Global Educational Research Journal: 2360-7963
Vol. 13(12) December, Pp. 510-516, 2025

Full Length Paper

Curriculum Design and its Alignment with Industry Needs: Evaluating Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education is increasingly recognised as a vital strategy for addressing youth unemployment and fostering economic diversification in Nigeria. This study evaluates the design of entrepreneurship curricula in Nigerian universities and examines their alignment with industry needs, alongside the role of institutional support in shaping students' entrepreneurial aspirations. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 320 respondents across ten universities comprising students, faculty, and administrators using structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and paired t-tests were employed to analyse curriculum indicators, institutional support mechanisms, and entrepreneurial intent. Findings reveal that while most curricula demonstrate high relevance, gaps persist in comprehensiveness and industry alignment, with many programmes lacking practical exposure to real-world business challenges. Institutional support emerged as a significant determinant of entrepreneurial aspirations, with regression results ($R^2 = 0.591$, $p = 0.010$) confirming a strong positive relationship between mentorship, funding opportunities, administrative backing, and students' entrepreneurial intent. Furthermore, a pre-test/post-test analysis showed an 18.2% increase in entrepreneurial intent after students completed entrepreneurship courses, illustrating the transformative effects of structured entrepreneurial education. The study concludes that Nigerian universities must deliberately reform entrepreneurship curricula to integrate experiential learning, digital innovation, and sector-specific realities, while expanding institutional support systems to sustain students' entrepreneurial drives.

Keywords: Curriculum Design Entrepreneurship education, Industrial Needs

Accepted 10/11/2025 Published 13/12/2025

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education has become an indispensable component of higher education worldwide, and universities are recognised as critical incubators of entrepreneurial knowledge and practice. A central determinant of its success is curriculum design, which provides the framework for equipping students with relevant skills, competencies, and mindsets for entrepreneurial activity. Scholars have consistently emphasised that entrepreneurship curricula must be deliberately structured to balance theory with practice, integrating industry-aligned content and pedagogical approaches to prepare students for the dynamic realities of the labour market (Kuratko, 2005; Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education was formally institutionalised in 2006, when the National Universities Commission (NUC) directed all universities to establish compulsory General Studies (GST) courses in

entrepreneurship (Nwangwu, 2007). This policy was introduced to combat rising graduate unemployment, reduce overdependence on paid employment, and promote self-reliance among Nigerian youths. However, several Nigerian scholars argue that the implementation has been uneven and often hampered by curriculum design flaws. For example, Okebukola (2010) contends that many curricula are poorly contextualised, failing to reflect local entrepreneurial realities and sector-specific challenges. Similarly, Olufunso (2010) notes that entrepreneurship courses in many Nigerian universities remain overly theoretical, thereby limiting students' practical exposure to real business ventures.

Nigerian studies have further revealed that misalignment between curriculum content and industry needs is a major barrier to the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. Ediagbonya (2013) stresses that while the intention behind entrepreneurship curricula is laudable, the absence of strong industry inputs results in a skills mismatch, with graduates still underprepared for market challenges. In the same vein, Ibrahim and Mahmood (2016) emphasise that curricula often lack integration of critical experiential learning opportunities—such as internships, simulations, and start-up incubation—which are crucial for building entrepreneurial competencies. These deficiencies undermine the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education as a driver of national development.

Curriculum alignment with industry needs is particularly critical in Nigeria, where youth unemployment remains above 30% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). As Osibanjo (2014) explains, graduates' inability to translate classroom knowledge into viable business ideas reflects not a lack of exposure to entrepreneurship courses but the poor structuring of the curriculum. For instance, curricula in many universities rarely incorporate contemporary entrepreneurial practices such as digital marketing, fintech innovations, or agribusiness models, despite these being among the fastest-growing sectors in Nigeria's economy. As a result, students graduate with limited awareness of emerging opportunities and insufficient capacity to respond innovatively to industry demands.

Moreover, Nigerian authors have highlighted regional and institutional disparities in curriculum design. According to Adebisi and Oni (2012), private universities such as Covenant University and AUN Yola have made greater strides in embedding experiential learning and industry partnerships, while many public universities lag behind due to inadequate funding, outdated curricula, and weak collaboration with the private sector. Similarly, Adeyemo (2009) underscores that without sufficient institutional investment in practical curriculum delivery—including entrepreneurship laboratories, business plan competitions, and access to start-up capital—the impact of entrepreneurship education will remain minimal.

