

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT INTENTIONS OF GRADUATES IN STATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH- SOUTH NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria, with emphasis on the mediating roles of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial motivation. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to graduates from selected state universities in the region. The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and mediation analysis. The findings revealed that entrepreneurship education has a significant positive influence on self-employment intentions. The study further found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial motivation significantly mediate this relationship, indicating partial mediation effects. This suggests that while entrepreneurship education directly influences graduates' intentions, its impact is strengthened through increased confidence in entrepreneurial abilities and heightened motivation toward venture creation. The study concludes that

entrepreneurship education alone is insufficient to drive self-employment intentions unless complemented by psychological factors such as self-efficacy and motivation. It therefore recommends the integration of experiential learning, mentorship programmes, and institutional support systems to enhance entrepreneurial outcomes. The study contributes to the growing body of literature by providing empirical evidence from a developing country context on the mechanisms through which entrepreneurship education influences entrepreneurial intentions.

**KEYWORDS:** Entrepreneurship Education, Self-Employment Intentions, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Entrepreneurial Motivation, Graduates, Nigeria.

## 1. 0 INTRODUCTION

Graduate unemployment has remained one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria in recent decades. Despite the expansion of higher education and the increasing number of graduates produced annually, the labour market has been unable to absorb this growing workforce. This mismatch between graduate output and available employment opportunities has resulted in rising unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people. In the South-South region of Nigeria, where state universities constitute a major source of graduate production, the situation is further compounded by economic fluctuations, overdependence on oil revenues, and limited industrial diversification.

In response to this challenge, entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as a viable pathway for job creation, poverty reduction, and economic development. Consequently, entrepreneurship education has gained prominence as a strategic intervention aimed at equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for self-employment and enterprise development. The integration of entrepreneurship education into university curricula in Nigeria followed policy directives by the National Universities Commission, which mandated its inclusion as a compulsory course across disciplines. This initiative was intended to foster an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates and reduce their dependence on paid employment (Adetayo & Oloruntoba, 2024).

Entrepreneurship education encompasses a range of pedagogical approaches designed to develop entrepreneurial competencies such as opportunity recognition, innovation, risk-taking, and business management skills. It also aims to enhance students' confidence in their ability to initiate and sustain business ventures. Empirical studies have consistently

demonstrated that entrepreneurship education plays a significant role in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions, which are strong predictors of actual entrepreneurial behaviour (Olawale et al., 2023; Amofah & Solé, 2024).

However, while entrepreneurship education has been widely implemented in Nigerian universities, its effectiveness in translating entrepreneurial intentions into actual business creation remains a subject of ongoing debate. Several studies have reported that although students exhibit positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship after exposure to entrepreneurship education, many still prefer paid employment due to perceived risks, lack of access to capital, and inadequate institutional support (Balogun, 2024; Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024). This suggests that the mere inclusion of entrepreneurship courses in university curricula may not be sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes.

Furthermore, recent research highlights the importance of psychological and contextual factors in influencing self-employment intentions. Variables such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and motivation have been identified as critical mediators in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention (Adeniyi, 2023; Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024). In addition, environmental factors such as access to funding, mentorship, and supportive institutional frameworks significantly affect graduates' ability to translate intentions into action (Adewumi & Cele, 2023).

In the context of South-South Nigeria, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is further influenced by region-specific challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited industry–university collaboration, and insufficient practical training opportunities. These constraints often result in a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby limiting the capacity of graduates to engage in successful entrepreneurial ventures. Despite these challenges, emerging evidence suggests that targeted entrepreneurship initiatives, such as business incubation programmes and mentorship schemes, can significantly enhance students' readiness for self-employment (Akpam et al., 2025).

