

## Exploring Alternative Behavioural Trajectories in Entrepreneurship Education in Universities



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**ABSTRACT:** This Paper explored alternative behavioural trajectories navigable to address entrepreneurship education issues in Nigeria's public universities. Entrepreneurship education's current viability and capacity utilization have not gained the impetus to drive students' practical application development and add significant value to economic development. This work relied on ethnography using the participant observer method to get relevant contextual specifics to give insights on traversable alternatives that culminate in the much-desired economic development and growth of individuals and the nation at large. It was concluded that behavioural alterations that gravitate towards trajectories that deviate significantly from the dismal state of affairs obtainable in the current pedagogy are the panacea to the apparent quagmire. It was suggested amongst others that driving emotional attachment, improvisation, and the use of alternative sources of funding are avenues of attaining optimal level benefits of entrepreneurship education. This paper contributes to the body of knowledge of entrepreneurship development and knowledge efficiency.

**KEYWORDS:** behaviour, Education, Entrepreneurship, pedagogy, Nigeria

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Economic growth and development of a nation are reckoned by her productive output, irrespective of revenue from natural resources. Since these outputs are to be processed for internal consumption and export, it becomes imperative that government efforts be geared towards educational policies that enhance the production of useful outputs for the ultimate benefit of the nation. The prioritization of continuous purposeful grooming of young minds and the inward search for national strengths and opportunities are logical strides towards economic sustainability. Entrepreneurship education is one self-sustaining way to foster innovation to vitalize the economic growth and development of a nation and indeed the whole of humanity. Many economically vibrant nations have leveraged this for public and private good. Through the instrumentality of entrepreneurship education, the potential capacities of individuals are refined for better usefulness for themselves, their potential workplaces or their businesses as self-employed persons (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Akpan, 2021; Iwu et al., 2021; Undiyaundeye & Otu, 2022)

Modern business and economic histories have been shaped by the conceptualization of Entrepreneurship as a vital diver of economic development. Schumpeter (1942), who has been attributed to be one of the first to introduce the concept as a source of innovation and a vital driving force in economies as well as in business cycles, believed that entrepreneurs afford economies creative destruction which connotes how the new constantly replaces the old by the introduction of exceptional products, processes, distribution channels, technologies amongst other phenomenal corporate undertakings to grow economies. The concept of entrepreneurship has been variously defined by scholars. A synthesis of definitions brings to the fore that entrepreneurship involves the identification of business opportunities while understanding and calculating the risks involved which are expected to lead to creativity, innovation, value creation and resourcefulness (Ubogu, 2020, Undiyaundeye & Otu, 2022). Some qualities of an entrepreneur in terms of the skills and attitudes they should possess include but are not limited to having "essential attributes encompassing a proactive disposition, advanced critical thinking and decision-making capabilities, visionary leadership, and a transformative mindset as well as individuals possessing creative problem-solving skills, resilience, strategic risk tolerance, and astute judgment, ultimately facilitating the effective translation of ideas into tangible outcomes." (Harrison et al., 2023; Odeyemi et al., 2024). All of these attributes aid in "making prudent decisions and making choices which reflect in the meticulous care in the management of financial and other resources as well as in the willingness to learn and develop

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a disposition to acquire and use entrepreneurship knowledge as a vital component for attainment in corporate and diverse professional domains" (Olotuase et al., 2023; Yiga et al., 2023). The student of entrepreneurship should be able to participate in issues that help society through innovative ideas and learn to have the foresight to engage in profitable ventures which is seen as opportunities to use limited resources to achieve economic goals while enjoying the much-needed prosperity.

The development of the country is a concern for everybody and there should be no barriers or limits in the development of skills and abilities for entrepreneurial ventures. There is no gain in saying that embarking on entrepreneurship training for all and sundry, especially the youthful population will be a right step in the right direction. The government through its relevant agencies and institutions have initiated and implemented various educational policies and frameworks for the achievement of very lofty goals. For example, in the government's bid to rejuvenate and improve vocational and technical knowledge, established under Decree No. 70 (now Act 70) of the 1993 constitution, the National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB) to conduct examinations for persons interested in obtaining craftsmanship certifications previously conducted by the United Kingdom-based examination bodies such as City and Guilds, Pitman's, and Royal Society of Arts (NABTEB, n.d.).

