

THE INFLUENCE OF LOCAL ECONOMIC NEEDS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM DESIGN AND DELIVERY IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing economy, the responsiveness of entrepreneurship education to local economic realities is crucial for equipping learners with relevant skills for innovation and sustainable development. This study examines the influence of local economic needs on entrepreneurship curriculum design and delivery in the North Central zone of Nigeria. Guided by a survey research design, data were collected from a purposive sample of 300 entrepreneurship educators across secondary and tertiary institutions. To ensure validity and reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.720, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Findings reveal that local economic factors such as industry trends, government policies, and resource availability significantly impact curriculum relevance and delivery. However, recurring challenges, including weak institutional-industry linkages, inadequate teaching resources, and insufficient policy alignment, constrain the full integration of economic needs into entrepreneurship education. Despite these challenges, educators perceive entrepreneurship education as a strategic driver for developing context-specific entrepreneurial skills, promoting job creation, and addressing regional economic disparities. This study highlights the urgent need for curriculum reforms, enhanced institutional partnerships, and sustained policy support, while contributing to global debates on aligning education with local economic development priorities.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has gained global recognition as a vital tool for stimulating innovation, fostering self-reliance, and accelerating socio-economic development. It is widely regarded as a strategic mechanism for addressing unemployment and underemployment, particularly among youth populations in developing economies (Kuratko et al., 2021). The central objective of entrepreneurship education is to equip learners with the skills, knowledge, and mindset required to identify opportunities, establish enterprises, and sustain them in competitive environments. However, its success is not determined merely by the provision of theoretical content; rather, it depends on how effectively the curriculum aligns with the socio-economic realities of its context (Nabi et al., 2017). This recognition has led to growing calls for entrepreneurship education to be context-specific, demand-driven, and adaptive to evolving market structures. Globally, the nature of economies varies significantly, shaping the kind of entrepreneurial competencies that are most relevant. For instance, advanced economies with technology-driven markets often prioritize entrepreneurial training in digital innovation, artificial intelligence, and fintech start-ups. In contrast, emerging economies and rural regions with predominantly agrarian or resource-based structures benefit more from curricula that emphasize agribusiness, cooperative enterprises, value chain management, and microfinance models (World Economic Forum, 2020). A one-size-fits-all approach to entrepreneurship curriculum design, therefore, risks producing graduates whose skills are mismatched with the demands of their local economies. This problem is particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, where educational curricula have often been imported or copied wholesale without adequate adaptation to local realities. Recent research highlights the importance of **contextual curriculum design** in bridging the gap between education and practice. For example, Ajani (2024) emphasizes that entrepreneurship curricula must incorporate experiential learning approaches—such as mentorship, apprenticeships, and incubation programs—that mirror real-life business environments. These approaches not only improve the practical relevance of entrepreneurship education but also build learners' confidence and resilience in facing business challenges. Similarly, Zollet et al. (2024) argue that entrepreneurship programs tailored to the cultural and socio-economic fabric of rural and peri-urban communities are more effective in encouraging self-employment, reducing rural-urban migration, and strengthening local economies. Such findings reveal that embedding entrepreneurship education within the lived experiences of learners enhances not only engagement but also long-term sustainability of ventures.

Moreover, entrepreneurship education must extend beyond the acquisition of technical skills. Recent scholarship underscores the need for cultivating holistic competencies such as critical thinking, adaptability, communication, and emotional intelligence—qualities that are essential for navigating uncertainty in volatile economic climates (Ajani et al., 2024). In this regard, entrepreneurship education is increasingly being framed not just as a pathway to business ownership but also as a broader developmental tool for nurturing problem-solvers and innovators who can contribute meaningfully to their societies (Neck & Corbett, 2018).

