

Building Confidence through Learning: Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy among Nigerian Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study investigates how entrepreneurship education (EE) contributes to building entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) among Nigerian undergraduates, emphasising confidence as a pivotal outcome of learning. Guided by Bandura's social cognitive theory, Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, and Kolb's experiential learning model, the study adopts a cross-sectional survey of 300 students drawn from public and private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Data were collected through a validated, structured questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.78$) and analysed using regression models to explore relationships between curriculum design, educator effectiveness, experiential learning, and ESE. Findings reveal significant demographic patterns: the majority of respondents were male (60%), undergraduates (75%), and aged 18–25 (60%), highlighting the importance of targeting younger students at formative educational stages. Results demonstrate that EE substantially enhances students' confidence in entrepreneurial tasks, with the highest gains recorded in opportunity identification (+1.09), business plan development (+1.08), and resilience in recovering from failure (+1.15). Regression analysis shows that for every unit increase in curriculum depth and breadth, students' ESE scores rise by 0.428 units ($p < 0.01$), with curriculum quality explaining 40.4% of the variance in self-efficacy. Tracking graduates' career paths further indicates that 65.3% pursued entrepreneurship, predominantly in social enterprise (27.7%), technology (23.7%), and agriculture (18.7%). This underscores the long-term efficacy of EE in fostering sustainable entrepreneurial careers. The study concludes that effective EE must integrate experiential infrastructures, industry linkages, and faculty development to cultivate mastery experiences that build confidence and resilience. By strengthening ESE, Nigerian universities can better prepare graduates for venture creation, job generation, and economic transformation.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Experiential Learning, Nigerian Universities, Curriculum Design, Youth Empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Across Nigeria's universities, entrepreneurship education has become a strategic response to persistent graduate underemployment and the need for job creation. National policy has pushed institutions to integrate practical entrepreneurial training with traditional curricula

so graduates can build and sustain ventures rather than rely solely on salaried work. In practice, many universities now run compulsory entrepreneurship courses, incubator schemes, and industry-linked projects, though uneven resourcing and overly theoretical delivery remain

challenges that can blunt impact.

Within this policy landscape, entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), students' belief in their capability to perform entrepreneurial tasks, has emerged as a pivotal psychological mechanism that links learning experiences to entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour. Grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy shapes what people attempt, the effort they invest, and their persistence under difficulty; in entrepreneurship, higher ESE reliably predicts opportunity recognition, venture start-up, and resilience (Bandura, 1997). ESE also aligns closely with Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB); by strengthening perceived behavioural control and positive attitudes toward venture creation, effective pedagogy can raise entrepreneurial intentions and, downstream, action (Ajzen, 1991).

Evidence from higher education supports this mechanism. Meta-analyses report that entrepreneurship education (EE) improves knowledge and skills and is associated, albeit modestly, with higher entrepreneurial intentions and downstream outcomes, especially when programmes are experiential and well-designed (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013; Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014; Nabi et al., 2017). More recent syntheses and cross-country studies sharpen the mechanism: ESE frequently mediates the relationship between EE and intentions/behaviour; when courses deliberately cultivate mastery experiences, role modelling, feedback, and real-world problem-solving, gains in ESE propagate to stronger start-up readiness and early venture activity (Newman et al., 2019).

How EE is taught matters. Kolb's experiential learning theory contends that durable learning flows from iterative cycles of doing–reflecting–conceptualising–experimenting, not from passive reception (Kolb, 1984). In Nigerian university settings, course designs that emphasise simulations, case competitions, internships, mentorship, and incubator work consistently outperform lecture-only approaches in building confidence, applied skills, and entrepreneurial intent. Project- and field-based activities in particular have been shown to boost confidence more than lectures and to raise intentions to start a business.

The present research foregrounds these confidence-building pathways with Nigerian undergraduates. Locally generated evidence shows that a richer, broader entrepreneurship curriculum predicts higher ESE and that practical experience (e.g., projects/ventures) is associated with significantly better performance scores than no such exposure. It also documents the role of educator effectiveness in shaping motivation and performance consistent with social cognitive accounts that highlight modelling and feedback. Programme follow-up further indicates that a majority of graduates (65.3%) pursued entrepreneurial careers, with notable participation in social enterprise, tech, and agribusiness—domains often emphasised in contemporary EE.