Nigerian universities are major hosts to the average age of the youth population in the country. The knowledge of entrepreneurship at this level will not only engage and empower able youths but the output from such knowledge will culminate into positive indices of economic development of the Nation. Entrepreneurship education at the higher education level prepares the youths to be responsive to the demands of society by emerging with attitudes and entrepreneurial skills that enhance competencies for job creation, poverty reduction as well as economic and technological development. The take is that if one graduate starts his/her venture and employs ten extra hands, there will no doubt be job availability.

The essence of entrepreneurship training is not to force or cajole students from their primary area of study but to create in them the ability to visualize and create new ideas and emerge with novel solutions to challenging situations even in their areas of study. The energy and passion to be innovative in the use of resources as well as seek opportunities in the face of risks, are requirements for success in the selected venture. There are no limits to areas students could venture into in the study of entrepreneurship. The aim is for the students to tactically select areas of interest and the relevant tools and facilities for learning the skills. Though some skill choices may be more popular than others, students should not be forced to choose from among the limited choices.

In line with the foregoing, the Nigerian government, through the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission (NUC), has enacted the policy of entrepreneurship training for all undergraduate students as a compulsory course in all universities with majestic aims among which are the improvement of quality of life through acquisition of skills and reduction of poverty. The course contents of the programmes are very enriching and knowledge-packed, prescribing elements that create the needed impetus for individual self-employment, professionalism and much-needed economic development. There is to be a periodic review of the curriculum to meet societal needs and be compliant with the world of work. Some categories of students learn it more than once in the course of their study at the university and some Institutions have full-fledged programmes for entrepreneurship that span for at least four years. However, this policy, which has been in place since 1996, has neither gained the needed impetus to drive the desires of the students to practically exhibit skills that promote the application of entrepreneurship that add value to economic development, yielded the expected benefits, nor met other well-outlined aims.

Numerous challenges militating against the optimum achievement of entrepreneurship studies programmes have been identified by scholars including factors such as lack of proper policy implementation, inadequate funding, poor orientation and sensitization, deficient infrastructure to support the programme, paying of lip service support to conceptualizations, and so on (Akpan, 2021; Olorundare & Kayode, 2014). Several solutions have also been proffered. For example, Undiyaundeye and Otu (2022) posit that the critical role of an adequate mix of theory and practice will resolve some pedagogical issues in entrepreneurship studies. However, all efforts seem to have defied resolutions.

This scholarly inquiry undertook an examination of alternative behavioural trajectories that can be utilized to navigate and resolve the multifaceted challenges confronting entrepreneurship education in public universities in Nigeria. The urgent need to improve on the current abysmal outcomes concerning the very spectacular intentions of the programme is acknowledged by this paper. Eccentric workable alternatives to overcome the dismal outcomes as well as the challenges and pitfalls currently observable as hindrances to the optimization of the study of entrepreneurship were brought to the fore. This work contributes to the body of knowledge on entrepreneurship development and capacity utilization by highlighting behavioural alterations from the current pedagogy and gravitating towards trajectories with prospects of producing more socioeconomically viable outcomes.

## 2. ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIOURAL TRAJECTORIES

Entrepreneurship education improves the capacities of beneficiaries to understand perspectives that lead to innovativeness, creativity and value addition to nation-building. This work is being guided by the theoretical foundation of the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984). Drawing from this theory, students and teachers stand to gain a lot from entrepreneurship education that is

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based on a practical pedagogy which anchors richly on experiential learning. The focus of the Experiential learning theory is to encourage learning by doing. The information received through the learning experience helps learners retain and recall useful data or facts. The Experiential learning theory, identifies four stages. They include the concrete learning and reflective observation stages which are concerned with strategies of how best to enhance learners' ability to grasp the experience; as well as the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages which focus on experience transformation. Kolb (1984) believes Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is a holistic model of the learning process and that learners must go through its stages for growth and development. Entrepreneurial education learning outcomes that reflect experiential learning will most likely alter behaviours in directions that will be more achievement-oriented.