Given this background, there is a need for a comprehensive examination of how entrepreneurship education influences self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria. This study therefore seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by critically analyzing the role of entrepreneurship education in shaping graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations, with particular emphasis on the mediating factors and contextual challenges that influence this relationship. Based on the content and variables clearly established in your document (entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial self-

efficacy, entrepreneurial motivation, and self-employment intention), here are well-aligned and academically sound components:

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Graduate unemployment in Nigeria has continued to rise despite the expansion of university education and the increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic empowerment. In the South-South region, where state universities play a central role in producing graduates, many young people still struggle to secure gainful employment after graduation. Although entrepreneurship education has been institutionalized as a compulsory component of university curricula, its effectiveness in fostering genuine self-employment intentions among graduates remains questionable. Evidence suggests that while students may acquire theoretical knowledge and develop positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship, a significant number still prefer paid employment due to perceived risks, limited access to capital, inadequate practical exposure, and weak institutional support systems.

Furthermore, existing studies indicate that entrepreneurship education alone may not sufficiently translate into entrepreneurial action without the influence of key psychological factors such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation. Many graduates lack confidence in their ability to initiate and manage business ventures, while others are not adequately motivated to pursue entrepreneurial careers despite exposure to entrepreneurship courses. In addition, contextual challenges within the South-South region, including infrastructural deficits, limited industry-university collaboration, and an underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem, further constrain the realization of self-employment aspirations.

Despite growing scholarly attention to entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, there is still limited empirical evidence that comprehensively examines how entrepreneurship education influences self-employment intentions through the mediating roles of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation, particularly among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria. This gap makes it difficult to determine whether current entrepreneurship education programmes are achieving their intended outcomes or to identify the mechanisms through which they can be improved. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation among graduates in the study area.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

1. To examine the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria.
2. To determine the mediating effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions.
3. To assess the mediating role of entrepreneurial motivation in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions.

## 1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria?
2. To what extent does entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions?
3. What is the role of entrepreneurial motivation in mediating the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions?

## 1.4 Research Hypotheses

1. **HO<sub>1</sub>:** Entrepreneurship education has no significant influence on self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria.
2. **HO<sub>2</sub>:** Entrepreneurial self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions.
3. **HO<sub>3</sub>:** Entrepreneurial motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions.

## 2. 0 Conceptual Clarifications

### 2.1 Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is a multidisciplinary field of study that focuses on developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours required for entrepreneurial activity. It extends beyond traditional business education by emphasizing innovation, opportunity recognition, creativity, and value creation. Contemporary perspectives conceptualize entrepreneurship education as both a cognitive and experiential process through which learners acquire the capacity to identify and exploit opportunities in uncertain environments. Entrepreneurship education can be delivered through formal curricula, co-curricular activities, and informal learning experiences such as mentorship, incubation programmes, and industry collaborations. According to Nabi et al. (2021), entrepreneurship education has

evolved from a theory-driven approach to a more practice-oriented model that emphasizes experiential learning, including business simulations, case studies, and startup projects. This shift reflects the growing recognition that entrepreneurial competencies are better developed through active engagement rather than passive instruction.

## **2.2 Self-Employment Intentions**

Self-employment intention refers to an individual's deliberate and conscious state of mind that directs attention, experience, and action toward starting and managing a business venture. It represents a critical antecedent of entrepreneurial behaviour and is widely used in entrepreneurship research as a predictor of future business creation. The concept of intention is grounded in behavioural theories which suggest that individuals are more likely to engage in a particular behaviour if they have a strong intention to do so. Self-employment intention is therefore influenced by a combination of personal attitudes, perceived social expectations, and perceived ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks.

Recent scholarship highlights that self-employment intention is not a static construct but a dynamic process influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include personality traits, risk tolerance, creativity, and self-confidence, while external factors encompass access to resources, institutional support, and economic conditions. According to Esfandiar et al. (2019, but still widely cited in recent studies), entrepreneurial intention is shaped by prior exposure to entrepreneurship, including education and role models, which reinforces the relevance of entrepreneurship education in intention formation.