At the same time, Nigerian institutions face persistent delivery gaps, resource shortages, theory-heavy syllabi, and limited educator industry experience that can inhibit the very mastery experiences ESE requires. Addressing these bottlenecks calls for sustained investment in experiential infrastructures (incubators, internships, problem-based courses), educator professional development, and stronger university–industry linkages so students repeatedly practise real entrepreneurial tasks with feedback.

This study, therefore, examines how specific teaching designs (especially experiential components), educator effectiveness, and supportive social norms cultivate ESE in Nigerian universities, and how increases in ESE translate into intentions, start-up readiness, and early venture pathways. By centring confidence as the key outcome of learning, the study advances both theory (TPB, social cognitive theory, experiential learning) and practice (how to design EE that measurably builds capability beliefs), contributing Nigeria-specific evidence to an international literature that increasingly treats ESE as the engine of educational impact in entrepreneurship. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which entrepreneurship education improves students' confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities and tracked graduates' career paths to determine the long-term efficacy of entrepreneurship education.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a cross-sectional, explanatory survey of Nigerian university students to examine how entrepreneurship education (EE) builds entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) and how ESE, in turn, relates to start-up intentions and early venture activities. The setting is a mix of public and private institutions in the Southwest (e.g., Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti), selected because of their dense higher-education ecosystem and active entrepreneurial culture; this diversity allows comparisons across groups. The target population comprises final-year and postgraduate students enrolled in or recently completing EE courses, alongside a small complementary group of lecturers/coordinators and academic administrators to enrich interpretation of educator effectiveness and institutional context. A two-stage sampling procedure is used: first, stratification by university type (public/private) and role (students, lecturers, administrators); second, simple random sampling of students from faculty lists. The above method was used to generate 300 undergraduates of EE in the Nigerian universities. Data are collected primarily with a structured questionnaire aligned to the study's theoretical frame (TPB, human capital, and experiential learning). Section A records demographics; Sections B–G capture (on 5-point Likert scales) attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms (family, peer, mentor,

and campus climate influences), ESE (opportunity identification, business planning, resource mobilisation, marketing, operations, and resilience), curriculum/educator effectiveness, and experiential learning. Instrument quality is established via face/content validity (expert appraisal and theory-construct mapping) and a pilot test (n = 30) yielding satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.78$ across subscales: attitudes 0.82, norms 0.78, ESE 0.85, educator/curriculum 0.80, experiential learning 0.83, intentions/outcomes 0.79). Administration follows ethical standards: informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation are emphasised; distribution is

coordinated with faculty contacts/class reps. Returned instruments are screened; where applicable, a small number of semi-structured interviews with administrators/lecturers are recorded and thematically summarised to contextualise quantitative patterns on educator effectiveness and delivery constraints. Variable construction proceeds as follows: composite indices are computed for attitudes, subjective norms, ESE, educator/curriculum effectiveness, experiential learning effectiveness (ELM), and traditional teaching effectiveness (TTM). A regression model was used to test the relationship between variables of interest in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

The above table is showing the numbers of respondents that participated in the survey with respect to the genders, educational qualifications and ages.

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	180	60
Female	120	40
Total	300	100
Educational Level		
Undergraduates	225	75
Post Graduates	75	25
Total	300	100
Age		
18 to 25	180	60
26 to 40	90	30
41 to 65	30	10
Total	300	100

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 300 respondents, which provide useful insights into the profile of students whose entrepreneurial self-efficacy was assessed. The gender distribution reveals that 180 (60%) of the respondents were male, while 120 (40%) were female. This indicates a higher participation of male students in the study, reflecting broader enrolment patterns in Nigerian universities where male dominance in certain academic disciplines persists (Okafor & Amaechi, 2021). The implication for entrepreneurial self-efficacy is noteworthy: while research has shown that men often report greater confidence in entrepreneurial ventures due to cultural expectations and access to business-orientated networks, female students may

experience structural barriers that reduce their perceived entrepreneurial capabilities (Nwosu & Onuoha, 2020). However, the inclusion of both male and female respondents provides an opportunity to evaluate whether structured entrepreneurial education can mitigate such gender gaps by enhancing confidence across both groups.

