

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION, CREATIVITY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION: MODERATING ROLE OF MENTORSHIP

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial intention has become an important research area due to increasing Student unemployment and the growing recognition of entrepreneurship as a mechanism for economic development, innovation, and job creation. Despite the widespread adoption of entrepreneurship education in universities, empirical findings regarding its effectiveness in stimulating entrepreneurial intention remain inconsistent. Similarly, although creativity has been identified as a critical antecedent of entrepreneurial behaviour, limited understanding exists regarding the contextual conditions under which creative capabilities translate into entrepreneurial intention. This paper develops a conceptual framework that integrates entrepreneurship education, creativity, entrepreneurial mentorship, and entrepreneurial intention within the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The paper proposes that entrepreneurship education and creativity positively influence entrepreneurial intention, while entrepreneurial mentorship strengthens these relationships by providing role modelling, psychosocial support, networking opportunities, venture guidance, and entrepreneurial feedback. The study extends TPB by positioning entrepreneurial mentorship as a contextual boundary condition that enhances attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The proposed framework contributes theoretically to entrepreneurship intention literature and provides practical implications for universities, policymakers, and entrepreneurship development agencies seeking to promote Student entrepreneurship in developing economies such as Nigeria. Future studies are encouraged to empirically validate the proposed relationships using Structural Equation Modelling or Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling.

Keywords: Creativity; Entrepreneurial Mentorship, Entrepreneurial Intention, Entrepreneurship Education, Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as a catalyst for innovation, employment creation, economic diversification, and sustainable development. Across both developed and developing economies, entrepreneurial ventures contribute significantly to job creation and economic competitiveness. Consequently, policymakers, universities, and development agencies have intensified efforts to promote entrepreneurship among young people, particularly university students and graduates (Ramadani et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2023).

The importance of entrepreneurship has become particularly evident in developing economies where student unemployment continues to pose a major socioeconomic challenge. In Nigeria, despite the expansion of higher education institutions, employment opportunities have not kept pace with the growing number of graduates entering the labour market. This mismatch has intensified concerns regarding youth unemployment and underemployment, thereby increasing interest in entrepreneurship as an alternative career pathway (Tanko et al., 2024). Entrepreneurship education was introduced into Nigerian universities by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to develop entrepreneurial competencies and encourage self-employment among graduates. However, evidence regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in fostering entrepreneurial intention remains mixed (Sun et al., 2023; Mabhena & Ncube, 2024).

Within the African context, entrepreneurial activity is relatively high in terms of early-stage entrepreneurship, but many businesses remain necessity-driven and exhibit limited job creation capacity compared with innovation-driven economies (GEM, 2023). Consequently, countries such as Nigeria continue to face challenges in transforming high entrepreneurial participation into sustainable and growth-oriented ventures capable of generating significant employment and economic development. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems, improving access to finance, and promoting entrepreneurial education to enhance entrepreneurial intention and performance in developing economies. Similarly, Nigeria faces similar challenges, where the number of graduates entering the labor market exceeds available job opportunities. This situation has increased the importance of encouraging entrepreneurial intention among students and graduates (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Consequently, understanding the factors that influence entrepreneurial intention has become a critical research issue.

Creativity has also emerged as an important determinant of entrepreneurial intention because entrepreneurship fundamentally involves opportunity recognition, idea generation, and innovative problem-solving. Individuals possessing higher levels of creativity are more likely to generate novel and useful business ideas and perceive entrepreneurial opportunities in uncertain environments (Li et al., 2023). Nevertheless, previous studies have reported varying results concerning the magnitude of creativity's influence on entrepreneurial intention, suggesting the existence of contextual factors that may strengthen or weaken this relationship.

One contextual factor receiving increasing scholarly attention is entrepreneurial mentorship. Entrepreneurial mentors provide guidance, venture advice, role modelling, networking opportunities, emotional support, and entrepreneurial feedback that assist aspiring entrepreneurs in translating knowledge and ideas into viable entrepreneurial actions (Gindes et al., 2023). Despite growing recognition of mentorship within entrepreneurship ecosystems, limited studies have examined its moderating role in strengthening the effects of entrepreneurship education and creativity on entrepreneurial intention.