## **2.3 Graduates of State Universities**

Graduates of state universities represent a significant segment of the educated workforce in Nigeria. These institutions are established and funded by state governments and are primarily designed to increase access to higher education and promote regional development. In South-South Nigeria, state universities play a crucial role in producing skilled manpower across various disciplines. However, graduates from these institutions often face unique challenges in the labour market. These challenges include limited employment opportunities, skills mismatch, and inadequate exposure to practical and industry-relevant training. As a result, many graduates struggle to secure formal employment and are increasingly compelled to consider alternative career pathways such as self-employment.

The quality and orientation of education received in state universities significantly influence graduates' career choices. Studies have shown that graduates who are exposed to practical

and skills-based training are more likely to develop entrepreneurial intentions compared to those who receive predominantly theoretical instruction. This underscores the importance of aligning university education with labour market demands and entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition, socio-economic and environmental factors within the South-South region, such as resource dependency, infrastructural deficits, and economic volatility, further shape graduates' employment outcomes. These conditions create both challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship. On one hand, limited formal employment options push graduates toward self-employment; on the other hand, structural constraints may hinder their ability to successfully establish and sustain businesses.

#### **2.4 Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy**

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks associated with starting and managing a business. It is a critical psychological construct that influences entrepreneurial intention and behaviour. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy affects how individuals perceive opportunities, evaluate risks, and persist in the face of challenges. Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to view entrepreneurship as achievable and are therefore more inclined to pursue self-employment. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to fear of failure and avoidance of entrepreneurial activities.

Recent studies emphasize that entrepreneurship education plays a vital role in enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy by providing students with knowledge, skills, and practical experiences. Through activities such as business plan development, simulations, and mentorship, students gain confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. Moreover, entrepreneurial self-efficacy has been identified as a key mediating variable between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intention. This means that entrepreneurship education may not directly lead to entrepreneurial intention unless it first strengthens individuals' confidence in their capabilities.

#### **2.5 Entrepreneurial Motivation**

Entrepreneurial motivation refers to the internal and external drivers that influence an individual's decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities. It encompasses both intrinsic factors, such as passion, autonomy, and personal fulfilment, and extrinsic factors, such as financial rewards and social recognition. Motivation plays a crucial role in the formation of self-employment intentions, as it determines the level of effort and persistence individuals are willing to invest in entrepreneurial activities. Individuals who are highly motivated are more

likely to overcome challenges and pursue business opportunities despite uncertainties. Entrepreneurship education contributes to entrepreneurial motivation by exposing students to success stories, role models, and practical experiences that inspire entrepreneurial aspirations. It also helps students understand the potential benefits and challenges of entrepreneurship, thereby shaping their motivational orientation.

## **2.6 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**

The entrepreneurial ecosystem refers to the network of institutions, policies, resources, and cultural factors that support or hinder entrepreneurial activity within a given environment. It includes elements such as access to finance, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure, education systems, and support services. A supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem is essential for translating entrepreneurial intentions into actual business creation. Even when individuals possess the necessary skills and motivation, unfavourable environmental conditions can impede entrepreneurial activity.

In the context of South-South Nigeria, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is characterized by both opportunities and constraints. While the region has significant economic potential, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to capital, and regulatory bottlenecks continue to affect entrepreneurial development. Strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem is therefore critical for enhancing the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education and promoting self-employment among graduates.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions requires a robust theoretical grounding that explains how knowledge acquisition translates into behavioural outcomes. This study is anchored on two dominant and complementary theories: the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Human Capital Theory (HCT). In addition, insights from Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) are incorporated to strengthen the explanatory power of the framework, particularly in relation to self-efficacy and behavioural regulation.

### **3.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Icek Ajzen (1991)**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991. TPB is one of the most widely used frameworks for predicting and explaining human behaviour in various domains, including entrepreneurship. The theory posits that an individual's behaviour is primarily determined by their intention to perform that behaviour, which in turn is influenced

by three key constructs: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Attitude toward behaviour refers to the degree to which an individual has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of becoming self-employed. Entrepreneurship education plays a critical role in shaping this attitude by exposing students to the benefits, opportunities, and realities of entrepreneurial activity. Through structured learning and practical experiences, students develop a more positive perception of self-employment as a viable career option.

