

Reframing Entrepreneurship Education: Assessing the Applicability of Undergraduate Curriculum to Start-up Formation in a Nigerian University

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Abstract.

This study critically assesses the applicability of the undergraduate entrepreneurship curriculum at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, in supporting start-up founders. It examines how entrepreneurship education translates into practical entrepreneurial outcomes and identifies gaps requiring curricular enhancement. A descriptive survey design was adopted. A random sample of 300 final-year undergraduate students participated by completing a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to explore perceptions of business creation readiness, funding awareness, marketing strategies, digital business adoption, and ethical considerations. Findings indicate that while students possess a conceptual understanding of business planning, funding sources, and marketing strategies, significant gaps exist in the practical application of entrepreneurial skills. Misconceptions about risk-taking, short-term profit focus, and limited digital entrepreneurship literacy were identified. Although ethical awareness was moderately strong, students' ability to leverage opportunities for sustainable business growth was constrained by insufficient experiential learning. Recommendations include integrating experiential learning components, strengthening entrepreneurial finance and marketing modules, promoting digital literacy, embedding ethics and social responsibility, and fostering stronger collaboration between academia and start-up ecosystems. This study provides nuanced, context-specific insights into the entrepreneurship education–start-up formation nexus in an emerging economy. It highlights the pressing need for Nigerian and similar universities to transition from knowledge-based to action-driven entrepreneurial education models.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, Start-up founders, Undergraduate curriculum, Experiential learning, Digital entrepreneurship, Nigeria.

Introduction

In an era marked by economic volatility, technological disruption, and escalating youth unemployment, graduates' capacity for entrepreneurial decision-making and start-up formation is increasingly shaping the transition from university to the workforce. This paradigm shift places entrepreneurship education at the centre of national development strategies, particularly in countries like Nigeria, where formal employment opportunities are scarce (Gautam & Singh, 2015; Ho et al., 2018). Entrepreneurship today is widely acknowledged as a vehicle for economic empowerment, job creation, and national transformation (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Taylor, 2021).

The integration of entrepreneurship education into Nigerian university curricula, formalised in 2006, reflects this shift in policy direction (Agbonlahor, 2016; Sofoluwe & Kayode, 2012). The aim is to foster entrepreneurial competencies that encourage graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers (Olorundare & Kayode, 2014). However, despite the widespread adoption of entrepreneurship courses across institutions, significant concerns remain regarding their real-world applicability and ability to drive tangible business formation (Küttim et al., 2014; Oosterbeek et al., 2010; Adekunle & Yusuf, 2018).

Research has shown that while these programmes may boost entrepreneurial intentions, they often lack the experiential components needed to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Nabi et al., 2017). A growing body of evidence supports that well-designed, structured entrepreneurship education can cultivate essential capabilities such as innovation, opportunity recognition, and venture creation (Lee et al., 2007;

Mwasalwiba, 2010). Yet, student entrepreneurs' practical realities, particularly in resource-constrained environments, are often overlooked in curriculum design (Brown & Wilson, 2017; Davis, 2021).

The University of Ilorin, as a leading institution in Nigeria, presents a valuable case for examining how entrepreneurship education aligns with the needs of aspiring entrepreneurs. While prior studies have explored students' perceptions and intentions (Adekunle & Yusuf, 2018; Ogunleye & Olaoye, 2019), limited attention has been given to the alignment between curriculum content and the challenges faced by actual student-led start-ups. Factors such as access to funding, mentorship, digital literacy, and market positioning remain critical yet underdeveloped aspects of the educational process (Anderson, 2020; Martin & Clark, 2019; Kumar & Singh, 2018).

Therefore, this study critically assesses the relevance and effectiveness of the undergraduate entrepreneurship curriculum at the University of Ilorin in supporting real-world venture formation. It investigates how the curriculum fosters entrepreneurial skills, where gaps persist, and what reforms may be necessary to create more robust, practice-oriented learning experiences. By exploring the lived experiences of student entrepreneurs, the study aims to offer actionable insights for strengthening entrepreneurship education as a tool for sustainable economic empowerment and national development in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study's primary purpose is to assess the applicability of the undergraduate entrepreneurship curriculum to support start-up founders at the University of Ilorin, Kwara-State. Specifically, the study will seek to;