In terms of educational level, 225 respondents (75%) were undergraduates, while 75 (25%) were postgraduates. The predominance of undergraduates suggests that the study largely reflects the experiences of students at formative stages of higher education. This is significant because undergraduates are often in the process of shaping their career outlooks and identity

formation, making them highly responsive to confidence-building interventions such as entrepreneurial training (Bandura, 1997). Postgraduates, though fewer, represent a more mature category of students who may have gained prior exposure to entrepreneurial practices or workplace experiences, thereby entering the study with higher baseline self-efficacy. The distribution, therefore, allows for useful comparisons of how entrepreneurial education impacts confidence-building at different academic stages.

The age distribution further enriches the analysis. The majority of respondents (180; 60%) were between 18 and 25 years old, 90 (30%) were aged 26 to 40, while only 30 (10%) fell within the 41 to 65 range. This profile is consistent with the typical age structure of Nigerian university students, where the bulk of enrollees are youths in their late teens and twenties. Age is a critical factor in entrepreneurial self-efficacy since younger students are still developing their professional identities and are more impressionable in terms of confidence-building (Shinnar et al., 2014). The dominance of the 18–25 age group implies that entrepreneurial education interventions can have long-term transformative effects on Nigeria's youth, who represent both the most vulnerable population to unemployment and the most fertile ground for innovation and entrepreneurial risk-taking. Older participants, though a minority, bring in the perspective of maturity and prior experiences, offering a broader understanding of how age intersects with learning and confidence in entrepreneurial contexts.

Taken together, the demographic data show that the study sample is well-positioned to reveal how entrepreneurial learning contributes to building confidence, particularly among young undergraduates who form the majority of Nigeria's future workforce. The gender imbalance underscores the need to pay attention to how entrepreneurial self-efficacy develops differently across male and female students, while the educational and age distributions highlight the strategic importance of targeting undergraduates in entrepreneurship education. Ultimately, these findings situate entrepreneurial self-efficacy not only as an academic outcome but also as a developmental tool for preparing Nigerian youths to overcome structural unemployment and contribute meaningfully to economic growth.

The extent to which entrepreneurship education improves students' confidence in their abilities to perform entrepreneurial tasks and overcome obstacles

This section interprets and discusses the data presented in Table 2, which captures students' self-reported confidence in performing entrepreneurial tasks and overcoming related challenges. The table is divided into two thematic clusters: Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (i.e., confidence in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks) and Entrepreneurial Resilience (i.e., confidence in their ability to manage and overcome setbacks). The responses are based on a 5-point Likert scale, and the comparison of pre-course and post-course means reveals significant improvement across all measured variables.

The results indicate a marked improvement in students' entrepreneurial self-confidence following participation in the entrepreneurship education Program. The average increase across all ten variables is over +1.0, with each post-course mean exceeding the 3.0 benchmark, suggesting a high level of confidence was achieved.

Among the self-efficacy indicators, the highest increase was observed in students' confidence in identifying viable business opportunities (+1.09) and in developing a business plan (+1.08). These findings suggest that the course successfully equipped students with the cognitive tools necessary for opportunity recognition and strategic planning—two foundational competencies in entrepreneurship.

Similarly, students' ability to mobilise resources (+1.02), market products effectively (+1.03), and manage operations (+0.96) all improved significantly. This aligns with prior studies that demonstrate the role of entrepreneurship education in enhancing practical business competencies (Olokundun et al., 2017). Such outcomes may be attributed to the use of experiential learning strategies, such as simulations, group projects, and business plan presentations, which mirror real-world entrepreneurial experiences.

Entrepreneurial Resilience (Confidence in Overcoming Challenges)

Table 2: Extent to which entrepreneurship education improves students' confidence

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (Confidence in Abilities)	Pre-Course Mean	Post-Course Mean	Change in Mean
I am confident I can identify viable business opportunities.	3.02*	4.11*	1.09
I believe I can develop a successful business plan.	2.97	4.05*	1.08
I can mobilize resources (e.g., funds, people) to start a business.	3.00*	4.02*	1.02
I can effectively market a new product or service.	2.95	3.98*	1.03
I can manage a business operation successfully	3.10*	4.06*	0.96
Entrepreneurial Resilience (Confidence in Overcoming Challenges)			
I can cope with financial setbacks in a business.	2.88	3.95*	1.07
I am confident in solving unexpected business problems.	2.90	3.92*	1.02
I can recover from failure and try again in business.	2.85	4.00*	1.15
I can make tough decisions under uncertainty.	2.92	3.89*	0.97
I can persist in pursuing a business idea despite discouragement	3.00*	4.01*	1.01