Globally, best practices stress the importance of curricula that integrate cross-disciplinary knowledge, digital technologies, and collaboration with industry actors (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Neck & Greene, 2011). For Nigeria to harness the full potential of entrepreneurship education, it is essential to critically evaluate and reform its curriculum design in ways that align more closely with labour market realities and national development priorities. Such alignment will not only enhance students' entrepreneurial intent but also strengthen Nigeria's economic resilience through innovation, job creation, and diversification away from oil dependency.

Therefore, evaluating curriculum design and its alignment with industry needs in Nigerian universities is critical for enhancing the impact of entrepreneurship education. It was specifically designed to evaluate the curriculum design and content for entrepreneurship studies and examine the impact of institutional support, including mentorship and funding opportunities, on the entrepreneurial aspirations and activities of students with a view to determining the alignment of this curriculum to the industrial needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative strand enables measurement of curriculum design indicators (relevance, comprehensiveness, and industry alignment), while the qualitative strand provides contextual insights into how curricula are developed and reviewed in Nigerian universities. This dual approach allows for a holistic evaluation of curriculum design and its alignment with industry needs. The research covers ten Nigerian universities, drawn from both public and private institutions across the six geopolitical zones. These universities were purposely selected because they have established entrepreneurship programs and represent diverse institutional contexts.

The study population includes: 1. Undergraduate students enrolled in entrepreneurship courses,

2. Faculty members teaching entrepreneurship-related subjects, and 3. University administrators involved in curriculum design and programme management (e.g., deans, heads of department, directors of entrepreneurship centres).

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. The first stage involved a purposive sampling of ten universities (five public and five private) with established entrepreneurship education programmes. The second stage involved a systematic sampling of departments or units offering entrepreneurship courses within these universities, while the third stage involved a random sampling selection of students from enrolment lists using random number generators.

In total, 320 respondents participated in the study: 250 students, 50 faculty members, and 20 administrators. This

distribution ensured adequate representation of key stakeholders in curriculum design and delivery. A structured questionnaire was administered to students to assess their perceptions of curriculum relevance, comprehensiveness, and alignment with industry demands, and interview guides were used with faculty and administrators to gain deeper insights into curriculum review processes, industry inputs, and pedagogical strategies. Data collected were analysed with descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequencies) and were used to summarise curriculum indicators, while a paired t-test measured changes in entrepreneurial intent before and after taking entrepreneurship courses. Ethically, participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Data confidentiality was ensured, and findings were reported without identifiers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Curriculum design and content for entrepreneurship studies

Table 1: Curriculum design and content for entrepreneurship studies

University	Curriculum_Relevance	Curriculum_Comprehensiveness	Industry_Alignment	Curriculum_Design_Score
Covernant university, Ota,	3.85*	3.55*	2.90	3.44*
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, Enugu State	4.15*	3.44*	2.78	2.46
Usmanu Danfodiyo University	3.89*	3.65*	2.07	2.54
University of Nigeria, Nnsukka,	4.00*	3.44*	2.79	2.41
Baze University, Abuja (FCT)	4.02*	3.24*	3.86*	3.37*
University of Maiduguri	4.05*	3.56*	2.03	2.55
Igbinedion University in Okada, Edo State	3.95*	3.64*	2.78	2.45
University of Lagos	3.88*	3.22*	3.16*	3.42*
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	4.02*	3.30*	2.39	2.57
American University of Nigeria (AUN), Yola – Adamawa State	3.89*	3.46*	2.09	3.48*

Source: Field Survey, 2025
KEY: *Mean ≥ 3.0 = High standards

Evidence in Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of curriculum design indicators—curriculum relevance, curriculum comprehensiveness, and industry alignment—across ten Nigerian universities offering entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. The composite curriculum design score serves as a summary metric reflecting the overall quality and alignment of the curriculum with entrepreneurial objectives.

For relevance, this metric assesses how well the course content meets contemporary entrepreneurial needs. All ten universities scored above the benchmark of 3.0, indicating generally high relevance across institutions. Notably, Godfrey Okoye University (M = 4.15) and the University of Maiduguri (M = 4.05) show exceptional alignment with the core knowledge base required for entrepreneurial capacity-building.