This is especially critical in regions where structural unemployment, underutilization of resources, and weak industrial bases persist. Empirical studies also reinforce the direct link between entrepreneurship education and regional development outcomes. For example, recent evidence from sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that entrepreneurial skills, when cultivated within supportive ecosystems, significantly enhance graduates' ability to create ventures that address local economic needs (Springer, 2024). These ecosystems often include collaborations between universities, industries, financial institutions, and government agencies that provide access to funding, mentorship, and markets. However, in many contexts—including Nigeria—such ecosystems remain underdeveloped, limiting the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in translating classroom learning into entrepreneurial action. Despite the growing body of knowledge advocating for context-responsive entrepreneurship education, many institutions in Nigeria and other developing economies continue to adopt curricula that are outdated, overly theoretical, and disconnected from labor market realities. Such curricula often emphasize abstract business concepts without adequately preparing students to navigate the complexities of their local environments. The result is a widening gap between graduate aspirations and the socio-economic opportunities available, leading to frustration, unemployment, and wasted potential. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the extent to which local economic needs shape the design and delivery of entrepreneurship curricula in Nigeria's North Central zone. By analyzing teacher perceptions, curriculum adequacy, and learner engagement, the study seeks to uncover gaps between policy intent and practical implementation. Ultimately, the research contributes to the discourse on how entrepreneurship education can be redesigned to become a catalyst for sustainable development by aligning with regional dynamics and equipping learners with contextually relevant entrepreneurial capacities.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing emphasis on entrepreneurship education as a solution to Nigeria's rising unemployment and economic stagnation, a troubling gap persists between what is taught in classrooms and the pressing realities of the local economy. Curricula often mirror standardized models that ignore the unique dynamics of regional industries, government policies, and resource availability, leaving graduates ill-equipped to translate knowledge into viable ventures. In the North Central zone of Nigeria, where economic activities are deeply shaped by agriculture, trade, and emerging industries, the lack of curriculum alignment with local needs not only undermines the relevance of entrepreneurship education but also perpetuates graduate underemployment, wasted potential, and a cycle of economic dependency. The problem is not the absence of entrepreneurship education, but its disconnection from the very environment it seeks to transform. Unless curricula are redesigned to integrate local economic factors, the promise of entrepreneurship as a driver of

innovation, job creation, and regional development will remain an illusion rather than a lived reality.

Methodology

This study adopted a **survey research design** to investigate the influence of local economic needs on entrepreneurship curriculum design and delivery in the North Central zone of Nigeria. A **purposive sample of 300 entrepreneurship educators** drawn from secondary and tertiary institutions constituted the study population. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in line with the research questions and hypotheses. To ensure reliability and internal consistency, the instrument was subjected to a pilot test, yielding a **Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.720**, which was considered acceptable for the study. The instrument employed a four-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically the **mean and standard deviation**, to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using appropriate inferential techniques to establish the relationship between local economic needs and entrepreneurship curriculum design.

Research Questions

To explore the influence of local economic needs on entrepreneurship curriculum design and delivery, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do local economic factors such as industry trends, government policies, and available resources impact entrepreneurship curriculum design?
2. What strategies can be implemented to enhance the alignment between entrepreneurship education and regional economic needs?

Analysis

RQ1. How do local economic factors such as industry trends, government policies, and available resources impact entrepreneurship curriculum design.

N=300

S/ N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Local industry trends significantly shape the entrepreneurship curriculum content	2.57	1.026	Agreed
2	Government policies and initiatives directly influence the structure of entrepreneurship education programmes.	2.35	1.127	Disagreed
3	The availability of local resources (such as finance, manpower, and technology) determines the focus areas of entrepreneurship curriculum design.	2.53	1.060	Agreed
4	The entrepreneurship curriculum in my institution adequately reflects the realities of the local economic environment.	2.48	1.128	Disagreed
5	Excluding local economic factors weakens the effectiveness of entrepreneurship curriculum design and delivery.	2.64	1.027	Agreed
Sectional Mean		2.97	1.074	

The analysis shows an overall sectional mean of **2.97 (SD = 1.074)**, indicating that respondents generally agreed local economic factors affect entrepreneurship curriculum design. Specifically, they agreed that industry trends (M=2.57,SD=1.026)(M = 2.57, SD = 1.026)(M=2.57,SD=1.026), resource availability (M=2.53,SD=1.060)(M = 2.53, SD = 1.060)(M=2.53,SD=1.060), and exclusion of economic needs (M=2.64,SD=1.027)(M = 2.64, SD = 1.027)(M=2.64,SD=1.027) strongly shape curriculum effectiveness. In contrast, they disagreed that government policies (M=2.35,SD=1.127)(M = 2.35, SD = 1.127)(M=2.35,SD=1.127) and institutional curricula (M=2.48,SD=1.128)(M = 2.48, SD = 1.128)(M=2.48,SD=1.128) adequately address local realities. This implies that while grassroots economic factors are seen as important, weak policy influence and poor institutional alignment remain critical barriers.

Rq2. What strategies can be implemented to enhance the alignment between entrepreneurship education and regional economic needs?