Accordingly, this paper develops a conceptual framework explaining how entrepreneurial mentorship moderates the effects of entrepreneurship education and creativity on entrepreneurial intention among university students.

Problem Statement

Empirical studies examining entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention have produced inconsistent findings. While numerous studies report significant positive relationships (Kisubi et al., 2021; Ramadani et al., 2022), others report weak or insignificant effects, suggesting the existence of contextual conditions influencing the relationship (Mensah et al., 2023). Theoretically, most entrepreneurial intention studies rely on direct-effect models and pay limited attention to contextual moderators capable of explaining why entrepreneurship education and creativity produce different outcomes across individuals and institutions. Existing applications of the Theory of Planned Behaviour primarily focus on attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control while overlooking mentorship as an important boundary condition.

Furthermore, contextually, limited evidence exists within Nigerian universities where entrepreneurship education implementation, incubation support, and mentoring structures differ substantially from those in developed economies. Although entrepreneurship courses have become mandatory across Nigerian universities, many institutions continue to face challenges relating to practical entrepreneurial exposure and structured mentoring systems. Practically, universities continue to invest substantial resources in entrepreneurship education despite uncertainty regarding the conditions under which such programmes effectively stimulate entrepreneurial intention. Consequently, there is a need to develop a comprehensive framework explaining how entrepreneurial mentorship strengthens the effects of entrepreneurship education and creativity on entrepreneurial intention among university students.

Objective of the Study

1. To determine effect of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention among university students?
2. To determine effect of creativity and entrepreneurial intention among university students?
3. To determine the entrepreneurial mentorship moderate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention?
4. To determine effect of entrepreneurial mentorship moderate the relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial intention

Research Questions

1. How does entrepreneurship education influence entrepreneurial intention among university students?
2. How does creativity influence entrepreneurial intention among university students?
3. How does entrepreneurial mentorship moderate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention?
4. How does entrepreneurial mentorship moderate the relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial intention?

Literature Review

Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention refers to the conscious state of mind that directs an individual's attention and action toward starting a new business venture. It represents an individual's commitment and willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Gunia et al., 2021; Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024). Entrepreneurial intention is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of entrepreneurial behavior and venture creation. Recent studies suggest that entrepreneurial intention is influenced by a combination of personal characteristics, educational exposure, and environmental support systems (Murad et al., 2021). Universities and higher education institutions increasingly play an important role in fostering entrepreneurial intention by providing students with training, resources, and practical exposure to entrepreneurship (Shamsudin et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial intention refers to an individual's conscious state of mind, commitment, and willingness to establish a new business venture in the future. It represents the cognitive precursor of entrepreneurial behaviour and is regarded as one of the strongest predictors of venture creation (Sun et al., 2023). Recent entrepreneurship studies define entrepreneurial intention as the deliberate plan to initiate entrepreneurial activities and exploit business opportunities within a specific future timeframe. Entrepreneurial intention precedes actual entrepreneurial behaviour and reflects an individual's readiness to engage in venture creation activities. Given its predictive nature, entrepreneurial intention remains a critical outcome variable in entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship development research.

Concept of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become successful entrepreneurs (Boldureanu et al., 2020; Galvão et al., 2020). The effectiveness of this education can be measured through various aspects, including its impact on students' competence, their readiness to start a business, and their success in creating new jobs. In another study, it was found that entrepreneurship education moderated the relationship between predictors and entrepreneurial intentions generated by attitudes towards entrepreneurship and behavioral control that was perceived positively and strongly related to entrepreneurship intentions (Duong, 2022).