On comprehensiveness, this component measures the breadth and depth of topics covered, including theoretical, practical, and interdisciplinary elements. While most universities performed moderately well (e.g., Usmanu Danfodiyo University – mean = 3.65; Igbinedion University – mean = 3.64), the lowest performer was Baze University (mean = 3.24). This suggests that while entrepreneurial themes are present, some programmes lack depth or integration of cross-cutting themes such as sustainability, innovation, and social enterprise.

For the industry alignment, this dimension reflects the extent to which curriculum content is informed by industry needs and labour market realities. Here, the data reveals major weaknesses. Only Baze University (mean = 3.86) and the University of Lagos (mean = 3.16) exceed the benchmark of 3.0, implying strong integration of industry trends and practical exposure. Most others fall below, particularly the University of Maiduguri (mean = 2.03) and Usmanu Danfodiyo University (mean = 2.07), suggesting limited input from external stakeholders or real-world business scenarios.

On the overall curriculum design score, the overall curriculum design score integrates the above elements to present a holistic view of programme quality, such as top-

performing universities, including American University of Nigeria (mean = 3.48), Covenant University (mean = 3.44), and University of Lagos (mean = 3.42). These institutions likely implement modern teaching practices, update curricula regularly, and engage with industry stakeholders. Conversely, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (mean = 2.41), and Igbinedion University (mean = 2.45) rank lower, indicating room for strategic curriculum improvement and modernisation.

Findings revealed that all ten universities scored above the benchmark, indicating generally high relevance across institutions. This aligns with Olawolu and Kaegon (2012), who argue that the relevance of entrepreneurship curricula is crucial for engaging students in meaningful learning and preparing them for Nigeria's unique economic challenges. Moreover, Okebukola (2021) emphasises the importance of demand-driven curriculum reform to address Nigeria's urgent employment crisis.

Findings on the comprehensiveness indicated that while entrepreneurial themes are present, some programmes lacked depth or integration of cross-cutting themes such as sustainability, innovation, and social enterprise. According to Adejimola and Olufunmilayo (2009), a comprehensive curriculum should include elements of business planning, innovation management, legal structures, and digital competencies to foster holistic entrepreneurial development. Similarly, Afolabi et al. (2017) contend that fragmented curricula contribute to low entrepreneurial motivation among Nigerian undergraduates.

Findings on the industry alignment revealed major weaknesses, suggesting limited input from external stakeholders or real-world business scenarios. These findings corroborate the observations of Osibanjo et al. (2020), who criticise the disconnect between Nigerian university curricula and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Without strong industry collaboration, students may graduate with theoretical knowledge but lack practical entrepreneurial acumen. Adebayo and Kolawole (2019) also emphasise that engagement with entrepreneurs and business incubators enhances the contextual relevance of entrepreneurship education.

On the overall curriculum design score, findings showed performance differential which aligns with Nwankwo and Okeke (2022), who advocate for university-specific curriculum audits and reform as tools for improving graduate outcomes in entrepreneurship.

Impact of institutional support, including mentorship and funding opportunities, on the entrepreneurial aspirations and activities of students

Table 2: Impact of institutional support, including mentorship and funding opportunities, on the entrepreneurial aspirations and activities of students

University	Mentorship Programs	Funding Opportunities	Admin Support	Entrepreneuria Aspiration	Institutional Support_Score
Covenant University	4.23	2.24	2.56	3.08	3.01
Godfrey Okoye University	3.75	3.43	3.77	2.82	3.65
Usmanu Danfodiyo University	3.16	3.52	3.13	4.36	3.27
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	2.63	3.12	3.52	4.12	3.09
Baze University	3.12	3.54	4.32	3.77	3.66
University of Maiduguri	3.15	2.99	3.00	4.24	3.05
Igbinedion University	3.96	3.05	3.32	4.11	3.44
University of Lagos	3.78	2.86	4.01	2.87	3.55
Ahmadu Bello University	4.27	2.05	2.96	4.29	3.09
American University of Nigeria	3.44	2.22	2.65	3.58	2.77

Source: Field survey, 2025.
KEY: Regression Coefficient = 0.468
R-squared = 0.591
p-value = 0.010

Table 2 reveals the impact of institutional support, including mentorship and funding opportunities, on the entrepreneurial aspirations and activities of students. Results in Table 4.6 assess how institutional support systems—such as mentorship, funding, and administrative backing—influence students' entrepreneurial aspirations across ten Nigerian universities. It uses five indicators for the mentorship programmes. - structured faculty or industry-based mentorship opportunities provided to students, funding opportunities - availability of financial support like seed grants, competitions, or innovation funds, administrative support - institutional commitment through policies, entrepreneurship centres, and faculty engagement;

entrepreneurial aspiration – student-reported motivation and confidence to pursue entrepreneurship; and institutional support score – a composite average of all support indicators per institution.

