

From Education to Enterprise: Assessing the Impact of Institutional Factors on Graduate Entrepreneurial Intentions in North-West Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The thrust of this study is to examine the impact of institutional factors such as curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competency on entrepreneurial intentions among graduands of tertiary institutions in the North-West region of Nigeria, comprising seven states. To achieve this objective, the study adopted a quantitative survey design and drew a sample of 700 participants, representing 100 from each state, using a convenience sampling technique. Data for the study were collected through a well-structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire designed to extract pertinent information regarding these institutional factors and their influence on the entrepreneurial intentions of higher institution graduates. Consequently, the data collected were subjected to a reliability test using the Cronbach alpha (α) test, and relationships were established with the aid of a linear regression model. Results showed that all variables achieved coefficients greater than 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency among the variables. The regression test revealed that all four factors significantly and positively predict entrepreneurial intention, with curriculum exerting the strongest influence, followed by lecturer competence, pedagogy, and mentorship. Furthermore, the negative and significant constant suggests that entrepreneurial drive does not emerge in isolation but requires structured institutional support. The study, therefore, concludes that effective institutional mechanisms are indispensable for nurturing graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations. Hence, there is a need for reforms that embed hands-on, project-based entrepreneurship modules compulsory across all disciplines. Organising faculty training in partnership with industry or local enterprises to enhance lecturers' practical entrepreneurial experience and establish structured mentorship programmes that pair students with alumni entrepreneurs, with clear objectives, defined roles, and regular feedback to ensure effective guidance.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial intention, Institutional factors, curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship and lecturer competency.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Youth unemployment remains one of Nigeria's most persistent socio-economic challenges, with graduates from tertiary institutions disproportionately affected (Gado, 2025). In the North-West region of Nigeria, this problem is particularly acute, as the mismatch between the number of graduates and available job opportunities continues to widen. Consequently, graduates often face prolonged periods of joblessness or are compelled to accept underemployment, raising critical questions about how entrepreneurial capacity can be nurtured as an alternative to wage employment. This concern brings entrepreneurship education to the forefront as a strategic tool for equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to identify opportunities, create ventures, and contribute to regional development.

Over the past decade, research in entrepreneurship education has made significant advances in understanding how formal training and mentorship influence entrepreneurial intentions. Abbes (2024) demonstrates that structured entrepreneurial curricula, when effectively delivered, can substantially shape students' entrepreneurial aspirations by combining theoretical foundations with practical exposure. Similarly, Mahfud et al. (2024) emphasize the role of innovative pedagogical models, such as the teaching factory approach, in strengthening entrepreneurial competence and increasing the likelihood that students will pursue entrepreneurial careers.

Beyond curriculum design, Polydorou (2025) argued that entrepreneurship education depends on lecturer competency and pedagogical practices, which collectively determine how well students internalize entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. Complementing these insights, Oni and Daniyan (2024) highlight mentorship as an equally vital dimension, showing that guided mentor–mentee relationships foster innovation, confidence, and networking capacity as key factors that translate entrepreneurial education into tangible entrepreneurial action.

Despite these insights, gaps remain in the contextual application of entrepreneurship education, particularly in the Nigerian North-West. Most of the available evidence originates from studies in other countries or broader national contexts, while limited research directly investigates how institutional factors like curriculum design, teaching methods, and faculty expertise translate into entrepreneurial intention among graduates in this region. This study is critical because of the socio-cultural norms, infrastructural deficits, and institutional capacity in North-West Nigeria, which may influence the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education differently than in other settings. Thus, while entrepreneurship education is widely recognized as a catalyst for entrepreneurial intention, localized empirical evidence is still scarce.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to examine how entrepreneurship education, shaped by institutional factors, influences entrepreneurial intentions among graduates of tertiary institutions in North-West Nigeria. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following question: To what extent do institutional factors, including curriculum, pedagogy, and lecturer competency, predict entrepreneurial intentions among graduates in the North-West region? By addressing this question, the study not only contributes to the broader discourse on entrepreneurship education but also generates insights that are contextually relevant for reducing graduate unemployment and fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems in Northern Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the assumption that institutional factors within higher education significantly shape the entrepreneurial intentions of graduates. Specifically, the framework considers curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competency as independent variables that influence the dependent variable, entrepreneurial intention. These institutional dimensions collectively provide the knowledge base, skills, guidance, and motivational support necessary for students to translate entrepreneurial education into entrepreneurial aspirations.

