

Exploring Entrepreneurial Motivations and Intentions of Students in Public Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Moderated Research Framework

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial motivation is seen as a crucial link to entrepreneurial intention and action. Hence, this study explores the entrepreneurial motivations and intentions of students in public universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria with a moderated research framework. Data were collected from a convenience sample of 346 final-year undergraduate pharmacy students from two public universities in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. Descriptive and inferential statistics provided the basis for the analysis. This study argues that strong entrepreneurial motivation (EM) will enable entrepreneurial intentions (EI) and that entrepreneurial knowledge can enhance individuals' EI and accelerate their propensity to embark on new venture creation. Consequently, it proposes a comprehensive predictive model for entrepreneurial motivation that incorporates both cognitive-psychological dimensions from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and individual-level motivational dimensions to evaluate their direct effects on entrepreneurial intentions. The results support the view that individual behavioural tendencies to develop and sustain entrepreneurial intentions are positively attributed to the level of entrepreneurial motivation.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial intentions, entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial attitude, perceived behavioural control*

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is seen as the engine of growth and the foundation of economic resilience and national competitiveness. It plays a pivotal role in driving innovation, generating employment, fostering inclusive and sustainable development, and contributes significantly to global GDP (Akpan *et al.*, 2025). Evidence abounds that entrepreneurship through SMEs account for 90% of businesses and 50% of jobs worldwide. In Nigeria, entrepreneurship accounts for 96% of businesses, 84% of total employment, and makes a 48% contribution to the country's GDP (Elujekwute *et al.*, 2023).

Given the statistics above, understanding the psychological and behavioural mechanisms that bring about entrepreneurial motivation (EM) in individuals has become increasingly important for researchers and policymakers. Entrepreneurial motivation (EM) refers to the willingness of individuals to exert effort to start their own businesses (Malebana, 2014, 2021). Motivation comprises internal factors that impel action and external factors that can act as inducement to action and affects three aspects of action namely, choice, effort and persistence. While entrepreneurial motivation (EM) is significantly related to an individual's entrepreneurial intention, it also serves as a crucial link between entrepreneurial intention (an individual's readiness and motivation to start a new business venture or pursue entrepreneurship as a career path) and action.

Research examining the EM-EI link has garnered significant interest and produced insights (Liu *et al.*, 2022; Syed *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, certain limits are present. For instance, most previous studies have analysed the elements of the EM-EI relationship in isolation, rather than incorporating them into a unified, comprehensive predictive model. Secondly, whereas research substantiates the significance of the EM-EI relationship in developed economies, limited studies have examined these relationships within the cultural and institutional framework of an emerging economy like Nigeria. Moreover, entrepreneurial knowledge through entrepreneurial education is often overlooked as a moderator in the EM-EI relationship, despite strong evidence suggesting it has influence on the relationship. Specifically, entrepreneurial education has been shown to raise entrepreneurial intentions and can stimulate skill accumulation and knowledge, which can be leveraged to address various subjective norms and barriers to starting new business ventures.

The objective of this study is to develop and empirically examine a comprehensive predictive model for entrepreneurial motivation that incorporates both cognitive-psychological dimension from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and individual-level motivational dimensions to evaluate their direct effects on entrepreneurial intentions. Also, this study aims to examine the moderating effect of entrepreneurial knowledge on the EM-EI relationship. This is in an attempt to

understand how entrepreneurial knowledge influences the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and intention.

Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Formulation

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is a widely used cognitive model for predicting and understanding human behaviour. It identifies three main components; attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control that motivate a person's intention to perform a behaviour, which in turn predicts actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to Ajzen (1991). Attitude refers to a person's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behaviour. This component reflects how favorably or unfavorably an individual feels about engaging in the specific action. This is shaped by beliefs about the likely outcomes of the behaviour and the value placed on those outcomes. This implies that a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship will motivate an individual into opening an entrepreneurial enterprise (Sadat and Lin, 2020).

Subjective norms involve the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour. This component captures the perceived social pressure from others, such as family, friends, or society, on the individual's decision-making and their motivation to comply with those people's views. Subjective norms comprise two components: normative beliefs, (the perception about family and friends' expectations) and motivation (the need to comply with what people expect) (Ajzen, 1991; Fatoki, 2019). As such it has been argued that subjective norms reflect the perceptions that an individual has about the values contained in their immediate environment which may include the cultural values of their group (Ajzen, 1991; Sadat & Lin, 2020). Perceived behavioural control (PBC) refers to the individual's perception of their ability to perform the behaviour. This includes both internal factors (such as self-efficacy or confidence in one's abilities) and external factors (such as access to resources, technology, or support). While the nature of PBC may differ depending on the context, for the purposes of this study, PBC is understood as the perceived difficulty or ease of starting a business (Ajzen, 1991; Shirokova et al., 2016). PBC is important because it does not only motivate intentions but can also directly affect behaviour, especially when actual control is limited.

