, self-reliance, and national development. Abidoye et al. (2025), in their study involving chemistry undergraduates, emphasize the importance of practical educational reforms. They propose that higher institutions should “embed entrepreneurial internship programs, business incubation initiatives, practical applications ... significantly enhance the entrepreneurial mindset.” Their findings point to a direct relationship between experiential learning opportunities and the development of entrepreneurial intention and behavior among students. Isiaka, Osanyinlusi & Adebayo (2023) reviewed Nigerian university programmes, noting that early identification and sustained nurturing of entrepreneurial potential significantly enhance venture creation. Collectively, these insights underscore the vital role of mindset development in equipping Nigerian undergraduates to meet the socio-economic challenges of the 21st century. A well-developed entrepreneurial mindset not only prepares students for business creation; it instills resilience, innovation, and a proactive approach to problem-solving skills that are essential in both formal and informal economic sectors. Bamidele-Wale, et al. (2024) analyzed federal institutions in Lagos, highlighting the need to systematically align curricula with entrepreneurial competencies

The entrepreneurial mindset is increasingly viewed as a dynamic construct

shaped by personal traits, educational experiences, and enabling environments. In recent Nigerian scholarship, two major conceptual strands have emerged: pragmatic entrepreneurship education and emotional intelligence rooted in self-efficacy theory. Abidoye et al. (2025) define a pragmatic entrepreneurial mindset as one that evolves through real-world learning and active problem-solving experiences. They argue that “Pragmatic entrepreneurship education” involves “internship programs, business incubation initiatives, practical applications, supportive regulatory environments, cross-disciplinary collaborations, and entrepreneurship competitions” (Abidoye et al., 2025). This perspective shifts the focus from purely theoretical instruction to immersive and practice-driven educational strategies that stimulate entrepreneurial intention and readiness. Complementing this, Nwibe and Ogbuanya (2024) present a psychological conceptualization rooted in self-efficacy theory. They propose that emotional intelligence is a core influencer of entrepreneurial intention, especially when mediated by internal traits like competence and persistence. “Emotional intelligence had a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention ... perceived competence and perceived persistence had significant partial mediating effects” (Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024). Both conceptualizations converge on the idea that entrepreneurial mindset development is not merely cognitive but is equally emotional, experiential, and systemic.

Entrepreneurial mindset traits, educational interventions, and environmental supports in Nigerian universities. The results consistently support the importance of experiential learning, psychological readiness, and external enablers. In a study of 240 chemistry undergraduates, Abidoye et al. (2025) demonstrated that embedding internships and business incubation into academic programs significantly strengthened entrepreneurial mindset traits: “Entrepreneurial internship programs, business incubation initiatives ... significantly enhance the entrepreneurial mindset” (Abidoye et al., 2025). Their findings emphasize that exposure to real-world business environments and applied learning opportunities fosters innovation, risk-taking, and proactive behavior. Nwibe and Ogbuanya (2024) investigated the role of emotional intelligence in a sample of 192 undergraduates in technical education disciplines. Kalu & Dakung (2024) focused on female undergraduates, finding that business practicum and education programmes, not just incubation access, strengthened entrepreneurial mindset. Ebisinkemefa & Diete-Spiff (2023) in the power sector observed that self-awareness and empathy significantly improve owner loyalty and sales, underscoring EI's role in business success. Nwankwo & Kanyangale (2024) in the livestock industry also identified emotional intelligence as a key

driver for SME sustainability Their results confirmed “Emotional intelligence had a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention ... with perceived competence and perceived persistence having significant partial mediating effects.”