The curriculum is positioned as a foundational determinant of entrepreneurial intention. A curriculum that emphasizes creativity, innovation, and opportunity recognition has the potential to instil entrepreneurial attitudes and foster intention (Igwe et al., 2021). However, the delivery of such a curriculum is contingent on pedagogy, which mediates how content is transmitted and internalized. Experiential pedagogical approaches, such as project-based learning and simulations, serve as a catalyst for transforming abstract concepts into applied entrepreneurial competencies that strengthen intention (Suherlan & Purnama, 2025).

Mentorship is incorporated into the framework as an enabling factor that bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world entrepreneurial practice. Through mentorship, students are exposed to role models, industry insights, and personalized guidance that enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy and confidence, thereby increasing the likelihood of developing strong entrepreneurial intentions (Al-Issa, 2024). Similarly, lecturer competency is critical to the framework as it influences both the design and delivery of entrepreneurship education. Competent lecturers who possess not only academic knowledge but also practical entrepreneurial experience are more effective in inspiring students, contextualizing concepts, and reinforcing the feasibility of entrepreneurship as a career path (Makwara et al., 2024).

At the core of this framework is entrepreneurial intention, conceptualized as the most immediate predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour (Ferreira et al., 2012). The framework assumes that the four institutional factors interact to create a conducive learning environment that shapes attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and self-

efficacy, all of which are central to the development of entrepreneurial intention. Thus, the framework highlights the crucial role of institutional support mechanisms in determining whether entrepreneurship education achieves its intended outcome of producing graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also motivated to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.

Theoretical Review

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), is one of the most influential frameworks for predicting intentional behaviour, particularly in domains where action is preceded by deliberate planning. As an extension of the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), TPB introduced the construct of perceived behavioural control to account for behaviours not entirely under volitional control. The central proposition of TPB is that intention serves as the immediate antecedent of behaviour and, intention itself is shaped by the attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). These constructs collectively explain why individuals decide to engage in a given behaviour, such as pursuing entrepreneurship.

In the context of entrepreneurship education, TPB provides a strong theoretical basis for linking institutional factors to entrepreneurial intention. Curriculum design influences students' attitudes by shaping how desirable or rewarding entrepreneurship is perceived to be. Exposure to courses in opportunity recognition, business planning, and innovation cultivates positive evaluations of entrepreneurship as a viable career path (Costa et al., 2018). Pedagogy, especially experiential methods like simulations, case studies, or project-based learning, affects perceived behavioural control by equipping students with practical skills and mastery experiences that strengthen their confidence in managing entrepreneurial tasks (Mtibaa, 2025). Similarly, mentorship enhances subjective norms by offering social validation and role models who communicate the acceptability and prestige of entrepreneurship (Al-Issa et al., 2024). Finally, lecturer competency interacts with all three TPB antecedents, as competent lecturers inspire favourable attitudes, model entrepreneurial behaviours that influence norms, and provide learning structures that heighten perceived control (Ismail, 2024). Thus, TPB offers a coherent lens for understanding how institutional inputs translate into intention.

However, the assumptions underlying TPB are that individuals are rational actors who systematically evaluate available information before forming intentions (Taylor et al., 2006). Secondly, TPB assumes a causal hierarchy, where attitudes, norms, and perceived control shape intention, which in turn precedes behaviour. Lastly, it assumes that perceived behavioural control not only affects intention but also directly influences behaviour when actual control is high. Within entrepreneurship education, these assumptions suggest that if institutions provide robust curricular content, effective pedagogy, strong mentorship, and competent lecturers, students will rationally integrate these inputs into favourable beliefs that culminate in stronger entrepreneurial intentions.

