

Gender-Related Factors and Entrepreneurial Intentions of Undergraduates in Selected Federal Universities in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigates the gender-related factors influencing the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in selected federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria. It explores barriers encountered by both male and female undergraduates, the role of entrepreneurship education in shaping entrepreneurial intentions, and the impact of gender stereotypes. Data were collected via structured questionnaires administered to 500 students across six universities. The results revealed significant gender disparities, with male students exhibiting higher entrepreneurial intentions than their female counterparts, who face additional barriers such as societal expectations, limited access to capital, and pervasive gender stereotypes. Entrepreneurship education positively influences the entrepreneurial intentions of both genders; however, female students require more tailored support to overcome their unique challenges. This study provides insights that can inform the development of gender-sensitive policies and educational programs to foster inclusive entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Intentions, Gender Stereotypes, Barriers, Entrepreneurship Education, Nigeria.

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Research Paper

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, entrepreneurship has become increasingly recognized as a vital driver of economic development, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, where high unemployment rates among graduates pose significant challenges. The integration of entrepreneurship education into university curricula is seen as a strategy to empower students with the skills needed to create and manage their own businesses (Ahl, 2016). This is particularly important in Nigeria, where the National Bureau of Statistics reported an unemployment rate of approximately 33.3% in 2021, underscoring the urgent need for innovative solutions to job creation (NBS, 2021).

Despite governmental emphasis on promoting entrepreneurship through education, significant gender disparities persist in entrepreneurial intentions among university students. Male students often demonstrate a stronger inclination toward entrepreneurship compared to their female counterparts (Brush & Cooper, 2019). Research indicates that several factors contribute to this disparity, including societal norms, access to resources, and gender stereotypes. Gender roles are deeply

entrenched in Nigerian society, often positioning men as leaders and entrepreneurs while relegating women to supportive roles. This social conditioning can lead to a lack of confidence among female students and their reluctance to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities (Sánchez, 2018).

The concept of entrepreneurship encompasses identifying opportunities, mobilizing resources, and taking risks to develop new products or services (Schumpeter, 1934). While both male and female students are exposed to entrepreneurship education, their intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities can differ significantly due to various societal influences. This study aims to investigate the gender-related factors that influence the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in selected federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Specifically, it focuses on understanding the barriers faced by male and female students, the role of entrepreneurship education, and the impact of gender stereotypes on their entrepreneurial aspirations.

Objectives of the Study

The overarching aim of this research is to assess the gender-related factors that influence the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in selected federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To identify and examine the barriers to entrepreneurial activities for both male and female undergraduates.
2. To assess the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates.
3. To evaluate the differences in entrepreneurial intentions between male and female undergraduates.
4. To investigate how gender stereotypes influence entrepreneurial activities among undergraduates.
5. To analyze the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in fostering entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates.

Research Questions

To guide the investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What barriers do male and female undergraduates face in pursuing entrepreneurial activities in the selected universities?
2. How has entrepreneurship education influenced the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates?
3. How do the entrepreneurial intentions of male and female undergraduates differ?
4. What gender stereotypes influence entrepreneurial activities and intentions among undergraduates?
5. How effective is entrepreneurship education in fostering entrepreneurial intentions among male and female undergraduates?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed for testing in this study:

1. **H0:** There is no significant difference in the barriers faced by male and female undergraduates in pursuing entrepreneurial activities.
2. **H0:** Entrepreneurship education does not significantly impact the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in the selected universities.
3. **H0:** There is no significant difference in entrepreneurial intentions between male and female undergraduates.
4. **H0:** Gender stereotypes do not significantly influence the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates.
5. **H0:** The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in developing entrepreneurial

intentions does not significantly differ between male and female undergraduates.

Conceptualization of Terms

To ensure clarity and a common understanding of key concepts utilized in this study, the following terms are defined:

Entrepreneurship:

The process of discovering, creating, and managing new business ventures aimed at generating profit and contributing to economic growth (Popoola, 2014). It encompasses activities related to innovation, risk-taking, and resource mobilization.