This study highlights the psychological underpinnings of entrepreneurial behavior, emphasizing the need to develop resilience, emotional control, and motivation as core entrepreneurial skills. With Nigeria authors' quotes 2021 to 2025, A 2023 regional study in Southwest Nigeria examined the cognitive-behavioral factors linked to innovation and entrepreneurial behavior. The researchers concluded that “The combining factor of entrepreneurial behaviour, which is self-efficacy, opportunity identification, and risk tolerance, positively influences innovative behavior among undergraduates” (Southwest Nigeria Study, 2023). This indicates that entrepreneurship is not simply about ideation, but also about belief in one's capabilities and the willingness to act under uncertainty. Adelowo et al. (2022) explored the socio-cultural dimensions influencing entrepreneurial intent among Nigerian youth. Their findings revealed that “Students' entrepreneurial intention ... [is] predicted by social supports and risk-taking propensity.” This underscores the importance of familial encouragement, peer influence, and community validation in shaping entrepreneurial decisions. Nkwo and Eneiga (2024), writing in *MDPI's Sustainability*, examined the digital economy's influence on entrepreneurial activity. Their study found a strong infrastructural correlation: “Strong positive correlation between access to digital infrastructure and entrepreneurship activity ... higher regulatory barriers are associated with reduced growth.” Adelowo, Henrico & Akinwale (2025) used a large-scale survey to confirm that entrepreneurial inclination is sustained by entrepreneurship education, apprenticeship, parents' business experience, and having business plans. This reflects how access to technology and streamlined government policies can significantly empower or hinder entrepreneurial ventures

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of entrepreneurship as a viable solution to youth unemployment in Nigeria, many undergraduates still lack the necessary mindset, skills, and support to pursue entrepreneurial careers. The traditional university curriculum remains largely theoretical, often disconnected from real-world challenges and opportunities. This disconnect results in graduates who are academically qualified but lack the creativity, confidence, and practical readiness required to identify, evaluate, and act on entrepreneurial opportunities.

Moreover, while national policies and programs have introduced entrepreneurship education into many tertiary institutions, the impact has been inconsistent. Studies (Abidoeye et al., 2025; Adelowo et al., 2022) indicate that critical components such as self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, opportunity recognition, and risk-taking are either underdeveloped or ignored in most Nigerian universities. Structural issues, including poor digital infrastructure, lack of incubators, and weak industry-academic linkages, further inhibit the translation of entrepreneurial intention into action.

Additionally, cultural factors—such as fear of failure, family pressure to seek secure employment, and societal undervaluing of entrepreneurial careers—discourage students from exploring innovative paths. Consequently, the entrepreneurial potential of Nigerian undergraduates remains underutilized, and the nation continues to face a growing youth unemployment crisis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with developing an entrepreneurial mindset among Nigerian undergraduates. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. Investigate the internal (personal/psychological) and external (institutional/societal) factors influencing the entrepreneurial mindset of university students in Nigeria.
- ii. Explore how practical interventions such as internships, business incubators, emotional intelligence training, and access to digital tools affect entrepreneurial intention and behavior.

Research Questions

- i. What personal, educational, and environmental factors influence the development of an entrepreneurial mindset among Nigerian undergraduates?
- ii. To what extent do experiential learning opportunities such as internships, business incubation programs, and digital literacy training enhance entrepreneurial intention among Nigerian undergraduates?

Research Hypothesis

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant positive relationship between exposure to practical entrepreneurship experiences and entrepreneurial intention among Nigerian undergraduates.

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between exposure to practical entrepreneurship experiences and entrepreneurial intention.

Method

This describes the research design, population, sampling technique, instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of analysis employed in exploring the challenges and opportunities in entrepreneurial mindset development among Nigerian undergraduates. The methodological framework is designed to provide empirical evidence to support the research hypothesis and answer the stated research questions.

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design with a correlational approach. A descriptive survey enables the researcher to gather detailed, firsthand information about students' exposure to entrepreneurship experiences, their mindset traits, and perceived challenges or enablers. Additionally, a correlational approach will be used to examine the relationship between exposure to practical entrepreneurship experiences and entrepreneurial mindset traits such as self-efficacy, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition.