Despite the prominence of TPB, the theory has attracted several critiques. One criticism is its static orientation, as it often fails to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of intention over time (Krueger, 2017). Additionally, critics argue that TPB underplays the role of contextual and institutional factors, focusing more on individual cognition than on structural enablers or barriers (Ahmed et al., 2025). In entrepreneurial contexts, this is particularly limiting, since institutional environments like resource availability, policy support, and cultural attitudes significantly influence intentions. Others caution that TPB assumes rationality, overlooking the role of emotions, heuristics, and unexpected opportunities in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour (Al-Ruwaitea, 2022). Nonetheless, TPB remains highly relevant when adapted to incorporate institutional mediators such as curriculum and mentorship, thereby offering a robust yet flexible framework for linking education and intention.

In summary, the TPB provides a valuable theoretical foundation for analysing how institutional factors influence entrepreneurial intention through its tripartite structure: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which aligns closely with the pathways through which curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competency shape students' entrepreneurial outlooks.

Empirical Review

A considerable body of work highlights the centrality of curriculum content and design in influencing

entrepreneurial intentions among graduates. Darman et al. (2025) examined the impact of entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial intentions within vocational institutions. Their study, grounded in a quantitative survey design, revealed that exposure to curricula enriched with experiential elements, such as project-based activities, business simulations, and case studies, significantly fostered entrepreneurial aspirations. The study concluded that entrepreneurship education, when taught beyond theoretical boundaries, serves as a catalyst for shaping graduates' entrepreneurial mindset. This argument aligns with Liu et al. (2025), who conducted a large-scale quantitative study employing structural equation modelling to test the direct and mediated effects of entrepreneurship education. Their findings indicated that entrepreneurship education not only directly increased entrepreneurial intentions but also indirectly enhanced them by boosting students' passion and self-efficacy. Such findings emphasise that the curriculum should be designed not only for knowledge transmission but also for psychological empowerment.

Al-Qadasi et al. (2024) further reinforced the importance of curriculum relevance and quality in their study on the role of attitudes toward entrepreneurship education in shaping students' intentions. The study revealed that students' positive attitudes were largely shaped by the perceived quality and relevance of the curriculum, as well as the effectiveness of teaching delivery. This suggests that curriculum design must be dynamic and aligned with student expectations and market realities. Similarly, Pham et al. (2024) investigated the role of digital entrepreneurship curriculum and training on students' e-entrepreneurial intentions through a survey-based design and regression analysis. Their study found that courses embedding digital competencies enhanced technological innovativeness, which mediated students' entrepreneurial aspirations in digital contexts. Generally, these studies provide converging evidence that the curriculum is not merely a content delivery mechanism but a strategic institutional tool that shapes graduates' orientations toward entrepreneurship.

Beyond curriculum, pedagogical practices such as instructional strategies and teaching methods adopted by lecturers play a decisive role in entrepreneurial education outcomes. Lyu et al. (2024) evaluated the effect of discovery-based pedagogy on students' opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial intentions through an empirical design. The findings indicated that students exposed to active pedagogical strategies developed higher levels of opportunity recognition, which in turn translated into stronger entrepreneurial intentions. This conclusion aligned with Pérez-Macías et al. (2023), who tested whether experiential pedagogy moderated the relationship between opportunity perception and entrepreneurial intention. Results confirmed that students taught through problem-based and experiential strategies were better able to translate entrepreneurial opportunities into concrete intentions than their peers exposed to more traditional methods.

Furthermore, Xanthopoulou and Sahinidis (2025) provide further depth by tracking changes in students' entrepreneurial orientation over time. Employing a diary design with tourism students, the study demonstrated that repeated exposure to problem-centered pedagogy led to gradual but sustained increases in social entrepreneurial intentions. Unlike cross-sectional designs, this study emphasizes the cumulative influence of long-term pedagogical practices on entrepreneurial mindset. Similarly, Gazi et al. (2024) explore how teaching approaches influence employability and entrepreneurial intention. Their findings showed that innovative pedagogies, with relevant curricula, improve skill acquisition and employability, mediate stronger entrepreneurial intentions. Collectively, these studies highlight the assertion that pedagogical style is not peripheral but central to the success of entrepreneurship education.