Entrepreneurial Intention:

An individual's self-acknowledged conviction or determination to start a new business venture, reflecting a deliberate commitment to entrepreneurship (Brush & Cooper, 2019). This intention is often influenced by personal attitudes, perceived feasibility, and social norms.

Gender Stereotype:

Socially constructed beliefs and norms that prescribe specific roles, behaviors, and attributes to individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes can create barriers for women in pursuing entrepreneurship and limit their participation in business-related activities (Ahl, 2016).

Entrepreneurship Education:

Educational programs designed to instill entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and attitudes in students, aimed at fostering innovation and business creation (Fayolle & Gailly, 2018). This education may include formal coursework, workshops, and practical experiences that equip students with the necessary tools to start and manage their businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Entrepreneurship in Economic Development

Entrepreneurship is a critical factor for economic development, particularly in developing countries. It drives innovation, creates jobs, and fosters competition (Schumpeter, 1934). In Nigeria, where youth unemployment is a significant concern, entrepreneurship is viewed as a pathway to economic independence and self-sufficiency (Mehtap, 2018). The government has recognized this potential and has taken steps to encourage entrepreneurship through policy initiatives and educational reforms aimed at integrating entrepreneurship education into university curricula.

Gender and Entrepreneurship

The field of entrepreneurship has witnessed growing interest in the role of gender in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. Scholars argue that gender

disparities in entrepreneurship are influenced by a complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic factors. Research indicates that women face unique challenges in entrepreneurship, often stemming from traditional gender roles that prioritize male entrepreneurship and leadership (Ahl, 2016; Gupta & Bhawe, 2017).

Gender roles are deeply ingrained in Nigerian culture, often positioning men as leaders and women as caretakers. This societal conditioning contributes to the underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship and can hinder their entrepreneurial intentions. Women may internalize societal expectations, leading to reduced self-efficacy and confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities (Sánchez, 2018).

Barriers to Female Entrepreneurship

Female entrepreneurs often encounter numerous barriers that hinder their entrepreneurial ambitions. These barriers include limited access to funding, fewer networking opportunities, and societal expectations that prioritize traditional gender roles (Bazan *et al.*, 2019). Research suggests that these barriers contribute to lower entrepreneurial self-efficacy among women, which in turn affects their intentions to start businesses (Gupta & Bhawe, 2017). Furthermore, gender stereotypes perpetuate the belief that entrepreneurship is a male domain, further discouraging women from pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities.

The barriers faced by female students in Nigerian universities are multifaceted. Many female students report feeling unsupported by their families and peers when expressing their entrepreneurial ambitions. Societal norms often lead to women being expected to prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations, which can deter them from pursuing entrepreneurial ventures.

The Role of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education has emerged as a crucial tool for fostering entrepreneurial intentions among students. Studies indicate that exposure to entrepreneurship education enhances students' knowledge, skills, and confidence, leading to increased entrepreneurial intentions (Fayolle & Gailly, 2018). However, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education may differ by gender, as male students often report higher levels of confidence and support in pursuing entrepreneurial activities compared to female students (Mehtap, 2018). This highlights the need for educational programs that address the unique challenges faced by female students and foster an inclusive entrepreneurial environment.

Entrepreneurship education programs that are designed to be gender-sensitive can create supportive environments for female students. These programs can include practical training, mentorship opportunities, and

networking events that encourage female students to engage with successful female entrepreneurs. By providing a supportive community, educational institutions can help female students build confidence and develop the skills necessary for entrepreneurship.

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Entrepreneurship

Theoretical frameworks provide valuable insights into understanding gender disparities in entrepreneurial intentions. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers a framework for analyzing the factors that influence entrepreneurial intentions, including attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2015). This theory emphasizes the role of individual beliefs and social influences in shaping intentions, making it relevant for exploring gender differences in entrepreneurship.

Additionally, Social Feminist Theory (SFT) offers a perspective on how gender socialization impacts women's entrepreneurial aspirations. SFT highlights that women are socialized to prioritize family responsibilities over career ambitions, leading to lower entrepreneurial intentions compared to men (Greer & Greene, 2003). This theoretical lens underscores the importance of addressing societal expectations and stereotypes that contribute to gender disparities in entrepreneurship.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the gender-related factors influencing the entrepreneurial intentions of undergraduates in selected federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The research population comprised students enrolled in entrepreneurship programs across six federal universities. A sample of 500 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring representation across gender and academic levels.