Subjective norms relate to the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a particular behaviour. In the context of entrepreneurship, this includes the influence of family, peers, educators, and society at large. In many developing economies, societal expectations often favour stable salaried employment over entrepreneurial risk-taking. However, entrepreneurship education can help reshape these perceptions by promoting entrepreneurial success stories and fostering a culture that values innovation and self-reliance.

Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of their ability to perform the behaviour, which closely aligns with the concept of self-efficacy. It encompasses both internal factors (such as skills and confidence) and external factors (such as access to resources and opportunities). Entrepreneurship education enhances perceived behavioural control by equipping students with relevant competencies and exposing them to practical entrepreneurial experiences.

Recent extensions of TPB in entrepreneurship research highlight that perceived behavioural control is often the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial intention, particularly in contexts where environmental constraints are significant. This underscores the importance of developing students' confidence and capability through effective entrepreneurship education. Overall, TPB provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how entrepreneurship education influences self-employment intentions by shaping attitudes, social perceptions, and perceived capabilities.

### **3.2 Human Capital Theory (HCT) by Theodore William Schultz and Gary Stanley Becker (1964)**

Human Capital Theory was originally advanced by Theodore William Schultz and Gary Stanley Becker in 1964. HCT emphasizes the role of education, skills, and knowledge in enhancing individuals' productivity and economic outcomes. The theory posits that investment in education and training increases an individual's capacity to perform tasks effectively, thereby improving their employability and income-generating potential. In the

context of entrepreneurship, human capital includes not only formal education but also entrepreneurial skills, experience, and knowledge acquired through training and practice. Entrepreneurship education is therefore viewed as a critical investment in human capital that equips individuals with the competencies required for business creation and management.

Entrepreneurship education contributes to human capital development in several ways. First, it provides cognitive skills, such as opportunity recognition, strategic thinking, and problem-solving. Second, it develops technical skills, including business planning, financial management, and marketing. Third, it enhances non-cognitive skills, such as resilience, creativity, and risk tolerance, which are essential for entrepreneurial success. Recent developments in Human Capital Theory emphasize the importance of entrepreneurial-specific human capital, which refers to skills and knowledge directly related to entrepreneurial activities. Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of entrepreneurial human capital are more likely to identify business opportunities and successfully launch ventures.

However, the effectiveness of human capital development depends on the quality and relevance of education. In many developing contexts, including Nigeria, there is often a mismatch between the skills acquired through formal education and the demands of the labour market. This highlights the need for entrepreneurship education to be practical, context-specific, and aligned with real-world business environments. Human Capital Theory thus provides a strong foundation for understanding how entrepreneurship education enhances graduates' capacity for self-employment by building relevant skills and competencies.

### **3.3 Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Albert Bandura (1986)**

Social Cognitive Theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1986. SCT provides additional insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying entrepreneurial behaviour. The theory emphasizes the dynamic interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour, a concept known as reciprocal determinism. A central construct in SCT is self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a specific task. In the entrepreneurial context, self-efficacy influences individuals' willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities, their persistence in the face of challenges, and their resilience after failure.

Entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy through several mechanisms:

- a. Mastery experiences: Engaging in practical entrepreneurial activities builds confidence.
- b. Vicarious learning: Observing successful entrepreneurs provides role models.
- c. Social persuasion: Encouragement from instructors and mentors reinforces belief in one's abilities.
- d. Emotional regulation: Managing fear and uncertainty associated with entrepreneurship.

SCT also highlights the importance of environmental factors, such as access to resources, institutional support, and socio-economic conditions, in shaping behaviour. This is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where structural challenges can either facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial activity. By incorporating SCT, this study acknowledges that entrepreneurship education influences not only cognitive and behavioural factors but also psychological processes that are critical for entrepreneurial intention and action.