Mentorship represents another critical dimension influencing entrepreneurial outcomes across diverse contexts. Al-Issa (2024) examines how mentoring, self-efficacy, and motivation jointly shaped entrepreneurial intentions among university students. The findings demonstrated that mentoring relationships enhanced student confidence and intention to pursue entrepreneurship, with self-efficacy serving as a mediator. Olanrewaju and Akinola (2023) explored mentoring and entrepreneurial intentions among real estate students in federal universities in South-West Nigeria, finding that mentees exhibited stronger entrepreneurial intentions than non-mentees. The study identified mentorship as a motivational and confidence-building factor that shapes students' willingness to engage in entrepreneurial ventures.

However, Alkhulaifi et al. (2023) extended these insights in their study that examined the combined effect of mentoring, self-efficacy, and motivation on entrepreneurial intentions among Libyan university students. The

study, using structural equation modelling, revealed that mentorship exerted both direct and indirect effects on entrepreneurial intentions through enhanced self-efficacy, though achievement motivation moderated this relationship. Similarly, Adelaja (2022) focused on mentoring and entrepreneurial development among university students in South-West Nigeria and found a strong positive correlation between mentorship, especially in career guidance and entrepreneurial competence, indicating that practical mentorship contributes more meaningfully to entrepreneurial readiness than academic instruction alone.

Afolabi et al. (2018) contributed to this growing body of evidence by linking mentorship to career adaptability and ambiguity tolerance among prospective Nigerian entrepreneurs. Their analysis revealed that mentorship improved adaptability, a trait for navigating uncertain business environments. Complementing these quantitative findings, Okonkwo and Adebayo (2024) used qualitative interviews to assess the impact of mentorship on technopreneurial success in Nigeria. They found that mentorship fostered innovation, problem-solving capacity, and access to critical networks, positioning it as a key determinant of business sustainability in the technology sector.

Taken together, these studies assert that mentorship provides a direct and mediated pathway for enhancing entrepreneurial intentions and success. It builds confidence, nurtures innovative thinking, and improves access to social and professional networks.

Lastly, the role of lecturer competency has equally been shown to be crucial in determining the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. According to Ismail (2022), students who perceived their lecturers as highly competent reported stronger entrepreneurial intentions. The study's quantitative design demonstrated that not only content expertise but also pedagogical skill influenced student outcomes. Vivekananth et al. (2023) also found that lecturer competency and curriculum quality together enhanced students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which in turn predicted their entrepreneurial intentions.

Similarly, Iwu (2024), in a qualitative design, evaluated the implementation of entrepreneurship education in selected institutions and concluded that despite the presence of entrepreneurship curricula, the lack of lecturer competency and inconsistent pedagogy significantly undermined the effectiveness of these programs. This finding adds nuance by suggesting that even the most well-designed curriculum may fail to achieve its goals without competent delivery. Collectively, these studies argued that lecturer competency functions as the backbone of entrepreneurship education, without which curriculum and pedagogy lose much of their potential impact.

In conclusion, the empirical evidence strongly supports the argument that institutional factors such as curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competency are critical determinants of entrepreneurial intentions among graduates. The findings converge on the conclusion that entrepreneurship education cannot be reduced to mere content delivery; rather, it must be seen as an ecosystem comprising curriculum design, pedagogical practices, supportive mentorship, and competent faculty.

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine the effect of institutional factors on entrepreneurial intention among graduates in North-West Nigeria, a design widely acknowledged for its ability to capture standardized responses and allow statistical generalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population comprises graduates from tertiary institutions across the seven states in the region (Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Kebbi), from which a sample of 700 respondents (100 from each state) was drawn. A convenience sampling technique was adopted due to its practicality in reaching participants dispersed across a wide geographical area and its suitability where accessibility is a major constraint (Valerio et al., 2016). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), which is appropriate for capturing attitudes and perceptions in entrepreneurship education research (Ho, 2017). To ensure validity, the instrument was reviewed by subject experts and pre-tested through a pilot study. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for internal consistency (Hajjar, 2018). Data were analyzed using regression analysis to determine the extent to which curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competency predict entrepreneurial

intention, given that regression is particularly suited for modeling relationships between multiple independent variables and a dependent outcome. The regression results were interpreted within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which emphasize the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control in shaping intention, thereby providing a strong theoretical basis for linking institutional factors to graduates' entrepreneurial intention.