Results of regression results (coefficient = 0.468, R^2 = 0.591, p = 0.010) confirm a strong and statistically significant relationship between the quality of institutional support and students' entrepreneurial aspirations.

For each of the findings, results show that for mentorship programmes, Ahmadu Bello University (mean = 4.27) and Covenant University (mean = 4.23) ranked highest, reflecting strong mentoring initiatives embedded within their entrepreneurship ecosystem, while the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (mean = 2.63) and the University of Maiduguri (mean = 3.15) scored lower, suggesting room for improvement in mentoring structures.

On the funding opportunities, the top scores were recorded by Baze University (mean = 3.54) and Usmanu Danfodiyo University (mean = 3.52), indicating that these institutions provide more accessible or visible entrepreneurship financing options, while Ahmadu Bello University (mean = 2.05) and American University of Nigeria (mean = 2.22) scored low, pointing to barriers in student access to entrepreneurial capital.

For the administrative support, Baze University (mean = 4.32) and the University of Lagos (mean = 4.01) excel in this area, likely due to institutionalised entrepreneurship centres or responsive leadership, while Covenant University (mean = 2.56) and the American University of Nigeria (mean = 2.65) underperformed, suggesting possible institutional disconnects between entrepreneurship rhetoric and administrative practice.

On the entrepreneurial aspiration, Ahmadu Bello University (mean = 4.29), University of Maiduguri (mean = 4.24), and University of Nigeria, Nsukka (mean = 4.12) lead in student entrepreneurial intent. Interestingly, the University of Lagos (mean = 2.87) and Godfrey Okoye University (mean = 2.82), despite moderate institutional support, show low student aspiration—perhaps indicating gaps between support services and student awareness or engagement.

On the institutional support score, Baze University (mean = 3.66), Godfrey Okoye University (mean = 3.65), and the University of Lagos (mean = 3.55) ranked highest overall, showing holistic support across mentorship, funding, and administration. The American University of Nigeria (mean = 2.77) and Covenant University (mean = 3.01) had lower composite scores, despite excelling in mentorship or other isolated metrics.

Regression results (R^2 = 0.591; p = 0.010) indicate that 59.1% of the variation in entrepreneurial aspiration is explained by the quality of institutional support, reinforcing the significant role institutions play in fostering entrepreneurship.

Findings for mentorship programmes suggested room for improvement in mentoring structures. This supports Adegbite and Arogundade (2021), who emphasise that mentoring—especially when integrated with real-world business scenarios—enhances students' confidence and strategic thinking in entrepreneurship.

On the funding opportunities, findings indicated that the institutions provide more accessible or visible entrepreneurship financing options and also pointed to barriers in student access to entrepreneurial capital. This aligns with findings by Chima and Okon (2022), who report that most Nigerian universities lack sustainable internal funding frameworks for students' business ideas.

Findings for the administrative support showed progress in this area, likely due to institutionalised entrepreneurship centres or responsive leadership. It also revealed institutional disconnection between entrepreneurship rhetoric and administrative practice. This mirrors Adeleke and Lawal (2020), who highlight that effective university leadership and coherent policies drive successful student entrepreneurship.

On the entrepreneurial aspiration, findings indicated gaps between support services and student awareness or engagement. This resonates with Omole and Udu (2020), who argue that student aspirations depend not only on the existence of support mechanisms but also on their accessibility, visibility, and relevance.

On the institutional support score, regression results reinforced the significant role institutions play in fostering entrepreneurship. This echoes the broader study's emphasis on stakeholder theory—that collaboration between institutions, students, faculty, and external partners fosters a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. It also proves that entrepreneurial aspirations flourish when universities provide structured mentorship, accessible funding, and strong administrative backing.