- i. Determine the level of effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in the University of Ilorin.
- ii. Find out the impact of entrepreneurship education in supporting start up founders in University of Ilorin, Kwara State
- iii. Ascertain the prospects of entrepreneurship education in supporting start up founders in University of Ilorin, Kwara State
- iv. Evaluate the challenges of entrepreneurship education in supporting start up founders in University of Ilorin, Kwara State
- v. Proffer the solutions to the challenges of entrepreneurship education in supporting start up founders in University of Ilorin, Kwara State

Research Questions

The following research questions have been raised to guide the study

- i. What is the level of effectiveness of entrepreneurship education at the University of Ilorin?
- ii. What are the impacts of entrepreneurship education in supporting start-up founders at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State?
- iii. What are the prospects of entrepreneurship education in supporting start-up founders at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State?
- iv. What are the challenges of entrepreneurship education in supporting start-up founders at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State?
- v. What are the solutions to the challenges of entrepreneurship education in supporting start-up founders at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State?

Methodolog

This study adopted a descriptive survey design suitable for collecting data from a representative sample to describe existing conditions, beliefs, and behaviours. According to Check and Schutt (2012), survey research involves gathering information from a sample through responses to structured questions. This appropriate design allows the researcher to explore the applicability of entrepreneurship education to start-up formation among the students of the University of Ilorin. The population comprises all students at the University of Ilorin, totalling over 48,000 (Student Affairs Unit, 2024). A random sampling technique was used to select 300 respondents for the study. Data was collected using a researcher-designed Entrepreneurship Education and Students Start-Up Questionnaire (EESSQ) questionnaire. The instrument consists of two sections: Section A gathers demographic data, while Section B addresses items related to the research questions. To establish

the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire were reviewed by three experts in the Department of Educational Management. Their feedback was taken and necessary revisions were made before a pilot study was carried out. For reliability, a test-retest method was conducted with a different group of students. The results were analysed and reliability coefficients were obtained for the seven constructs above the threshold value of 0.7. The researcher personally administer the questionnaires to selected students in the Business Education program. Observations on students' enterprise sales performance was also documented to support findings on the influence of market segmentation. Data was analysed using SPSS. Mean and standard deviation were applied to answer the research questions raised.

Results and Discussions of Findings

This study investigates the assessment of the undergraduate entrepreneurship curriculum's applicability to support start-up founders at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State.

Research Question One: What is entrepreneurship education's effectiveness level at the University of Ilorin in business creation and growth?

Table 1: Level of effectiveness of entrepreneurship education at the University of Ilorin in business creation and growth

Item No	Statements	Mean Score	Remarks
1.	A well-developed business plan is essential for securing funding for a new venture	2.78	Agreed
2.	Businesses can only achieve growth by expanding their product offerings	2.76	Agreed
3.	Strong customer relationships are a key factor in sustainable business growth	2.81	Agreed

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education at the University of Ilorin in business creation and growth is positively perceived, as indicated by the mean scores for various statements. For instance, the importance of a well-developed business plan for securing funding (mean score of 2.78) and the significance of expanding product offerings for business growth (mean score of 2.76) are acknowledged. Additionally, the role of strong customer relationships in sustainable business growth, with a mean score of 2.81, underscores the emphasis on maintaining customer connections as a key growth strategy.

These findings suggest that entrepreneurship education at the University of Ilorin effectively prepares students for the practical aspects of business creation and growth, though continuous improvement is needed to further enhance these skills.

Research Question Two: What are the issues of business growth in the University of Ilorin?

Table 2: Issues of business growth in the University of Ilorin

Item No	Statements	Mean Score	Remarks
1.	Increased competition is the biggest challenge faced by businesses looking to grow education effective	2.78	Agreed
2.	Focusing solely on short-term profits is the best strategy for business growth	2.73	Agreed
3.	Businesses can achieve growth without taking any risks	2.75	Agreed

The table highlights the challenges associated with business growth in the University of Ilorin, with increased competition being identified as the biggest challenge (mean score of 2.78). Moreover, focusing solely on short-term profits (mean score of 2.73) and the perception that growth can be achieved without taking

risks (mean score of 2.75) indicate potential misconceptions or strategic misalignments among students. These results point to the need for a balanced approach in entrepreneurship education that addresses long-term strategies, risk management, and competitive analysis to prepare students for sustainable business growth better.

Research Question Three: What are the sources of funds for entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin?