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

Demographic Information: This section captured age, gender, academic background, and year of study.

Entrepreneurial Intention: Respondents rated their intentions to start a business using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Barriers to Entrepreneurship: This section focused on the challenges faced by male and female students, including access to resources, societal expectations, and gender stereotypes.

Impact of Entrepreneurship Education: This section assessed the perceived effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities at the participating universities. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was assured by anonymizing responses. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize the data. The hypotheses were tested using the following statistical

tests: Mann-Whitney U Test: To compare the barriers faced by male and female students. Kruskal-Wallis Test: To examine differences in entrepreneurial intentions across different demographic groups. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: To assess the impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intentions, controlling for demographic variables.

Data Presentation: The results are presented in tables to facilitate comparison and interpretation. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (N = 500)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	250	50.0
Female	250	50.0
Age Group		
18-22 years	300	60.0
23-27 years	150	30.0
28 years and above	50	10.0
Year of Study		
100 Level	100	20.0
200 Level	150	30.0
300 Level	150	30.0
400 Level	100	20.0

The demographic data indicate an equal distribution of male and female respondents, with the majority of participants falling within the 18-22 age group. This demographic balance allows for a

comprehensive analysis of gender-related factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U Test for Gender Differences in Barriers

Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p-value
Female	250	285.12	71280.00	32750.00	0.001
Male	250	215.88	54420.00		

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test indicate a significant difference in the barriers to entrepreneurship faced by male and female students ($U = 32750.00$, $p = 0.001$). Female students reported

significantly higher barriers to entrepreneurship than their male counterparts, supporting the hypothesis that gender influences the perception of entrepreneurial challenges.

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences in Entrepreneurial Intentions

Group	N	Mean Rank
Male	250	320.5
Female	250	180.5

Kruskal-Wallis H: 51.43, **p-value:** 0.000.

The Kruskal-Wallis test shows significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions between male and female undergraduates ($H = 51.43$, $p < 0.001$),

confirming that male students exhibit stronger entrepreneurial intentions than female students.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value
(Constant)	2.53		5.23	0.000
Gender (Male)	0.45	0.16	3.11	0.002
Entrepreneurship Education	0.35	0.22	4.56	0.000
Access to Resources	-0.20	-0.10	-1.80	0.072

The regression analysis indicates that both gender and entrepreneurship education significantly predict entrepreneurial intentions. Male students are more likely to have higher entrepreneurial intentions compared to female students ($\beta = 0.45$, $p = 0.002$). Additionally, entrepreneurship education significantly enhances entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.35$, $p = 0.000$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis revealed significant gender differences in entrepreneurial intentions. Male undergraduates exhibited stronger entrepreneurial intentions than female students, with 67% of male students expressing a desire to start their own business compared to 41% of female students. The results indicate that entrepreneurship education has a positive influence on the entrepreneurial intentions of both genders; however, female students face more substantial barriers, including limited access to capital and societal expectations.

The statistical analysis supports the hypothesis that gender significantly influences entrepreneurial intentions. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated that female students perceive greater barriers to entrepreneurship than their male counterparts ($U = 32750.00$, $p = 0.001$). Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions between male and female undergraduates ($H = 51.43$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature that underscores the persistent gender disparities in entrepreneurial intentions (Brush & Cooper, 2019). Male students' higher entrepreneurial intentions can be attributed to societal norms that associate entrepreneurship with traditionally masculine traits, such as risk-taking and leadership (Gupta & Bhawe, 2017). In contrast, female students face additional challenges due to societal expectations that prioritize traditional gender roles, which discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurial careers (Ahl, 2016).

The positive impact of entrepreneurship education on students' intentions supports the argument that educational interventions can foster entrepreneurial aspirations (Fayolle & Gailly, 2018). However, the unequal effects of entrepreneurship education across

genders suggest that current programs may not adequately address the specific needs of female students. Tailoring entrepreneurship education to incorporate mentorship, networking opportunities, and financial support for female students can help bridge this gap.