Model specification;

$$ENI = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 CUR + \alpha_2 PED + \alpha_3 MEN + \alpha_4 LEC + \hat{\epsilon}$$

Where; ENI =Entrepreneurship Intention

CUR = Curriculum

PED = Pedagogy

MEN = Mentorship

LEC = Lecturer competency

$\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3, \alpha_4$ = are the coefficient of curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship and lecturer competency respectively.

α_0 = coefficient of the constant

Data Presentation and Discussion

This section presents the analysis and discussion of data collected from 700 respondents across tertiary institutions in the Northwest region of Nigeria. The analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Reliability and validity tests were first conducted to ensure the internal consistency and appropriateness of the measurement instruments while the regression analysis, were applied to established the hypothesized relationships between institutional factors (curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competence) and entrepreneurship intention. The results are presented in tabular form, followed by detailed interpretations aligned with the study objectives.

Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	386	55.1
	Female	314	44.9
Field of Study	Science	178	25.4.
	Social Sciences	227	32.4
	Arts	143	20.4
	Engineering	152	21.8
Institution Type	University	332	47.4
	Polytechnic	231	33.0
	College of Education	137	19.6
Years Since Graduation	0-2 years	268	38.3

	3-5 years	241	34.4
	6+ years	191	27.3
Current Employment Status	Employed	232	33.1
	Unemployed	319	45.6
	Self-Employed	149	21.3

Source: Author's compilation from SPSS output

As presented in Table 4.1, the sample comprised 700 graduates drawn from universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education across North-West Nigeria. The gender composition was fairly balanced, with 55.1% male and 44.9% female participants. Respondents came from a wide range of academic backgrounds, with the social sciences (32.4%) and sciences (25.4%) being the most represented fields. Nearly half of the participants (47.4%) graduated from universities, followed by 33.0% from polytechnics and 19.6% from colleges of education. In terms of graduation period, 38.3% had completed their studies within the past two years, while 34.4% graduated three to five years earlier, and 27.3% more than six years ago. Regarding employment status, 45.6% of respondents were unemployed, compared with 33.1% who were employed and 21.3% who were self-employed, indicating that unemployment remains a major challenge among graduates in the region.

Table 4.2: Reliability Test

Variable	No. of Item	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Entrepreneurship Intention(ENI)	5	0.926	Excellent
Curriculum (CUR)	5	0.940	Excellent
Pedagogy (PED)	5	0.930	Excellent
Mentorship (MEN)	5	0.942	Excellent
Lecturers Competence (LEC)	5	0.954	Excellent

Source: Author's Computation from SPSS Output

Table 4.2 presents the results of the reliability analysis conducted to determine the internal consistency of the measurement items used in the study. The Cronbach's Alpha (α) values for all the constructs: Entrepreneurship Intention (ENI), Curriculum (CUR), Pedagogy (PED), Mentorship (MEN), and Lecturer Competence (LEC) are well above the conventional threshold of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), which signifies acceptable reliability. In fact, the results reveal that all variables achieved coefficients greater than 0.90, which, according to George and Mallery (2003), indicates excellent internal consistency.

Specifically, Entrepreneurship Intention ($\alpha = 0.926$) demonstrates a high level of reliability, suggesting that the items measuring graduates' entrepreneurial intentions are strongly interrelated. Similarly, Curriculum ($\alpha = 0.940$) and Pedagogy ($\alpha = 0.930$) also exhibit excellent reliability, reinforcing that the items developed to capture these institutional factors are consistent and stable in assessing their respective constructs. Mentorship ($\alpha = 0.942$) and Lecturer Competence ($\alpha = 0.954$) record the highest alpha values, further emphasizing that the scales measuring these variables are highly dependable for capturing perceptions of mentoring quality and lecturer competence.