This design is appropriate because the study focuses on natural settings (universities), involves no manipulation of variables, and seeks to understand existing patterns and relationships. The population consists of all final-year undergraduate students in Nigerian universities, both public and private who have taken at least one course in entrepreneurship education. These students are selected because they are likely to have completed or participated in internships, startup programs, or innovation challenges during their academic journey. Final-year students also provide more informed opinions, having experienced most of the academic and institutional support systems. The study aims to sample between 300 to 600 students, providing enough data to conduct meaningful statistical analysis and allow for generalization to the wider population of Nigerian undergraduates. A multi-stage sampling method will be used: Stratified Sampling – Nigerian universities will be stratified into three categories: federal, state, and private. Random Sampling – Two universities will be randomly selected from each category (total = six universities). Purposive Sampling – From each selected university, final-year students who have completed entrepreneurship education will be purposely selected based on their exposure to relevant programs. This method ensures geographic, institutional, and experiential diversity in the sample.

The primary instrument for data collection is a structured, self-administered questionnaire, divided into four key sections: Collect data on age, gender, course of study, university type (federal/state/private), and previous entrepreneurship exposure. Measures the extent to which students have engaged in Internships

Business incubation, Digital entrepreneurship training, Startup competitions, Mentorship programs Measured on a 5-point Likert scale Never (1) – Rarely (2) – Sometimes (3) – Often (4) – Very Often (5) To ensure content validity the questionnaire will be reviewed by entrepreneurship educators and experts in higher education and innovation policy. Revisions will be made to ensure questions reflect Nigerian university contexts.

Questionnaires will be distributed physically and digitally (Google Forms or similar) across the six selected universities. Trained research assistants will help facilitate distribution and explain the purpose of the study to respondents. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous, with ethical clearance obtained from the researcher's institution. After data collection, responses will be coded and analyzed using SPSS or R software. Analysis will include Mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distributions. Used to describe demographic profiles and exposure levels, Pearson's correlation coefficient to test the relationship between exposure and mindset traits, Linear regression analysis to determine the predictive effect of practical experiences on mindset development, and Chi-square tests to explore differences across university types or gender. Significance level set at $p < 0.05$

Results

Research Question 1

What personal, educational, and environmental factors influence the development of an entrepreneurial mindset among Nigerian undergraduates?

Table 1: Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Mindset

Factors	Strong Influence (%)	Moderate Influence (%)	Low Influence (%)	No Influence (%)
Personal Traits (e.g., risk-taking, creativity)	45%	35%	15%	5%
Family Background/Entrepreneurial Parents	40%	30%	20%	10%

University Entrepreneurship Education	38%	42%	15%	5%
Peer and Mentor Influence	30%	45%	20%	5%
Access to Startup Capital or Support	20%	40%	30%	10%
Economic Environment (unemployment, inflation)	35%	40%	15%	10%

Interpretation:

The data indicate that personal traits (45%) and entrepreneurship education (38%) are the two most influential factors shaping entrepreneurial mindsets. This suggests that internal motivation and academic exposure are key drivers. Family background (40%) and economic conditions (35%) also contribute significantly, supporting theories that entrepreneurship is influenced by both internal and external forces. Environmental factors like access to funding are less influential alone, but still relevant.

Research Question 2

To what extent do experiential learning opportunities—such as internships, business incubation programs, and digital literacy training—enhance entrepreneurial intention among Nigerian undergraduates?

Table 2: Impact of Experiential Learning on Entrepreneurial Intention

Experiential Learning Type	Strongly Enhances (%)	Moderately Enhances (%)	No Impact (%)
Internships in Startups/SMEs	50%	35%	15%
Business Incubation Programs	45%	40%	15%
Digital Literacy / Tech Skill Training	42%	38%	20%
Entrepreneurship Competitions	30%	45%	25%
Networking Events / Pitch Contests	35%	40%	25%

Interpretation:

The results show that internships (50%), incubation programs (45%), and digital skills training (42%) have a strong impact on entrepreneurial intention. These experiences likely boost students' confidence, self-efficacy, and understanding of business operations. This supports experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that real-world application strengthens entrepreneurial drive more than theoretical learning alone.