Nigeria has a lot to contribute to the world's economic space. This can be done through her very determined and creative people. However, the current entrepreneurship education policy direction of the government will need to be significantly adjusted especially through the current operationalized curriculum and pedagogy in universities. Despite the very magnificent aims of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria and the several policies and strategies to attain its beneficial effects, the current visible results beg for other more viable approaches. This section highlights approaches that steer towards alternative behavioural trajectories that are navigable to attain the most desired grandiose benefits for individuals and the nation at large and are more beneficial and goal-oriented-driven. They include the following:

### I. Incentivized gaming approach to learning

Incentives have been seen as boosters that aid motivation towards obtaining rewards. The rewards, if valued, be they intrinsic or extrinsic, will prompt an individual's behaviour to attain the rewards. By tying the rewards to learning outcomes that have practical relevance and valued entrepreneurial achievements, the students are likely to put up behaviours that lead to such achievements. The use of commissions or other financial bonuses will be preferred to recognition or even an 'A' grade, especially at a time of extreme downturn in the nation's economic life. The belief of the students is that their grade will come out well if they study the module and perform well in the examination. However, the take is that the financial incentives will seal the commitment and eagerness to learn the course, bringing ideas taught from the modules into practical relevance to generate income. Learning will be like playing which gives the desired outcome of commitment to learning and income generation. The upsurge in the use of games amongst young persons, especially of the younger generations, as well as the use of games as a learning strategy does not only enhance learning and commitment to the learning process but also serves as an orientation to a possible new normal where learning and earning will promote the entrepreneurship educational process. The use of games for social change communication and enhancement of development have been identified by scholars (Dhiman, 2023; Gennari et al., 2023; Omokhabi, 2023).

Students' assignments are practice-based using theories and principles learned from the study modules. The practical aspect of embarking on a project is that the students get real clients to patronize their ideas and get paid for the clientele. The products or services rendered are ideas originating from the students. Even after the duration of the course, the idea that has already started generating income will want to be continued. The experiences garnered will aid the repositioning of the business idea to achieve greater heights. This learning approach achieves the aims of the establishment of the entrepreneurial programme and can capture the attention of the students for the duration of the programme and even beyond. The current reviews of the programme are disappointing and discouraging. However, if a student knows that a product or service idea will generate income or that they will receive commission there will likely be increases in output to get larger commission. This makes the programme a game with benefits.

Many university graduates who make up the youthful population of the country have remained unemployed and in some cases, underemployed which has been attributed to high crime rates (Essang et al.,2024; Nte et al.,2024; Madubuike & Dimnaji,2023; Uchechukwu et al.,2023). While elements of these may hold valid facts, the lack of engagement of these young minds in legally productive ventures and environments with opportunities that make them earn from what they can creatively do may be the biggest cause. Ubogu (2020) has suggested the engagement in "entrepreneurship advocacy, campaigns and enlightenment programmes to provide information about entrepreneurship and encourage students to consider entrepreneurship as a career". Kolawole, (2024) has identified the largely informal nature of some entrepreneurial ventures as a source of discouragement as students perceive it as demeaning. All these points are well noted but if an incentivized gaming approach to learning is successfully tried and stands the test of time, the story will be different. A good product sells itself is a popular business motivational adage in Nigeria. If the entrepreneurial programme is successful people will not only embrace the study of the programme but will strive to make it a priority area of concentration while in the university.

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### II. Alternative Sources of Funding

Entrepreneurship education is an investment if well accomplished will yield results with dividends implication for personal worth and quality of life and capital and for addressing issues of poverty as well as other socioeconomic issues. Students stand to gain a lot of knowledge for themselves through the study of entrepreneurship. Through the programme, vistas of ideas may be prompted and generated in the minds of the students that could lead to life-changing outcomes for the development of their personal lives and well-being. However, the inadequate or total absence of funding to bring these ideas to the limelight has been a major challenge in the study of entrepreneurship in Universities. This has been well-documented as a major hindrance to the development of entrepreneurship education (Hameed & Irfan, 2019; Iwu et al., 2021; Odeyemi et al., 2024). It is quite unfortunate that a government that cannot create employment nor employ young graduates cannot also adequately fund entrepreneurial programmes in Universities nor sponsor entrepreneurship ventures. Ironically, the same government will place heavy tax burdens on entrepreneurial ventures struggling to achieve success and survive in a business environment that seems not to be very investor-friendly nor the ease –of –doing –business very easy.

To navigate through the tortuous and rigorous process of securing funding from the government or their institutions of study, students should source for alternative means of funding their entrepreneurial ideas. As part of acquiring resilience and survival behaviours as an entrepreneur, a student could source funds through personal networks. The most important thing is that the prospects of very impressive entrepreneurial ideas are kept alive with deliberate efforts to strive to achieve success. Noting that the financial gains and any intrinsic satisfaction will be that of the individual first before anyone else. Going by the adage that success has many fathers, a successful budding entrepreneurship venture may eventually find sponsorship from venture capitalists encouraged by the prospects and potential. The rigours of coming to the limelight to be noticed are not easy but possible.