Generally, the findings confirm that the instruments used in this study are both internally consistent and reliable. This provides a strong foundation for subsequent analyses, as the measurement scales can be considered dependable representations of the constructs under investigation.

Table 4.3: Regression Analysis Output

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Err.	T-statistics	P-Value	R ²	F-statistics	Collinearity Statistics		Dub.Watson
							Tolerance	VIF	
Constant	-.839	.160	-5.243	0.001	0.64	154.814			2.014
CUR	.437	.027	16.375	0.001			.998	1.002	
PED	.288	.027	10.598	0.001			.996	1.004	
MEN	.243	.027	9.160	0.001			1.000	1.000	
LEC	.310	.026	11.779	0.001			.997	1.003	

Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurship Intention

From Table 4.3 above, it is observed that the regression model explained a substantial proportion of the variance in entrepreneurial intention ($R^2 = 0.64$), indicating that 64% of the variations in graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations are attributable to institutional factors. The model was also statistically significant ($F = 154.814$, $p < 0.05$), affirming its robustness. Notably, the constant was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.839$, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that in the absence of supportive institutional factors such as curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and lecturer competence, entrepreneurship intention among graduates would be minimal. This establishes the importance of examining each institutional factor in detail, beginning with the curriculum.

The results identified curriculum as the strongest predictor of entrepreneurship intention ($\beta = 0.437$, $p < 0.05$). This highlights the critical role of curricular design and content in shaping graduates' entrepreneurial orientations. Darman et al. (2025) similarly observed that curricula incorporating experiential elements such as case studies and simulations significantly foster entrepreneurial aspirations. Liu et al. (2025) extended this by showing that entrepreneurship education not only directly impacts entrepreneurial intention but also enhances students' passion and self-efficacy, thereby exerting both direct and mediated effects. Furthermore, Al-Qadasi et al. (2024) revealed that student attitudes toward entrepreneurship education are shaped by the relevance and quality of curriculum, while Pham et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of digital entrepreneurship curricula in enhancing technological innovativeness. Collectively, these findings suggest that a well-structured curriculum provides the foundation upon which other institutional factors, such as pedagogy, can build to enhance entrepreneurial learning outcomes.

Pedagogy was also found to have a significant influence on entrepreneurial intention ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.05$). While the curriculum sets the direction, pedagogy determines how effectively that content is delivered and internalised. Lyu et al. (2024) demonstrated that discovery-based pedagogies enhance students' opportunity recognition, which subsequently fosters entrepreneurial aspirations. Similarly, Pérez-Macías et al. (2023) confirmed that experiential pedagogical approaches strengthen the translation of entrepreneurial opportunities into concrete intentions. In the same vein, a longitudinal insight from Xanthopoulou and Sahinidis (2025) revealed that problem-centered pedagogy produces cumulative and sustained increases in entrepreneurial orientation over time. Moreover, Gazi et al. (2024) highlighted the interaction between pedagogy and curriculum, showing that innovative teaching strategies enhance employability and entrepreneurial aspirations. This indicates that pedagogy complements curriculum, ensuring that entrepreneurial knowledge translates into actual intention.

In addition to pedagogy, mentorship also emerged as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.05$). While pedagogy structures the classroom learning experience, mentorship extends entrepreneurial learning into relational and experiential domains, fostering confidence, creativity, and practical competence. This finding is consistent with Al-Issa (2024), who demonstrated that mentoring enhances self-efficacy and motivation, thereby strengthening students' intentions to pursue entrepreneurship. Similarly, Olanrewaju and Akinola (2023) found that mentees among university students in South-West Nigeria exhibited stronger entrepreneurial intentions than non-mentees, identifying mentorship as a motivational and confidence-