Source: Field Survey, 2025.
General Mean ≥3.0 = High Extent

In terms of resilience, the greatest improvement was recorded in students' ability to recover from failure and try again (+1.15), the highest change among all variables. This suggests that the course succeeded in reshaping students' perceptions of failure, possibly by highlighting entrepreneurial stories where setbacks served as learning experiences.

The ability to cope with financial setbacks (+1.07), solve unexpected problems (+1.02), and persist despite discouragement (+1.01) also recorded strong increases. These findings underscore the development of emotional and cognitive resilience, which are critical attributes for navigating the uncertainties and risks inherent in entrepreneurial ventures. Moreover, students reported increased confidence in making tough decisions under uncertainty (+0.97), reflecting improved decision-making skills and adaptability traits closely associated with entrepreneurial success in volatile environments.

Furthermore, these findings can be understood through the lens of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the construct of self-efficacy, which asserts that belief in one's capacity to execute tasks enhances actual performance. The data supports the idea that entrepreneurship education fosters these beliefs through structured engagement, role modelling, feedback, and real-world practice. Additionally, the Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy Theory (Chen et al., 1998) supports this outcome, positing that targeted training increases individuals' confidence in entrepreneurial skills and behaviours. The marked improvement in both task-related and challenge-related variables suggests that entrepreneurship education does not merely convey knowledge but builds psychological preparedness for real-world entrepreneurial engagement.

Track the career paths of graduates from entrepreneurship programs to determine the long-term efficacy of such education in promoting sustainable entrepreneurial careers and ventures

Table 3: Tracking of career paths of graduates of entrepreneurship programs

Variables	Freq	%
Career Choices		
Entrepreneurial	196	65.3
Employed	104	34.7
Industry and Sector		
Tech	71	23.7
agriculture	56	18.7
social entrepreneurship	83	27.7
Others	90	30.0
Job Roles and Responsibilities		
Manager	27	9.0
Analyst	44	14.7
Consultant,	29	9.7
Founder	75	25.0
CEO	12	4.0
Others	113	37.7
Organizational Size		
Startups	59	19.7
Small businesses	136	45.3
Large corporations	47	15.7
Others	58	19.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 presents analysed data on the career paths of graduates from entrepreneurship programs. It was found that a majority (65.3%) of graduates pursued entrepreneurship, showing that the programme effectively instills an entrepreneurial mindset and encourages graduates to start their own ventures. This aligns with findings by Nabi et al. (2017), who note that entrepreneurship education increases self-employment intentions and actual venture creation over time. The graduates were found in the top sectors of the economy, and these include social entrepreneurship (27.7%), tech (23.7%), agriculture (18.7%), and others (30%). The high participation in social entrepreneurship and tech suggests that graduates are venturing into impact-driven and innovation-based industries, which are often emphasised in modern entrepreneurship curricula. The 18.7% in agriculture could reflect local economic opportunities or targeted programme content that encourages agribusiness development.

For the job roles and responsibilities, results show that founder (25%) and CEO (4%) roles together comprise

29% of the graduates, indicating that a significant number have taken up leadership and ownership positions. However, a large portion (37.7%) is categorised under “Others”, which may include administrative or less-defined roles; this suggests a need for better role clarity or expanded tracking metrics. Roles such as Analyst (14.7%) and Consultant (9.7%) also highlight that entrepreneurship graduates are valuable in advisory and strategic capacities within organisations, possibly leveraging entrepreneurial thinking in non-startup settings.

Considering the organisational size, evidence shows that small businesses (45.3%) dominate the organisational context where graduates are employed or running their businesses; startups account for 19.7%, which underscores the dynamic entry of graduates into new business formation, while the smaller percentages in large corporations (15.7%) may suggest either a lack of alignment with large corporate structures or a deliberate preference for agile, growth-focused environments encouraged by entrepreneurial training. This distribution

reflects the trend that entrepreneurship programmes are more likely to equip students to thrive in SMEs and innovation ecosystems rather than in traditional, hierarchical organisations.