Entrepreneurship education can increase awareness of positive cultural values that stimulate entrepreneurial intention, and mobilize the skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary to start a new venture (Ahmed et al., 2020). Furthermore, Entrepreneurship education programs identify a variety of pedagogical approaches and curriculum design, including experiential learning, mentorship, and practical exercises. The study highlights the importance of hands-on activities, real-world case studies, and interaction with employers in enhancing students' entrepreneurial skills and intention (Rodrigues, 2023; Baggen et al., 2021; Weng et al., 2022). Hands-on activities, real-world case studies, and interactions with entrepreneurs have proven effective in fostering entrepreneurial skills and intention. The entrepreneurship education curriculum needs to be enriched with knowledge and skills in utilizing digital technology, while business people need to be supported with adequate training and access to digital infrastructure (Rauf et al., 2024; Sitaridis & Kitsios, 2024).

Concept of Creativity

Creativity is the human ability to think, modify, discover, create, and exploit new opportunities, which largely depends on an individual's ability to recognize and understand

connections among ideas. The same applies to entrepreneurial intention, where an entrepreneur must be creative in identifying and exploiting opportunities to start a new venture (Iwu et al., 2020). Creativity serves as a key success factor in entrepreneurship, as it helps connect problems with solutions and identify innovative ideas to capitalize on opportunities with available resources, enabling entrepreneurs to thrive in a dynamic business environment. (Karyaningsih et al., 2020) Many researchers have highlighted creativity as a vital element in fostering entrepreneurial intention, as entrepreneurship itself is a creative activity. Novelty and effectiveness are the hallmarks of creative ideas, and students' creative disposition influences their motivation to engage in entrepreneurship.

Creativity refers as individual's ability to generate novel and useful ideas that can be transformed into entrepreneurial opportunities. Creativity is defined as the ability and skill that people hold. Prior researchers discussed that creativity is particularly essential for entrepreneurial activities and entrepreneurship itself is a creative activity (Shi et al., 2020). Creative individuals tend to perceive entrepreneurship as both desirable and feasible because they possess stronger capabilities for generating innovative business ideas and solving market problems.

Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurship education has been widely recognized as a key factor influencing entrepreneurial intention. It equips students with entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for venture creation and self-employment (Wardana et al., 2020). Research has shown that entrepreneurship education enhances students' creativity, opportunity recognition abilities, and confidence in starting new businesses (Ramadani et al., 2022). In addition, entrepreneurship education improves students' employability by developing leadership, innovation, and problem-solving skills that are highly valued in the labor market (Pardo-Garcia & Barac, 2020). Empirical studies have also demonstrated a positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention among university students (Kisubi et al., 2021). However, some studies have reported inconsistent results, suggesting that the impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention may depend on other contextual factors such as institutional support and mentorship programs (Letsoalo & Rankhumise, 2020).

Therefore, Ibrahim et al. (2025) stated that exposure to entrepreneurship courses, practical training, and experiential learning activities significantly enhances students' motivation to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Conversely, other studies argue that entrepreneurship education alone may not be sufficient to foster entrepreneurial intention except it is complemented by mentorship, practical experience, and institutional support systems (Mensah et al., 2023). Similarly, other studies argue that simply introducing entrepreneurship courses may not guarantee entrepreneurial outcomes if students experience fear of failure, lack of confidence, or limited access to resources. These psychological and contextual barriers may weaken the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in promoting entrepreneurial intention (Maritz et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Furthermore, institutional factors such as weak entrepreneurial ecosystems, inadequate mentorship, and limited practical exposure can reduce the impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention. In such cases, entrepreneurship education may increase awareness of entrepreneurship but not necessarily translate into a strong intention to start a business.

Generally, the literature specifies that entrepreneurship education plays a critical role in determining entrepreneurial intention, but its effectiveness depends on several mediating and moderating factors. While many studies confirm a positive relationship, others highlight that entrepreneurship education alone may not be sufficient to stimulate entrepreneurial intention without the support of psychological factors (e.g., self-efficacy and motivation) and contextual factors (e.g., institutional support and entrepreneurial ecosystem). From a TPB perspective, entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intention primarily by strengthening attitude toward entrepreneurship and perceived behavioural control. Students who acquire entrepreneurial knowledge are more likely to perceive entrepreneurship as desirable and achievable. Nevertheless, other studies argue that entrepreneurship education alone may not be adequate to foster entrepreneurial intention unless it is complemented by mentorship, practical experience, and institutional support systems (Mensah et al., 2023).