building mechanism that shapes entrepreneurial engagement. In support of this, Alkhulaifi et al. (2023) revealed that mentorship exerts direct and indirect effects on entrepreneurial intentions through enhanced self-efficacy, while Adelaja (2022) reported a strong positive correlation between mentorship, particularly in career guidance and entrepreneurial competence, suggesting that practical mentorship contributes more meaningfully to entrepreneurial readiness than academic instruction alone. Afolabi et al. (2018) further established that mentorship enhances career adaptability, a key attribute for navigating uncertainty in entrepreneurship. Lastly, Okonkwo and Adebayo (2024) found that mentorship promotes innovation, problem-solving, and access to vital business networks, which collectively support entrepreneurial sustainability. Hence, these findings affirm that mentorship serves as a crucial complement to entrepreneurship pedagogy by bridging the gap between theory and practice, strengthening self-efficacy, adaptability, innovation, and ultimately creating an enabling environment where entrepreneurial aspirations can be transformed into tangible entrepreneurial action.

Moreover, lecturer competence was found to significantly predict entrepreneurship intention ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < 0.05$), ranking second only to curriculum in terms of explanatory strength. This result shows that without competent lecturers, curriculum and pedagogy may fail to achieve their intended impact. Ismail (2022) confirmed that students' perceptions of lecturer competence are positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions, while Vivekananth et al. (2023) reported that lecturer competence and curriculum quality jointly enhance self-efficacy and entrepreneurial aspirations. Conversely, Iwu (2024) observed that a lack of lecturer competence undermines the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, even when curricula are well-designed. Thus, lecturer competence emerges as the backbone of entrepreneurship education, ensuring that institutional strategies translate into meaningful entrepreneurial outcomes.

Generally, the findings affirm that entrepreneurship intention is best understood as an outcome of a holistic institutional ecosystem comprising curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, mentorship structures, and lecturer competence. The negative constant further reinforces that entrepreneurial aspirations are unlikely to emerge spontaneously without these enabling factors. The convergence between the current findings and prior empirical evidence strengthens the argument that entrepreneurship education must extend beyond knowledge transmission to encompass experiential learning, supportive mentorship, competent teaching, and institutional backing. Accordingly, higher education institutions in Nigeria must adopt integrated strategies that cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets among graduates.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the impact of institutional factors on entrepreneurial intentions among graduates of tertiary institutions in the Northwest region of Nigeria. The findings revealed that all four factors significantly and positively predict entrepreneurial intention, with curriculum exerting the strongest influence, followed by lecturer competence, pedagogy, and mentorship. Furthermore, the negative and significant constant suggests that entrepreneurial drive does not emerge in isolation but requires structured institutional support. Anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the findings demonstrate that institutional factors act as antecedents that reinforce the TPB components. While curriculum and pedagogy enhance positive attitudes, mentorship strengthens subjective norms, and lecturer competence fosters perceived behavioural control, thereby collectively promoting entrepreneurial intention. These results highlight that effective institutional mechanisms are indispensable for nurturing graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations, particularly in a context such as Nigeria, where graduate unemployment remains a pressing concern and entrepreneurship serves as a viable pathway to socio-economic development.

From a policy standpoint, the study recommends making hands-on, project-based entrepreneurship modules compulsory across all disciplines, rather than limiting them to theoretical electives for business students. It also suggests organising faculty training in partnership with industry or local enterprises to enhance lecturers' practical entrepreneurial experience. Finally, the study advocates establishing a structured mentorship programme that pairs students with alumni entrepreneurs, with clear objectives, defined roles, and regular feedback to ensure effective guidance.

However, this study is not without limitations, which should be considered when interpreting the findings. The use of a convenience sampling method, though practical, limits the generalizability of the results and may

introduce selection bias, as the sample may not fully represent graduates in North-West Nigeria. Additionally, the cross-sectional and self-reported nature of the data, collected through a single questionnaire, presents the possibility of common method bias that could inflate the observed relationships. Lastly, the study's regional focus further constrains the applicability of the findings to other parts of Nigeria or different contexts. Consequently, future research should employ longitudinal designs, draw from more diverse regional samples, and incorporate contextual factors such as access to finance and regulatory support to provide a more comprehensive understanding of graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

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