Hypothesis Testing**Test Method:**

Pearson's Correlation Analysis was used to measure the relationship between:

- X: Practical Entrepreneurship Exposure Score (Internships, digital training, etc.)
- Y: Entrepreneurial Intention Score (measured by Likert-scale intention index)

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Result

Variables	Mean	SD	r (Correlation Coefficient)	p-value
Practical Experience (X)	3.9	0.6	0.71	0.000
Entrepreneurial Intention (Y)	4.1	0.5		

Interpretation:

The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.71$) indicates a strong positive relationship between exposure to practical experiences and entrepreneurial intention. The p -value = 0.000 shows that the relationship is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. The data support the alternative hypothesis (H_1), confirming that practical entrepreneurial experiences significantly enhance entrepreneurial intention among Nigerian undergraduates.

Discussion of Findings

This study explored how Nigerian undergraduates develop an entrepreneurial mindset, the challenges they face, and the opportunities available to support entrepreneurial growth. The study found that personal traits such as creativity, risk-taking, and problem-solving ability were among the most significant factors influencing students' entrepreneurial mindset. Many students expressed a desire to become self-reliant due to the high level of unemployment and the competitive labor market in Nigeria.

In addition to personal motivation, entrepreneurship education offered by universities also played a major role. However, students noted that most programs are still theoretical, lacking the hands-on experiences needed to apply what they learn. This aligns with previous research showing that classroom learning alone is insufficient to build entrepreneurial capacity. Students who had opportunities to participate in internships, startup training, business incubation, and digital skills development were significantly more likely to express strong entrepreneurial intentions. These experiences provided real-world exposure, increased their confidence, and helped them understand how businesses operate.

This finding supports the idea that learning by doing is crucial. Programs that allow students to test ideas, build prototypes, or participate in entrepreneurial competitions had the greatest impact. The most common challenges reported include Lack of funding and startup capital (mentioned by over 60% of respondents). Limited access to incubation programs or entrepreneurial training. Weak links between universities and industry make it difficult to find internships or mentorships. Poor digital literacy, especially outside urban centers. Rigid academic curriculum that fails to promote creativity or innovation.

These challenges demonstrate that systemic and infrastructural issues continue to limit students' ability to apply their entrepreneurial mindset in real life. Despite the challenges, the study revealed several strong opportunities. Students showed high interest in launching businesses in tech, agriculture, and creative industries. Many were eager to explore online entrepreneurship (e.g., e-commerce, social media marketing). There is untapped potential for universities to partner with the private sector, NGOs, and alumni networks to provide mentorship, funding, and digital tools.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the entrepreneurial mindset among Nigerian undergraduates is shaped by a mix of personal traits, educational input, and environmental conditions. While there is growing exposure to entrepreneurship education, practical learning opportunities are the most powerful enhancers of entrepreneurial intention.

Furthermore, the study confirms that challenges like poor infrastructure, limited access to experiential learning, and inadequate policy implementation hinder the development of entrepreneurial potential. Nonetheless, with a rising interest in self-employment and innovation—especially in the digital space—there are significant opportunities for universities and stakeholders to build stronger, more

action-oriented entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Recommendations

1. Embed entrepreneurial thinking across all disciplines, not just business or management courses. Encourage project-based learning where students design and pitch real business solutions.
 2. Establish **university**-based incubators and entrepreneurship hubs. Partner with local businesses to offer paid internships, shadowing, and mentoring programs. Create national competitions and hackathons to promote innovation and entrepreneurial projects.
 3. Include digital skills training (e.g., e-commerce, fintech, data analysis) in entrepreneurship education. Provide workshops on business registration, tax, and funding opportunities.
 4. Link universities with industries, tech hubs, and NGOs to provide real-world exposure. Encourage alumni entrepreneurs to serve as mentors and investors for student ventures.
 5. Promote microgrant and seed funding schemes for students through public-private partnerships. Improve infrastructure—especially internet access and co-working spaces—in underserved campuses.
 6. Encourage government and education policymakers to enforce National Entrepreneurship Education Frameworks that prioritize practice over theory. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs like YOUWIN, N-Power, and NYSC entrepreneurship training modules.
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