#### **4. Empirical Review**

The relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions has attracted extensive scholarly attention across both developed and developing economies. Contemporary studies increasingly emphasize that entrepreneurship education does not only transmit knowledge but also shapes attitudes, competencies, and behavioural intentions necessary for venture creation.

Recent empirical evidence suggests that entrepreneurship education has a statistically significant effect on students' entrepreneurial intentions when it is delivered through interactive and practice-oriented approaches. For instance, Ndofirepi (2022) found that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intention primarily through the development of entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, opportunity recognition, and problem-solving skills. The study further noted that competency-based training has a stronger predictive power on entrepreneurial intention than traditional lecture-based instruction.

Similarly, Nowiński et al. (2021) examined entrepreneurship education across multiple countries and concluded that its effectiveness varies depending on contextual and institutional factors. Their findings revealed that students in environments with supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems demonstrate stronger intentions toward self-employment compared to those in less supportive contexts. This underscores the importance of aligning educational programs with broader socio-economic conditions.

In another study, Anjum et al. (2021) reported that entrepreneurial passion and innovativeness significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention. The study emphasized that students who develop a strong emotional attachment to entrepreneurial activities are more likely to pursue self-employment. This highlights the need for entrepreneurship education to go beyond cognitive learning and foster affective engagement.

Foli et al. (2022) also found that entrepreneurship education positively influences self-employment intentions, particularly when supported by institutional resources such as training facilities and access to funding. Their study revealed that inadequate infrastructure and limited access to startup capital remain major barriers to entrepreneurial engagement among graduates in developing countries.

Furthermore, a study by Boubker et al. (2021) demonstrated that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and attitude significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention. The authors argued that students' belief in their ability to successfully start and manage a business plays a crucial role in transforming educational exposure into actionable intentions.

In the African context, Malebana (2022) reported that entrepreneurship education significantly predicts entrepreneurial intention among university students, but its impact is moderated by perceived behavioural control and environmental constraints. The study concluded that even when students possess the necessary skills and knowledge, external barriers such as regulatory challenges and financial constraints may hinder entrepreneurial action.

Additionally, research by Hasan et al. (2023) indicated that digital entrepreneurship education has emerged as an important dimension in shaping self-employment intentions in the modern economy. Their findings suggest that exposure to digital tools and online business models enhances students' readiness to engage in innovative entrepreneurial activities, particularly in developing economies where digital platforms provide alternative market access.

Another important dimension is the role of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education. According to Rasul et al. (2022), students who participate in hands-on entrepreneurial activities such as business simulations, internships, and startup projects exhibit higher levels of entrepreneurial intention compared to those exposed to purely theoretical instruction. Experiential learning enables students to apply knowledge in real-world contexts, thereby strengthening their confidence and competence.

Moreover, the role of social and cultural influences in shaping entrepreneurial intentions has been highlighted in recent studies. Karimi et al. (2022) found that subjective norms, including family expectations and societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship, significantly affect students' intention to pursue self-employment. In many developing countries, societal preference for stable salaried jobs continues to discourage entrepreneurial risk-taking among graduates.

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the positive impact of entrepreneurship education, some studies have reported mixed or limited effects. For example, Ozaralli and Rivenburgh (2023) observed that entrepreneurship education alone may not be sufficient to drive entrepreneurial intention unless complemented by supportive institutional frameworks and access to resources. This suggests that entrepreneurship education must be embedded within a broader ecosystem that facilitates business creation.