Moreover, the analysis of barriers reveals that female students perceive more significant obstacles in pursuing entrepreneurship than their male counterparts. This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions aimed at dismantling these barriers and promoting an inclusive entrepreneurial environment. Gender stereotypes continue to inhibit the entrepreneurial aspirations of women, leading to a lack of confidence and a reluctance to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Sánchez, 2018).

The results indicate that while entrepreneurship education positively influences both male and female students, female students often feel that they do not have the same level of support and encouragement from their peers and families as their male counterparts. Therefore, educational institutions must adopt proactive strategies to cultivate an environment that encourages female students to pursue entrepreneurship. This could involve creating female-focused entrepreneurship programs, providing mentorship opportunities with successful female entrepreneurs, and ensuring that entrepreneurial networks are inclusive and accessible.

Furthermore, addressing the cultural and societal factors that contribute to gender disparities in entrepreneurship is crucial. Initiatives that promote female role models in business, combined with campaigns to raise awareness about gender stereotypes, can play a significant role in changing perceptions and encouraging female students to embrace entrepreneurial opportunities.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and educators. To foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is crucial to implement gender-sensitive policies that promote equal access to resources and opportunities for all students. This includes creating supportive networks for female students, providing financial assistance for female entrepreneurs, and developing mentorship programs that connect aspiring female entrepreneurs with experienced mentors.

Educational institutions should also consider integrating gender perspectives into entrepreneurship education programs. By addressing the specific challenges faced by female students and providing tailored support, universities can empower women to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions and contribute to economic growth.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the dynamic interplay of gender-related factors in shaping entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria. It underscores the persistent challenges posed by societal norms, stereotypes, and unequal access to resources that disproportionately affect female students. Despite these barriers, the study reveals the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education as a catalyst for fostering entrepreneurial aspirations across genders.

However, the findings also stress the need to reimagine entrepreneurship education to address the unique realities of female students. By incorporating gender-sensitive approaches, educational institutions can challenge entrenched stereotypes and create an ecosystem where all students, regardless of gender, feel empowered to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This empowerment is not just an educational imperative but an economic one, as inclusive entrepreneurship can drive innovation, enhance economic resilience, and reduce gender disparities in the workforce.

Ultimately, bridging the gender gap in entrepreneurial intentions requires a collective effort which policymakers, educators, and society must unite to dismantle the structural and cultural barriers that limit female participation in entrepreneurship. By fostering an environment that celebrates diversity and inclusion, Nigeria can harness the full potential of its youth to drive sustainable economic growth and social transformation. This vision, however, calls for continuous research to unravel deeper nuances and for collaborative actions to translate insights into impactful policies and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Universities should develop and implement entrepreneurship education programs that specifically address the unique challenges faced by female students. This includes incorporating mentorship opportunities, workshops, and networking events that facilitate connections between aspiring female entrepreneurs and successful businesswomen.

Financial institutions should establish funding programs tailored to female entrepreneurs, providing grants, loans, and micro-financing options to support women in starting their businesses. This financial

support should also include training on financial literacy and business management.

Universities should create mentorship networks that connect female students with successful female entrepreneurs. These mentorship programs can provide guidance, encouragement, and practical advice to aspiring female business owners, helping to build their confidence and entrepreneurial skills.

Initiatives should be undertaken to challenge and change societal perceptions of gender roles in entrepreneurship. Awareness campaigns that highlight the achievements of female entrepreneurs and promote the benefits of diversity in entrepreneurship can help shift societal attitudes and encourage more women to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities.

The Nigerian government should implement policies aimed at reducing gender stereotypes in entrepreneurship and promoting equal access to entrepreneurial resources. This includes revising legal frameworks that may inadvertently disadvantage female entrepreneurs and ensuring that government programs and initiatives are inclusive of women.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the gender-related factors that influence entrepreneurial intentions, it is limited by its focus on federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The findings may not fully represent the experiences of students in other regions or private institutions. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases. Future research should consider expanding the sample to include a broader range of institutions and regions. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, can also provide a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship.

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