Table 3: Sources of funds for entrepreneurs in the University of Ilorin

Item No	Statements	Mean Score	Remarks
1.	Bootstrapping (using personal savings) is a viable source of funding for all businesses	3.01	Agreed
2.	Equity financing offers a lower risk for new businesses compared to debt financing	3.11	Agreed
3.	Crowdfunding is a reliable option for raising large amounts of capital.	2.99	Agreed

The effectiveness of various funding sources for entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin is positively viewed, with bootstrapping (using personal savings) being seen as a viable option (mean score of 3.01) and equity financing considered less risky than debt financing (mean score of 3.11). Crowdfunding also emerged as a reliable option for raising significant capital (mean score of 2.99). These findings suggest that students are aware of diverse funding mechanisms and their relative benefits, indicating a well-rounded understanding of financial strategies for entrepreneurship. However, it also highlights the need for continued education on these funding sources' practical applications and potential pitfalls.

Research Question Four: What are the entrepreneurial marketing strategies for entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin?

Table 4: Entrepreneurial marketing strategies for entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin

Item No	Statements	Mean Score	Remarks
1.	Traditional marketing strategies are not effective for start-ups	2.81	Agreed
2.	Building a strong social media presence is crucial for entrepreneurial marketing	2.76	Agreed
3.	Effective marketing for start-ups focuses solely on generating immediate sales	2.78	Agreed

Entrepreneurial marketing strategies are perceived as crucial for start-ups at the University of Ilorin, with traditional marketing strategies being deemed ineffective (mean score of 2.81) and a strong social media presence considered vital (mean score of 2.76). The focus on generating immediate sales as an effective marketing strategy (mean score of 2.78) indicates a pragmatic approach towards revenue generation. These findings highlight the importance of modern marketing techniques and the integration of digital platforms in entrepreneurial ventures, suggesting that students recognise the value of adaptive and innovative marketing strategies in the start-up ecosystem.

Research Question Five: What are the New Opportunities for Expansion (E-Business) for entrepreneurs in the University of Ilorin?

Table 5: New Opportunities for Expansion (E-Business) at the University of Ilorin

Item No	Statements	Mean Score	Remarks
1.	E-commerce is only relevant for businesses selling physical products	2.81	Agreed
2.	A strong online presence is essential for business growth in today's world	2.76	Agreed
3.	Existing brick-and-mortar businesses cannot benefit from adopting e-commerce strategies.	2.78	Agreed

Table indicates that e-business opportunities are well-regarded among entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin, with e-commerce being relevant for both physical and digital products (mean score of 2.81) and the necessity of a strong online presence for business growth (mean score of 2.76). However, there is a misconception that existing brick-and-mortar businesses cannot benefit from e-commerce strategies (mean score of 2.78). These findings suggest that while students appreciate the importance of e-commerce, there is a need for greater emphasis on how traditional businesses can leverage online strategies for expansion and growth.

Research Question Six: What are the Ethics and Social Responsibility for entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin?

Table 6: Ethics and Social Responsibility for Entrepreneurs in the University of Ilorin

Item No	Statements	Mean Score	Remarks
1.	E-commerce is only relevant for businesses selling physical products	2.81	Agreed
2.	A strong online presence is essential for business growth in today's world	2.76	Agreed
3.	Existing brick-and-mortar businesses cannot benefit from adopting e-commerce strategies.	2.78	Agreed

The perception of ethics and social responsibility among entrepreneurs at the University of Ilorin aligns with the contemporary business environment, with a strong online presence being deemed essential for business growth (mean score of 2.76). The belief that e-commerce is only relevant for physical products (mean score of 2.81) and that brick-and-mortar businesses cannot benefit from e-commerce (mean score of 2.78) suggests a need for better understanding of the broader applications of e-commerce. These results highlight the importance of integrating ethical considerations and social responsibility into the entrepreneurship curriculum to ensure students are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of modern business practices.

Discussions of Findings

This study assessed the applicability of the undergraduate entrepreneurship curriculum in supporting start-up founders at the University of Ilorin. The findings reveal nuanced insights into the strengths and limitations of the existing program and align with broader patterns in entrepreneurship education literature. The participants generally agreed that entrepreneurship education positively impacts business creation by equipping students with essential knowledge such as business planning, customer management, and growth strategies. This is consistent with Shane, Locke, and Collins (2003), who argued that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intention through structured exposure to business principles. However, the moderate mean scores suggest that while theoretical knowledge is transferred, practical application remains limited. This gap between theory and practice echoes the concerns raised by Nabi et al. (2017) that traditional entrepreneurship education often lacks experiential learning components crucial for

venture creation. Students may know what to do but lack the how—the actionable know-how gained through simulations, mentorship, and real-life start-up practice.