In the Nigerian context, emerging studies indicate that while entrepreneurship education has improved students' awareness and interest in business creation, significant gaps remain in terms of practical skill acquisition and post-graduation support. These gaps often result in a disconnect between intention and actual entrepreneurial behaviour. Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that entrepreneurship education is a critical determinant of self-employment intentions, but its effectiveness depends on several interrelated factors, including pedagogical approaches, psychological variables, and environmental conditions. The evidence also highlights the need for a holistic approach that integrates education, policy support, and institutional capacity to achieve meaningful entrepreneurial outcomes.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey design and a cross-sectional framework to examine the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions, as well as the mediating roles of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation, with data collected at a single point in time. The study was conducted in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, comprising Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States, focusing specifically on selected state universities due to their role in graduate production and the region's high unemployment rate. The population consisted of final-year undergraduate students and recent graduates, estimated at approximately 54,000 respondents based on a total student population of about 120,000 across the universities, with the target group representing 40–50% of this population. A sample size of 400 respondents was determined using standard techniques for large

populations, and a multi-stage sampling procedure was employed, involving purposive selection of universities, stratified sampling of faculties and departments, and simple random sampling of respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Entrepreneurship Education and Self-Employment Intentions Questionnaire (EESIQ),” organized into five sections and measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with validity ensured through expert review and reliability confirmed via Cronbach’s Alpha from a pilot study. The instrument was administered with the assistance of trained research assistants under strict ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and Structural Equation Modeling techniques, incorporating descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation and multiple regression). Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 372 were validly returned, yielding a 93% response rate, and data screening confirmed no violations of statistical assumptions. The demographic distribution showed a balanced representation in terms of gender, age, academic status, and disciplinary background, supporting the generalizability of the findings, while the study is expected to contribute to theory, policy, and practice in entrepreneurship education and graduate employment.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Descriptive Statistics

**Table 6.1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables. (n = 372)**

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision Level
<b>Entrepreneurship Education</b>	3.42	0.71	Moderate
<b>Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy</b>	3.58	0.68	High
<b>Entrepreneurial Motivation</b>	3.47	0.72	Moderate
<b>Self-Employment Intentions</b>	3.76	0.65	High

The results in Table 6.1 indicate variation in respondents’ perceptions across the study variables. Entrepreneurship education recorded a mean score of 3.42, suggesting a moderate level of exposure among respondents. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, with a mean of 3.58, reflects a relatively high level of confidence in entrepreneurial abilities. Entrepreneurial motivation recorded a mean of 3.47, indicating a moderate level of motivation toward entrepreneurial activities. In contrast, self-employment intention had the highest mean score of 3.76, indicating a high inclination toward self-employment. These findings imply that although respondents show strong intentions to engage in entrepreneurship, the supporting factors such as education exposure and motivation are not equally strong, which may limit the realization of these intentions.

## 6.2 Correlation Analysis

**Table 6.2: Pearson Correlation Matrix.**

Variables	EE	ESE	EM	SEI
<b>Entrepreneurship Education (EE)</b>	1			
<b>Self-Efficacy (ESE)</b>	0.57**	1		
<b>Motivation (EM)</b>	0.52**	0.61**	1	
<b>Self-Employment Intention (SEI)</b>	0.61**	0.69**	0.65**	1

Note:  $p < 0.01$

The correlation results in Table 6.2 reveal that entrepreneurship education has a significant positive relationship with self-employment intention ( $r = 0.61$ ), indicating that increased exposure to entrepreneurship education is associated with higher entrepreneurial intentions. Entrepreneurship education also shows significant positive relationships with entrepreneurial self-efficacy ( $r = 0.57$ ) and entrepreneurial motivation ( $r = 0.52$ ), suggesting that it contributes to enhancing both confidence and motivation among respondents. Furthermore, entrepreneurial self-efficacy ( $r = 0.69$ ) and motivation ( $r = 0.65$ ) both demonstrate strong positive relationships with self-employment intention. This implies that psychological factors play an important role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and may serve as important mediating variables.