Several studies found that TPB is a better predictor of entrepreneurial intention and have helped to explain the individual's social behaviour by including social norms as an important contributing explanatory factor. However, more recently, some scholars have criticised the theory because it ignores the individual's needs prior to engaging in a certain action, needs that would affect behaviour regardless of expressed attitudes (Alhamad and Donyai, 2021). To fill this gap, contemporary entrepreneurship research has expanded its focus to include a range of individual-level motivational and cognitive antecedents of entrepreneurial intention (EI) (Duong, 2022). Among these, need for success, need for independence and economic motivation have been recognized as

critical motivators influencing individual entrepreneurial intention (Jermsttiparsert *et al.*, 2020; Alshebami and Seraj, 2022).

Entrepreneurial motivation significantly impacts entrepreneurial intention as studies have shown that motivation is crucial in shaping individuals' intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Factors such as the need for achievement, independence, affiliation, subjective norms, attitude toward becoming an entrepreneur, and financial motives are identified as indicators of entrepreneurial motivation (Ananda *et al.*, 2023). Research by Obschonka *et al.* (2015) provides insights into the role of motivational factors, such as the need for achievement, need for independence, and financial motives, in shaping entrepreneurial intention among individuals. Their findings underscore the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, particularly the desire for achievement and independence, in driving individuals' intention to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. According to the above and consistent with the predictions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), entrepreneurial motivation is positively related to entrepreneurial intention.

H₁: Entrepreneurial motivation has significant positively effect on entrepreneurial intention of university students.

Moderating Role of Entrepreneurial Knowledge

One of the basic concepts of which entrepreneurial knowledge is built on is the opinion of Widding (2005) that knowledge is the most important resource in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial knowledge is the understanding and application of concepts, skills, and abilities needed to start and run a business, including how to develop new products, manage resources, and evaluate a business environment. It involves more than just theoretical knowledge; it's about applying this understanding to create and innovate, often through the commercialization of ideas into valuable products or services. This knowledge can increase confidence and intentions to become an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurial knowledge is gotten through entrepreneurial education which refers to short-term teaching and training that can be delivered through a variety of formats, such as courses offered by universities, mentoring programmes, and online courses from other educational sources aimed to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their intentions to establish and run a business (Dana *et al.*, 2021; Permatasari and Anggadwita, 2019). It alludes to the learning activities that encourage the development of individual abilities and skills for becoming a successful entrepreneur (Cui *et al.*, 2021). Entrepreneurial knowledge engenders entrepreneurial motivation, nurtures entrepreneurial qualities and directly influences entrepreneurial intentions. The entrepreneurial competence acquired through entrepreneurial knowledge motivates and significantly influences individual's intention to initiate and run an entrepreneurial outfit. Knowledge and skills acquired from business courses in the universities and/or any other means are important in supporting awareness and

enhancing entrepreneurship through career orientation for students (Higgins and Refai, 2017). Kadir *et al.* (2012) believe that when entrepreneurial education is organized appropriately, it helps students have a more positive view of setting up their businesses. Several previous studies have discovered that entrepreneurial knowledge moderates the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and the intention to establish businesses (Fayolle and Liñán., 2014; Zhao *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, entrepreneurial knowledge acquired through entrepreneurial education, which includes practical, managerial, and financial skills, can strongly motivate entrepreneurial spirit and is essential in strengthening perceived behavioural control – a fundamental principle in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) paradigm (Mugiono *et al.*, 2021). Given the above, it is suggested that entrepreneurial knowledge influences entrepreneurial motivation, whether intrinsic (e.g., the need for independence and/or the need for achievement) or extrinsic (e.g., economic motivations such as financial independence), and is recognized as a crucial emotional impetus that transforms entrepreneurial intentions into action (Shahab *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, it is hypothesised that entrepreneurial knowledge moderates the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial intentions

H₂: Entrepreneurial knowledge significantly moderates the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial intentions of university students.

METHODS

a. Research Design and Sample

The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for this study. The study was conducted in two (2) public universities, University of Port Harcourt and the University of Uyo in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The sample for the study was drawn from final year undergraduates of the Faculty of Pharmacy of the two (2) universities. A total of 346 undergraduates participated in this study. This set of students was chosen because besides being expectant of choice desirable career on completion of their study, their training and education equip them with entrepreneurial knowledge. Participation was voluntary.

b. Measures

Entrepreneurial Motivation (EM):

Six dimensions of entrepreneurial motivation (EM) were examined in this study. This study specifically focused on the dimensions of entrepreneurial attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, need for independence, need for success and economic motivation as proxies for EM. The items comprising these scales were adapted from Jermsittiparsert *et al.* (2020). For each of the items making up the

dimensions above, a 5-point Likert scale was used where 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI):

The scale to measure entrepreneurial intentions was adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009). This was made up of six items.