The Integrated Model of Ideological Representation in Discourse (Ogungbemi, 2016) is also indirectly validated here: institutional messaging and practices reflect and reinforce ideological commitments to entrepreneurship, which students internalise through support programmes.

There is no positive significant relationship between curriculum design and content for entrepreneurship studies among undergraduates who participate in entrepreneurship programs in selected universities in Nigeria.

Table 3: Difference in the students' entrepreneurial intent before and after taking entrepreneurship courses

Variables	Mean(Befor)	Mean (After)	Mean Difference	t-Statistic	p-Value	Significant at 0.05
Entrepreneurial Intent	2.8	3.31	0.51	20.062**	0.000	Yes

Source: Field survey, 2025.
KEY: **Sign. at 0.01 level of significance

Results in Table 3 reveal the difference in the students' entrepreneurial intent before and after taking entrepreneurship courses. The table evaluates the impact of entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial intent, using a pre-test/post-test design. The mean scores before and after taking entrepreneurship courses are compared statistically through a t-test to determine if the change is significant. The results show that the mean score before taking the course was 2.80, while the mean score after completing the course was 3.3, resulting in a mean difference of +0.51. The t-statistic was obtained as 20.062, with a p-value of 0.001. These results indicate a statistically significant increase in entrepreneurial intent after students completed entrepreneurship courses.

The difference in means (from 2.80 to 3.31) represents a substantial 18.2% increase in students' entrepreneurial intent following course participation. The extremely high t-statistic (20.062) and the p-value (0.000) confirm that this improvement is not due to chance and is significant at the 0.05 level.

Findings revealed a statistically significant increase in entrepreneurial intent after students completed entrepreneurship courses. This aligns with the assertion that entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities has a transformative effect on students' mindsets, empowering them to consider entrepreneurial careers with greater confidence and clarity.

This outcome strongly supports the overall argument made in the synthesised research: structured entrepreneurship education—when paired with supportive management strategies—influences student outlook and readiness for venture creation. It confirms the theoretical expectations of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) – as students gain knowledge, skills, and exposure, their perceived competence and willingness to engage in entrepreneurship increase – and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) – experiential teaching methods that blend reflection, action, and real-world application stimulate behavioural change and entrepreneurial motivation.

The study also validates the integrated contribution of multiple institutional variables (as captured in previous tables), revealing that curriculum design, faculty expertise, industry exposure, and institutional support coalesce to increase student intent. This aligns with Aliu and Ogunlana (2020), who found that Nigerian students exposed to experiential entrepreneurship training demonstrated significantly improved risk tolerance, problem-solving, and venture interest compared to those who had not received such training.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that curriculum design plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities. While the introduction of entrepreneurship courses across institutions reflects a commitment to combating graduate unemployment and promoting self-reliance, the findings reveal persistent gaps in curriculum comprehensiveness and industry alignment. Although most universities have developed relevant course content, many programmes remain overly theoretical, with limited integration of practical and industry-driven components. This has resulted in a skills mismatch that weakens the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education.

The results further establish that institutional support—through mentorship, funding, and administrative backing—significantly influences students' entrepreneurial aspirations. Universities that combine structured mentorship programmes, access to entrepreneurial finance, and supportive administrative frameworks record stronger student intent and readiness to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. The regression analysis confirmed a positive and statistically significant relationship between institutional support and students' entrepreneurial aspirations, underscoring the critical role of enabling environments in fostering innovation and enterprise development.

Additionally, the pre- and post-test results clearly showed that entrepreneurship education enhances students' entrepreneurial intent, with an 18.2% increase observed after participation in entrepreneurship courses. This finding validates the relevance of entrepreneurship education in shaping students' entrepreneurial mindset and highlights the importance of continuously refining curricula to sustain this positive impact.

Overall, the study concludes that for entrepreneurship

education to fulfil its objectives in Nigeria, curricula must be deliberately restructured to strengthen experiential learning, integrate industry inputs, and address sector-specific realities such as digital innovation, agribusiness, and sustainability. Furthermore, institutional commitment to mentorship, funding mechanisms, and administrative support should be expanded to consolidate gains in entrepreneurial aspirations. With the adoption of these reforms, Nigerian universities can better align entrepreneurship education with labour market needs, thereby contributing meaningfully to economic diversification, job creation, and national development.

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