## 6.3 Regression Analysis (Direct Effect)

**Table 6.3: Regression Result – Effect of Entrepreneurship Education on Self-Employment Intention.**

Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
<b>Entrepreneurship Education</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>12.50</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>0.000</b>

Model Summary	Value
<b>R</b>	0.61
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.37
<b>F-value</b>	156.32
<b>Sig.</b>	0.000

The regression results in Table 6.3 show that entrepreneurship education has a significant positive effect on self-employment intention ( $\beta = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The  $R^2$  value of 0.37 indicates that entrepreneurship education explains 37% of the variation in self-employment intention, suggesting a moderate explanatory power. The model is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-value (156.32,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that while entrepreneurship education is an important predictor of entrepreneurial intention, other factors also contribute

to shaping these intentions. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that entrepreneurship education has no significant influence on self-employment intention is rejected.

#### 6.4 Mediation Analysis: Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy

**Table 6.4: Mediation Result – Self-Efficacy.**

Path	Beta ( $\beta$ )	p-value
EE → ESE	0.57	0.000
ESE → SEI	0.45	0.000
EE → SEI (Direct Effect)	0.29	0.000
EE → SEI (Total Effect)	0.61	0.000

The results in Table 6.4 indicate that entrepreneurship education significantly influences entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, in turn, significantly affects self-employment intention. The reduction in the direct effect of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intention from 0.61 to 0.29 after introducing self-efficacy suggests partial mediation. This implies that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intention not only directly but also indirectly through improving individuals' confidence in their entrepreneurial capabilities. Hence, the null hypothesis that entrepreneurial self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the relationship is rejected.

#### 6.5 Mediation Analysis: Entrepreneurial Motivation

**Table 6.5: Mediation Result – Motivation.**

Path	Beta ( $\beta$ )	p-value
EE → EM	0.52	0.000
EM → SEI	0.43	0.000
EE → SEI (Direct Effect)	0.32	0.000
EE → SEI (Total Effect)	0.61	0.000

The results in Table 6.5 show that entrepreneurship education significantly influences entrepreneurial motivation, and entrepreneurial motivation significantly affects self-employment intention. The reduction in the direct effect from 0.61 to 0.32 indicates partial mediation. This suggests that entrepreneurship education contributes to self-employment intention by enhancing individuals' motivation toward entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that entrepreneurial motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship is rejected.

## 6.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 6.6.1 Influence of Entrepreneurship Education on Self-Employment Intentions

The first objective examined the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria. The findings revealed that entrepreneurship education has a significant positive effect on self-employment intention ( $\beta = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), explaining about 37% of the variation ( $R^2 = 0.37$ ). This indicates that graduates who are exposed to entrepreneurship education are more likely to develop intentions toward self-employment.

This result is consistent with existing empirical studies such as Ndofirepi (2022) and Nowiński et al. (2021), which established that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intentions by developing relevant competencies and shaping positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship. The finding also supports the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that education increases individuals' productive capacity by equipping them with knowledge and skills necessary for economic participation. However, the moderate explanatory power suggests that entrepreneurship education alone cannot fully account for self-employment intentions. This aligns with Foli et al. (2022), who argued that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends on complementary factors such as institutional support, access to finance, and practical training. Therefore, while entrepreneurship education is a key determinant, its impact is strengthened when supported by a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### 6.6.2 Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy

The second objective investigated the mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions. The findings showed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy significantly mediates this relationship, as the direct effect of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intention decreased from  $\beta = 0.61$  to  $\beta = 0.29$  when self-efficacy was introduced into the model. This indicates partial mediation, suggesting that entrepreneurship education influences self-employment intentions both directly and indirectly through enhancing individuals' confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities.

This finding is consistent with Adeniyi (2023) and Boubker et al. (2021), who emphasized that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a critical determinant of entrepreneurial intention. It also aligns with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which highlights self-efficacy as a key psychological factor influencing behaviour. The implication of this finding is that

entrepreneurship education programmes are more effective when they go beyond theoretical instruction to include experiential learning activities such as business simulations, internships, and mentorship programmes. These activities help build students' confidence and perceived capability, which are essential for translating entrepreneurial knowledge into intention and eventual action.