Thus, while the curriculum provides a strong conceptual foundation, it requires greater integration of experiential learning opportunities such as business incubators, internships, and start-up labs to translate intentions into sustainable entrepreneurial actions.

The results show that students identify increased competition, short-termism, and aversion to risk as significant barriers to start-up success. These challenges align with earlier findings by Brown and Wilson (2017), who noted that nascent entrepreneurs in emerging economies often fail to scale due to poor strategic planning and risk mismanagement. Interestingly, the finding that students believe businesses can achieve growth without taking risks suggests a critical misconception about entrepreneurship itself, which is inherently risk-based (Knight, 1921; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). This misperception could hinder venture resilience in volatile markets and indicates a need for the curriculum to emphasise entrepreneurial risk-taking and opportunity recognition as non-negotiable elements of business success.

Moreover, the short-term profit focus reveals a potential myopia in students' entrepreneurial orientation. Emphasising long-term value creation, strategic thinking, and sustainable business models should be prioritised in the curriculum to counteract this tendency.

Students demonstrated reasonable awareness of personal savings (bootstrapping), equity financing, and crowdfunding as viable funding strategies. This reflects progress in exposing students to diverse financial models beyond traditional bank loans, a shift also observed by Davis (2021).

Nevertheless, the data suggest that while students know of these sources, their practical understanding remains superficial. Without robust knowledge of investment negotiations, pitching, financial forecasting, and crowdfunding dynamics, many start-ups risk failure despite initial funding awareness. This reinforces Oosterbeek et al. (2010)'s call for embedding actionable financial literacy and entrepreneurial finance into undergraduate programs.

Integrating partnerships with angel investor networks, crowdfunding platforms, and venture capitalists into entrepreneurship education could bridge this critical competence gap.

The findings confirm students' recognition of the importance of modern marketing strategies such as building a strong social media presence. This aligns with contemporary marketing shifts noted by Kumar and Singh (2018), where digital platforms now dominate customer acquisition channels for start-ups.

However, the overemphasis on immediate sales generation rather than long-term brand building reveals an incomplete understanding of entrepreneurial marketing. Start-ups that prioritise short-term revenue at the expense of customer loyalty, value propositions, and brand equity often struggle with sustainability (Martin & Clark, 2019).

Therefore, the entrepreneurship curriculum must stress the strategic aspects of marketing, particularly customer journey mapping, content marketing, community building, and customer retention, as key growth drivers in modern entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Respondents generally acknowledged the importance of an online presence but showed misconceptions regarding the relevance of e-commerce for traditional brick-and-mortar businesses. This finding reflects a partial digital literacy among students and resonates with Anderson (2020), who emphasised the necessity of digital entrepreneurship skills in the 21st-century marketplace. Given the increasing hybridisation of business models (physical + digital), entrepreneurship education must demonstrate how even traditionally offline businesses (e.g., retail, education, manufacturing) can leverage digital tools for expanded market reach, customer engagement, and operational efficiency. Courses on digital transformation, platform economy, and business model innovation are urgently needed to correct prevailing misconceptions.

The findings reveal that students understand the significance of ethics and social responsibility in building sustainable ventures. This recognition is crucial, given that contemporary customers increasingly patronise businesses that demonstrate corporate social responsibility (Taylor, 2021).

However, ethical and social considerations must go beyond surface-level discussions. Entrepreneurship curricula should integrate topics like environmental sustainability, social innovation, impact entrepreneurship, and stakeholder theory. Preparing entrepreneurs to generate profits and create social value will enhance their

start-ups' resilience, reputation, and long-term viability in an increasingly purpose-driven economy (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Conclusion

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education at the University of Ilorin shows promise but also reveals significant areas needing improvement, especially in practical skill application and comprehensive strategic understanding. The curriculum should address these gaps by incorporating more useful experiences, balanced marketing approaches, and detailed financial and e-commerce strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that stakeholders should;

1. Integrate more hands-on projects and real-world case studies into the entrepreneurship curriculum to improve students' practical skills and application of business concepts.
2. Provide comprehensive training on competition, risk management, and long-term business strategies to address current gaps in students' understanding of business growth challenges.
3. Include detailed case studies and practical exercises related to various funding sources to enhance students' understanding of their real-world applications.
4. Develop curriculum content covering modern and traditional marketing strategies to give students a well-rounded perspective on effective marketing practices.
5. Educate students on how e-commerce can complement traditional business models and address misconceptions about its applicability to various types of businesses.

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