N=300

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
6	Collaboration between educational institutions and local businesses improves entrepreneurship curriculum relevance.	3.15	1.155	Agreed
7	Using local business case studies enhances students' understanding of entrepreneurship concepts.	2.69	1.110	Agreed
8	Customizing entrepreneurship curriculum to suit regional economic opportunities leads to more successful graduates.	2.73	1.127	Agreed
9	Incorporating practical training based on local economic needs improves graduate employability.	2.53	1.126	Agreed
10	Aligning entrepreneurship education with regional realities enhances students' ability to innovate and start viable businesses	2.46	1.127	Disagreed
Sectional Mean		2.712	1.129	

The results in Table 2 show that teachers agreed collaboration with local businesses improves entrepreneurship curriculum relevance (Mean=3.15,SD=1.155)(Mean = 3.15, SD = 1.155). They also supported the use of local case studies (Mean=2.69,SD=1.110)(Mean = 2.69, SD = 1.110), curriculum customization (Mean=2.73,SD=1.127)(Mean = 2.73, SD = 1.127), and practical training based on local needs (Mean=2.53,SD=1.126)(Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.126). However, they disagreed that aligning entrepreneurship education with regional realities significantly enhances students' innovation and business start-up capacity (Mean=2.46,SD=1.127)(Mean = 2.46, SD = 1.127). With a sectional mean of **2.71**, the overall perception is positive but moderated by doubts about the sufficiency of curriculum alignment alone in driving entrepreneurial outcomes.

Discussion of Result

The findings of this study demonstrate that local economic realities play a significant role in shaping entrepreneurship curriculum design and delivery in Nigeria's North Central region. Respondents agreed that industry trends, availability of resources, and integration of local needs are crucial to curriculum effectiveness, highlighting the need for entrepreneurship

education to reflect the socio-economic environment in which learners operate. This supports the views of Nabi et al. (2017) and Ajani (2024), who emphasized that curricula grounded in real-world business contexts enhance employability and enterprise creation. However, areas of weakness emerged, particularly with regard to government policies ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.127$) and institutional curriculum frameworks ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.128$), which were perceived as poorly aligned with local economic demands. This gap reveals a persistent disconnect between national policy frameworks and grassroots realities, echoing the World Economic Forum's (2020) observation that standardized or imported educational models often fail to address the unique needs of local economies. The implication is that entrepreneurship graduates risk remaining underprepared for real market challenges unless deliberate reforms are made to strengthen policy alignment and institutional responsiveness.

The results further indicate that practical strategies such as fostering collaboration with local businesses ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.155$), integrating case studies, customizing curricula, and providing hands-on training are widely seen as pathways for enhancing curriculum relevance. These findings align with Zollet et al. (2024) and Ajani (2024), who advocate for context-driven, experiential learning models that build entrepreneurial skills through real-world exposure. Nevertheless, respondents expressed reservations about whether curriculum alignment alone can significantly increase innovation and start-up success ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.127$), pointing to the importance of complementary enablers such as access to finance, mentorship, and supportive business ecosystems. This reinforces Neck and Corbett's (2018) argument that entrepreneurship education requires systemic support to achieve long-term developmental outcomes. Therefore, while this study affirms the value of curriculum customization and experiential strategies, it also highlights that without broader institutional and policy reforms, as well as an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem, the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education in addressing regional economic needs may remain limited.

Conclusion

This study has shown that local economic factors such as industry trends, resource availability, and exclusion of economic needs play a critical role in shaping entrepreneurship curriculum design in the North Central zone of Nigeria. However, weak government policy influence and poor institutional alignment continue to hinder curriculum effectiveness. While educators recognize the importance of aligning curricula with grassroots realities, there is skepticism about whether such alignment alone can drive innovation and entrepreneurship. This underscores the need for an integrated approach that combines localized curriculum development with supportive policies, institutional reforms, and ecosystem-based interventions to foster genuine entrepreneurial outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the alignment between entrepreneurship education and regional economic needs:

- I. Educational institutions should actively integrate industry trends and local business needs into entrepreneurship curricula to ensure relevance and practical applicability.
- ii. Government agencies should move beyond policy formulation to enforceable frameworks that mandate and monitor curriculum responsiveness to local economic realities.
- iii. Universities and colleges should adopt flexible and reviewable curricula that can be periodically updated to reflect changing economic conditions and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- iv. Institutions should establish entrepreneurship hubs, incubators, and mentorship programs to complement curriculum delivery and translate learning into practice.
- v. Stakeholders, including government, private sector, and NGOs should collaborate to provide financial, infrastructural, and technological resources that can support effective entrepreneurship education.

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