Also, Institutions could, from their very limited funds, initiate best project awards to deserving students with brilliant workable ideas. These promising business ideas or budding projects awarded with financial benefits attached could be a source of raising funds. The beneficiaries so honestly and fairly selected could get startup packs for their entrepreneurial ventures. The emphasis on honest and fair selection of awardees with all the criteria for selection transparently spelt will not dampen the morale of those not awarded or see it as being selection based on nepotism or any other criteria.

### III. Improvisation

Entrepreneurship education helps in the capacity building of citizens. Although the building of capacities is important, the utilization of the capacity in real terms is more advantageous to the economy in terms of lower cost of products and services and the enjoyment of economies of scale. One of the aims of the entrepreneurship education programme is to train students to have skills in various practical technical spheres using unique and technically compliant standard tools, machines, facilities and or infrastructure which should be readily available. The students are also to put the skills so learnt to good use for the aim of the training not to be defeated. However, for too long the lack of basic facilities has made it look like nothing meaningful can be done while studying entrepreneurship. This paper posits that a lot can be achieved with improvisation and creative thinking. The lack of or inadequate infrastructure as well as funding to support the various entrepreneurial teaching and learning processes are common challenges encountered in the entrepreneurial education programmes of many public universities in Nigeria and have been identified as the bane of entrepreneurship studies for so long (Amadi & Amakodi, 2019; Ibidokun & Adegboyega, 2023). While one can be optimistic that the situation will improve soon, improvisation is one alternative plan way to go around it. The improvisation process is also some form of creativity to achieve the same aim. In this case, close substitutes that will still achieve the same aim will be used. Students are encouraged to go for low-budget projects with high yields or turnover. In other words, the project does not have to be capital-intensive. The use of low-budget materials and tools does not necessarily mean substandard output.

The use of improvised materials at the beginning will be a fulcrum to launch new and better ideas with more alternative funding or financial proceeds from the use of the improvised material. For example in the garri production value chain, the use of improvised materials, technologies and processes have been in use by persons who have made that business a source of livelihood and they have been coming out with huge outputs and financial gains. This will get better if new and more cost-saving technology with higher prospects for volume production capacity equipment is used. Meanwhile, garri production will continue and people will continue to make great gains. Still using the garri value chain example, packaging and other fresh concepts like the addition of milk, groundnuts and so on have been incorporated as unprecedented entrepreneurship ideas that are profitable.

The entrepreneurial mindset should be that of thinking of solutions through the processes and services as well as in making tangible products and/ or services. Improvisation is an entrepreneurial behaviour way of thinking outside the box to surmount challenges and come out with sustainable, innovative, adaptive and creative solutions to seemingly deadlocked situations that are

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capable of dampening morale or causing the discouragement and outright abandonment of pursuits of very brilliant ideas due to lack of tools, facilities and/or infrastructure.

### IV. Driving emotional attachment

Entrepreneurship education ought to imprint in the minds of students, who are seen as budding entrepreneurs, the rudiments of survival in the intense and highly dynamic business environment they are likely to operate. Students ought to know how to start and manage businesses as self-employed persons who contribute to the success of the economy while coming out with innovative ideas. If the students have opportune firsthand experiences from real-life scenarios, the observations of the challenges should shape their minds towards critical analysis and problem-solving. The significant aspect of opening the students' reasoning faculty to be able to identify and exploit opportunities that they could be interested in for themselves and society. Students ought to develop a comprehensive range of knowledge and skills in the domain of entrepreneurial studies encompassing various ancillary competencies that complement the core curriculum that will not only make them think strategically and in the functionality of the proposed firms but also equip them with problem-solving, communicating, persuasive as well as leadership skills amongst others. The entrepreneurship studies programme though in existence as a compulsory course for university students, has not been able to imprint itself as a course students look forward to studying or miss after studying. Also, the feedback on the outcomes of graduates who have taken to entrepreneurial ventures is quite discouraging (Akpan, 2021). Students in the entrepreneurship class may just be there to pass the course and move on. Thus It should not surprise anyone to see that a student could score as high as 100% in an entrepreneurship examination and has 0% skill to sustain an entrepreneurship venture. Babatunde et al. (2021) opined from their study of comparative analysis of assessment methods that students perceive the inappropriateness of assessment methods adversely affects the learning of entrepreneurship.