### **6.6.3 Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Motivation**

The third objective examined the mediating role of entrepreneurial motivation in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions. The results indicated that entrepreneurial motivation also significantly mediates this relationship, with the direct effect of entrepreneurship education reducing from  $\beta = 0.61$  to  $\beta = 0.32$ , indicating partial mediation. This suggests that entrepreneurship education enhances self-employment intention by stimulating students' motivation toward entrepreneurial activities. The finding is in agreement with Anjum et al. (2021), who found that entrepreneurial passion and innovativeness significantly influence entrepreneurial intentions. It also supports Rasul et al. (2022), who emphasized that experiential learning increases students' motivation and engagement in entrepreneurial pursuits.

The result further validates the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), particularly the role of attitude in shaping behavioural intention. Entrepreneurial motivation reflects both intrinsic and extrinsic attitudes toward entrepreneurship, which are strengthened through exposure to entrepreneurial knowledge, role models, and success stories. Overall, this finding implies that entrepreneurship education should not only focus on skill acquisition but also on inspiring and motivating students to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Without adequate motivation, the likelihood of translating entrepreneurial knowledge and self-efficacy into actual self-employment remains low.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This study examined the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions among graduates of state universities in South-South Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation. The findings clearly demonstrate that entrepreneurship education is a significant predictor of self-employment intentions, indicating that exposure to entrepreneurial knowledge and skills enhances graduates' readiness to engage in business creation. However, the study also revealed that entrepreneurship education alone is not sufficient to fully drive entrepreneurial

intentions. The inclusion of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation as mediating variables showed that these psychological factors play a crucial role in strengthening the relationship between education and intention. Specifically, graduates who possess higher confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities and stronger motivation are more likely to translate entrepreneurial knowledge into actionable intentions.

The study therefore concludes that entrepreneurship education influences self-employment intentions through a multidimensional process involving skill acquisition, confidence building, and motivational development. Nonetheless, the moderate levels of entrepreneurship education exposure and motivation suggest gaps in programme implementation, particularly in terms of practical training and institutional support. Overall, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in promoting self-employment among graduates depends not only on curriculum content but also on the extent to which it fosters self-efficacy, motivation, and a supportive entrepreneurial environment.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Universities should adopt more experiential and practice-based teaching methods such as business simulations, internships, startup projects, and incubation programmes. This will help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world entrepreneurial practice.
2. Entrepreneurship programmes should incorporate activities that build students' confidence, such as mentorship schemes, interaction with successful entrepreneurs, and hands-on business development experiences.
3. Institutions should create an enabling environment that inspires students through success stories, competitions, innovation hubs, and recognition of entrepreneurial achievements. This will enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
4. Government and university management should provide access to startup funding, grants, and soft loans for graduates. Establishing entrepreneurship development centres and incubation hubs will further support business creation.
5. Partnerships between universities and industries should be enhanced to provide students with practical exposure, mentorship, and access to real business environments.
6. Regulatory bodies should ensure effective implementation and continuous evaluation of entrepreneurship education programmes to ensure they meet their intended objectives.

7. Policymakers should address structural challenges such as poor infrastructure, regulatory bottlenecks, and limited access to markets, which hinder entrepreneurial activities in the South-South region.

### 9. Suggestions for Further Studies

In view of the limitations and scope of this study, the following suggestions are made for future research:

1. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how entrepreneurship education influences actual business start-up behaviour over time, rather than just intentions.
2. Further studies should explore other psychological and contextual variables such as risk tolerance, innovation capability, access to finance, and government policies.
3. Researchers should conduct comparative studies between federal, state, and private universities, as well as across different geopolitical zones in Nigeria.
4. Future studies should incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies to gain deeper insights into students' entrepreneurial experiences and challenges.
5. Given the growing importance of technology, future research should examine how digital entrepreneurship education influences self-employment intentions and business creation.
6. Further research should focus on tracking graduates after completion of their studies to determine the extent to which entrepreneurial intentions translate into actual ventures.
7. Studies should assess the effectiveness of existing government and institutional entrepreneurship initiatives in promoting sustainable self-employment among graduates.

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