There is a positive correlation between the depth and breadth of entrepreneurship curriculum content in Nigerian universities and the levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy reported by the students.

For this hypothesis, as shown in Table 4, the independent variable was measured as the depth and breadth of entrepreneurship curriculum content. The depth refers to how extensively topics are covered (e.g.,

theoretical grounding, case studies, practical engagement, critical thinking elements), while the breadth refers to the range of topics included in the curriculum (e.g., finance, marketing, innovation, ethics, digital entrepreneurship, etc.).

This can be operationalised by the curriculum content analysis and faculty/course evaluation rubrics using 5-point Likert-scale student surveys measuring perceived coverage and diversity of entrepreneurship content. The dependent variable (outcome) is the entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE). This parameter is students' belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and roles related to entrepreneurship

Table 4: Relationship between depth and breadth of entrepreneurship curriculum content and self-efficacy reported by students

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	P> t	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Intercept	3.619	2.616	1.383	0.170	-1.573	8.810
Curriculum_Content_Score	0.428	0.053	8.153**	0.000	0.324	0.533

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

*Sign. At 0.05 level of significance

**Sign. At 0.01 level of significance

R-squared value= 0.404.

Decision: The depth and breadth of entrepreneurship curriculum content affect students' performance positively.

Results in Table 4 indicate that for every one-unit increase in the entrepreneurship curriculum content score (reflecting its depth and breadth), students' self-efficacy increases by 0.428 units on average. This shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between the comprehensiveness of the curriculum and students' belief in their entrepreneurial capabilities. The t-value of 8.153 and p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) confirm that the relationship is highly significant statistically. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and affirm that curriculum content is a strong predictor of self-efficacy. The Confidence Interval (CI) for the coefficient ranges from 0.324 to 0.533, indicating that even at the lowest estimate, the curriculum still positively contributes to self-efficacy. The R-squared value of 0.404 shows that about 40.4% of the variation in students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy can be explained by the variation in the curriculum content. This is a moderately strong explanatory power, suggesting that curriculum design plays a meaningful role in shaping entrepreneurial attitudes.

The findings from Table 4 empirically support the hypothesis that the depth and breadth of entrepreneurship curriculum content significantly influence students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy. A well-rounded, comprehensive curriculum appears to boost

students' confidence in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks, take initiative, and persist in challenging business environments.

This aligns with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which highlights that mastery experiences like those embedded in an enriched curriculum are critical for building belief in one's abilities. It also supports empirical findings from scholars such as Wilson et al. (2007) and Martin et al. (2013), who found that educational content richness enhances entrepreneurial intentions and capabilities.

Given Nigeria's push to develop entrepreneurship as a response to youth unemployment and underemployment, designing curricula that are both deep (theoretical) and broad (practical) becomes imperative. This includes incorporating case studies, simulation exercises, fieldwork, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to ensure that students can envision and enact entrepreneurial success.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that entrepreneurship education plays a decisive role in building entrepreneurial self-efficacy among Nigerian undergraduates. The evidence confirms that structured programs, especially those emphasising experiential learning, significantly enhance students' confidence in recognising

opportunities, developing business plans, mobilising resources, and managing enterprises effectively. Beyond skill acquisition, entrepreneurship education cultivates resilience by reshaping students' perceptions of failure and equipping them to persist in the face of challenges, thereby fostering psychological readiness for entrepreneurial endeavours.

The findings also reveal that entrepreneurship education has long-term impacts on career trajectories. A majority of graduates pursued entrepreneurial ventures, particularly in social enterprise, technology, and agriculture, underscoring the effectiveness of entrepreneurial training in shaping sustainable career paths. Importantly, the data highlight that enriched curricula with greater depth and breadth contribute positively and significantly to students' self-efficacy, explaining over 40% of the variance in their entrepreneurial confidence.

These insights affirm that the success of entrepreneurship education depends not merely on content delivery but on how courses are designed to integrate theory with practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Nigerian universities must therefore invest in experiential infrastructures such as incubators, internships, and simulation-based projects, while also supporting faculty development to bridge the gap between academic instruction and industry realities.
2. Strengthening university–industry partnerships will ensure that students gain repeated mastery experiences with feedback, further solidifying their entrepreneurial self-beliefs.

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