The drive for emotional attachment awakens and propels in the students the unflinching desire to demonstrate behaviours that engage in and maintain engagement in the process, project, programme or system. There is a sustainable emotional craving for entrepreneurial studies. A system-friendly approach to learning that enables an atmosphere which allows people to feel they are part of a process. Students are allowed to make meaningful contributions to the learning processes and feel committed to getting the output that will be beneficial to them and the system. There is also the desire to encourage other members with less passion to see the need to key in and increase their level of participation. The continuity of the system is prioritized above all else. There will be the strive for continuous improvement and the nostalgic feeling of always wanting to go back for a friendly visit or encouragement of those still in the system or feel prompted to make contributions for the continuity of the programme.

### V. The Lecturers' Quandary

Entrepreneurship studies have been in the curriculum of students in Nigerian universities, especially for those studying business-related courses. However, the federal Government of Nigeria has since 2006 compelled each university to ensure that the study of entrepreneurship is made compulsory for all students irrespective of their specialized area of study. The admirable ideas have been well accommodated in the curriculum of all students in the universities, especially as it was conceived as an avenue for self-reliance and reduction of graduate unemployment and poverty. The expectation is that at the end of the study of the course, graduates will have acquired skills and knowledge that will boost private sector-led growth through the multifarious ventures that will have been established. The challenge is that the lecturers themselves need more vigorous training and exposure. The idea of this is that rather than just imparting knowledge about entrepreneurship passively, a teacher should be able to provide real-world examples of their own experiences. This position resonates with the ideas of other authors who see practical knowledge transmission as a key to learner success (Asamoah & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2024; Iwu et al., 2021; Paudyal & Rana, 2021)).

Universities are tertiary education level institutions with the capacity for the production of knowledge that has a positive influence on the socio-economic and political lives of societies and nations while enhancing the well-being of the personal and family lives of graduates. Entrepreneurship education at the university level promises to adequately groom students on skill development for self-reliance as well as personal and societal job and wealth creation. The dynamics of the contemporary business world warrant the constant updating of knowledge and not moribund curriculum and pedagogies that have not only stagnated the progress level in the drive towards harnessing the benefits of entrepreneurship education but also acted antithetically to economic growth and development.

The need for course lectures to have practical knowledge and firsthand experiences in entrepreneurial ventures to provide direction and mentorship about actual-world expectations and challenges. One can only give what s/he has. Many lecturers have extensive knowledge of the theories of entrepreneurial studies. The instructions and information passed to students are largely theoretical and prescriptions of impersonal and untested solutions to real-life challenges. The students are armed with skills that have little capacity to withstand the turbulent and murky terrain of hyper-competition, dynamic business operations as well as other socio-political and unforeseen issues. From the foregoing, it is glaring that the lectures need to have practical and first-hand

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up-to-date knowledge and information of the prevailing environmental circumstances under which businesses operate. The behaviours should not only reflect trained academics but as business people capable of being key players in business and the corporate world. A teacher for example should have his/her demonstration firm that has gone through all the processes of formal registration and other legalities for establishment and currently operates in an environment in which he/she recommends to students to establish.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

This paper applied qualitative research and relied on ethnography as an approach using the participant observer method to get relevant contextual details to generate workable ideas that contribute to the body of knowledge of entrepreneurship development and capacity utilization in Nigeria. From the opinion of students who have passed the General studies course in entrepreneurship at the university, it was found that many see the course as boring, unnecessary, and a waste of time and would not recommend it to younger colleagues. The need for more practical knowledge is also acknowledged by students and lecturers. This implies that a more exciting pedagogy which deviates from the current contextual situation will more likely alter behaviours in directions that will yield alternative results.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship education is key to economic advancement through the building of creativity and innovation generation capacities. If well done the benefits are innumerable for the individual, society and humanity at large. However, the unbaiting high levels of unemployment among youths who are university graduates and other shortfalls depict that a lot still has to be done to get things done right in entrepreneurship education, especially at the university level. This predicament calls for the intensifying of efforts to ensure that both students and lecturers acquire behaviours that alter the current narrative. This paper posits that the highlighted areas of concern that suggest alternative behavioural trajectories to be followed are of pivotal sufficiency to enhance the socioeconomic well-being of students, while as undergraduates, and also those of the graduates and lecturers. The society will be the greatest gainer as there will be ample services and products for the end users with its attendant reduction in crime and other social vices, not to mention the revenue that this will generate for the nation. The prospects of aligning with the suggested alternative behavioural trajectories reverse the current dismal performance of the output of entrepreneurial education for the best and perfectly achieves the ideals of the entrepreneurship education programme as desired by the originators.

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