Proposition 1: Entrepreneurship education is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

Creativity and Entrepreneurial Intention

Creativity has increasingly been recognised as a critical antecedent of entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurship requires individuals to identify opportunities, develop innovative solutions, and create value under uncertain conditions (Gindes et al., 2023). Consequently, creative individuals often possess greater capability to envision entrepreneurial possibilities and develop innovative business concepts. Several studies demonstrate that creativity significantly enhances entrepreneurial attitudes, entrepreneurial confidence, and entrepreneurial intention among university students. Creative individuals are more likely to identify entrepreneurial opportunities, generate viable business ideas, and perceive entrepreneurship as a desirable career option.

Shi et al., (2020) studied the relationship between creativity and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) on entrepreneurial intention using a survey of 523 university students in China and found that individuals with a high level of creativity can obtain a positive attitude and high self-belief in entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, a recent study investigated a sample of 390 university students in Pakistan and found the significant impact of creativity in the relationship between Creativity and entrepreneurial intention (Murad et al., 2021). More precisely, the results of various studies confirmed that creativity significantly influences the individuals' interest in starting a business. In addition, previous empirical literature showed a positive association between creativity and entrepreneurial intention (Liu et al., 2020)

Nevertheless, creativity does not automatically translate into entrepreneurial intention. Many individuals possess creative abilities but lack the confidence, support systems, or practical guidance required to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. This suggests that contextual factors may influence whether creativity results in entrepreneurial intention. Within TPB, creativity contributes to entrepreneurial intention by strengthening both entrepreneurial attitude and perceived behavioural control. Creative individuals often perceive themselves as

capable of solving problems and exploiting opportunities, thereby increasing entrepreneurial feasibility perceptions.

Proposition 2: Creativity is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

Conceptual Framework

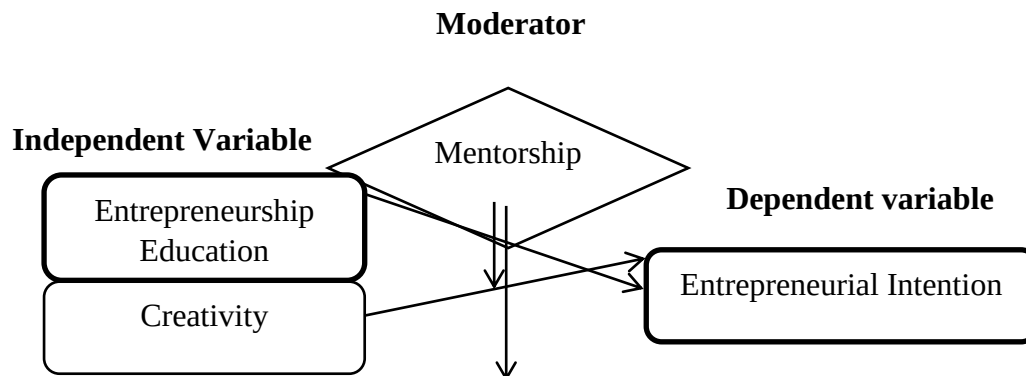


Figure I: Conceptual Framework

The framework suggests that Mentorship plays a crucial role in moderating the effects of and Entrepreneurship Education and Creativity on Entrepreneurial Intention. It posits that individuals high in Mentorship are more likely to exhibit stronger relationships between, Entrepreneurship Education and creativity and Entrepreneurial Intention. In other words, the impact of Entrepreneurship Education and creativity and Entrepreneurial Intention is expected to be more pronounced among individuals with a high level of Mentorship.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), established by Ajzen, remains one of the most widely applied theories for explaining entrepreneurial intention. The theory proposes that an individual's intention to perform a particular behaviour is determined by three antecedents: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020).

Attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a behaviour. Subjective norms refer to perceived social pressure from significant others regarding whether a behaviour should be performed. Perceived behavioural control reflects an individual's perception of their capability and confidence to perform a particular behaviour successfully. Within entrepreneurship research, TPB has constantly demonstrated strong explanatory power in predicting entrepreneurial intention among university students and graduates. Recent studies continue to validate the applicability of TPB in explaining entrepreneurial intention across diverse educational and cultural contexts. Entrepreneurship education influences entrepreneurial intention by strengthening entrepreneurial attitudes and perceived behavioural control, while creativity contributes to positive entrepreneurial attitudes and confidence in opportunity recognition. Furthermore, mentorship can strengthen subjective

norms and perceived behavioural control through guidance, social support, role modelling, and entrepreneurial feedback.

Even though TPB has been widely applied in entrepreneurial intention research, existing studies mostly focus on direct antecedents of intention and provide limited explanation regarding the contextual conditions under which educational and cognitive factors translate into entrepreneurial intention. Subsequently, this study extends TPB by introducing entrepreneurial mentorship as a boundary condition that strengthens the relationships between entrepreneurship education, creativity, and entrepreneurial intention.

Mentorship as a Moderator

Mentorship is a developmental relationship in which an experienced individual provides guidance, knowledge, and psychosocial support to a less experienced person. In the context of entrepreneurship education, mentorship allows students to gain practical insights, industry knowledge, and professional networks that facilitate entrepreneurial learning (Gindes et al., 2023). Mentors often serve as role models, providing students with inspiration and confidence to pursue entrepreneurial careers (Baggen et al., 2022). Through mentorship, students can develop stronger entrepreneurial competencies, improve opportunity recognition skills, and gain greater confidence in starting a business. Previous research suggests that mentorship can strengthen the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention by providing practical exposure and experiential learning opportunities (Winkler et al., 2023). Similarly, mentorship can reinforce the impact of creativity by encouraging individuals to pursue business thoughts and entrepreneurial success.

Entrepreneurship education provides theoretical knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. However, students often face challenges in applying classroom knowledge to real-world entrepreneurial situations. Mentorship can bridge this gap by translating entrepreneurial knowledge into practical venture-development guidance. Mentors help students understand market realities, validate entrepreneurial ideas, provide business feedback, facilitate networking opportunities, and reduce uncertainty associated with venture creation (Sun et al., 2023). Therefore, entrepreneurship education is likely to produce stronger entrepreneurial intention when entrepreneurial mentorship is available.

Creativity enables individuals to generate novel and useful business ideas. However, creative ideas alone may not lead to entrepreneurial intention unless individuals receive support and validation. Mentors play an important role in validating entrepreneurial ideas, providing constructive feedback, connecting students with entrepreneurial networks, and reducing uncertainty associated with venture implementation. Mentorship therefore increases the likelihood that creative individuals will perceive their ideas as feasible entrepreneurial opportunities. Through idea validation, entrepreneurial role modelling, networking support, and venture guidance, mentorship amplifies the effect of creativity on entrepreneurial intention. (Murad et al., 2021).

Proposition 3: The positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention is stronger when access to entrepreneurial mentorship is high

Proposition 4: The positive relationship between creativity and entrepreneurial intention is stronger when access to entrepreneurial mentorship is high.

Conclusion and Direction for Future Research

This study provides a conceptual framework that explains how entrepreneurship education and creativity influence entrepreneurial intention, with mentorship acting as a moderating factor. By integrating these variables within the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study offers a deeper understanding of the psychological and educational factors that shape students' entrepreneurial aspirations.

Future research should empirically test the proposed model using quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling. Additionally, comparative studies across different universities and countries could provide further insights into the role of mentorship in strengthening entrepreneurial intention among students.

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