Entrepreneurial Knowledge:

Items that made up the entrepreneurial knowledge dimension were adapted from Liñán *et al.*, (2010). All the items above were subjected to face and content validity, and Cronbach alpha reliability statistics was adopted to test the reliability of the instrument. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.74 was achieved. All items were designed using the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. The instruments were administered and retrieved the same day. Descriptive statistics (simple percentages and frequencies) were used to analyse data collected while Pearson's product moment correlation and hierarchical multiple linear regression were used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Out of the 346 copies of questionnaire that were administered, 316 (91.3%) copies were completed and returned in usable form. Demographic data collected from respondents indicate that 54.1% of the sample were male and 45.9% were female.

Table 1: Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis (n = 316)

		EI
Entrepreneurial attitude	Pearson Correlation	.418*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Perceived behavioural control	Pearson Correlation	.250*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Subjective norms	Pearson Correlation	.116*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.062
Need for independence	Pearson Correlation	.398*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Need for success	Pearson Correlation	.401*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Economic motivation	Pearson Correlation	.445*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Entrepreneurial knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.363*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

***Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

Correlation coefficients > .19 are significant at $p < .05$.

Table 1 shows the correlation between variables. The result reveals that there are significant positive correlations between Entrepreneurial attitude and EI ($r=0.418$, $p<0.000$), perceived behavioural control and EI ($r=0.250$, $p<0.000$), and need for independence and EI ($r=0.398$, $p<0.000$). Others are need for success and EI ($r=0.401$, $p<0.000$), economic motivation and EI ($r=0.445$, $p<0.000$) and EntKnow and EI ($r=0.363$, $p<0.000$). However, subjective norms ($r=0.116$, $p<0.062$) does not have a significant relationship with EI.

Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	
	Model 1	Model 2
Entrepreneurial attitude	.268*	.239*
Perceived behavioural control	.213*	.202*
Subjective norms	.072	.055
Need for Independence	.158*	.113*
Need for success	.241*	.223*
Economic motivation	.362*	.257*
Interaction		
EM x EntKnow		.411*
F-value	22.486*	88.950*
Adjusted R-square	.290	.456
Change in adjusted R-square		.166

Standardized regression coefficients are reported

**significant at $p < .05$*

In general, the results from Model 1 in Table 2 provide partial support for H₁. Collectively, the six (6) dimensions of entrepreneurial motivation (EM) explained 29.0% of variance in entrepreneurial intention (EI) ($F = 22.486$, $p < 0.05$). However, of the six (6) dimensions of EM, five (5) dimensions [entrepreneurial attitude ($b = 0.268$, $p < .05$); perceived behavioural control ($b = 0.213$, $p < .05$); need for independence ($b = 0.158$, $p < .05$); need for success ($b = 0.241$, $p < .05$) and economic motivation ($b = 0.362$, $p < .05$)] had significant positive effect on EI. In contrast, subjective norms ($b = 0.072$, $p < .05$) did not have any statistically significant effect on EI.

In Model 2, the moderating variable, entrepreneurial knowledge, was added to the EM variables. This increased the explanatory power of the model by 16.6% from 29.0% to 45.6% ($F = 88.950$, $p < .05$). As revealed by the model, the interaction between EM and entrepreneurial knowledge positively predict EI, suggesting that entrepreneurial knowledge moderates EM – EI relationship. Similar to Model 1, all the dimensions of EM [i.e. entrepreneurial attitude ($b = 0.239$, $p < .05$); perceived behavioural control ($b = 0.202$, $p < .05$); need for independence ($b = 0.113$, $p < .05$);

need for success ($b = 0.223, p < .05$) and economic motivation ($b = 0.257, p < .05$)] had significant positive effect on EI except subjective norms ($b = 0.055, p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

Drawing on previous studies relating to EM-EI link, the underlying premise of this study argues that strong entrepreneurial motivation (EM) will enable entrepreneurial intentions (EI) and that students' entrepreneurial knowledge acquired through entrepreneurial education can enhance EI and accelerate their propensity to embark on new venture creation. Based on the above premise, this study proposed a comprehensive predictive model that incorporates both cognitive-psychological dimensions (entrepreneurial attitude, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms) and individual-level motivational dimensions (need for independence, need for success and economic motivation) and hypothesised that entrepreneurial motivation has significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention and that entrepreneurial knowledge significantly moderates the EM-EI relationship.

The results from 316 students from two Nigerian universities support these hypotheses. Specifically, the findings of this study revealed that all predictor variables except subjective norms showed statistically significant effect on EI and that the moderating variable, entrepreneurial knowledge, has significant effect on the relationship between EM and EI (Table 1 and 2). These results imply that students' behavioural tendencies to develop and sustain entrepreneurial intentions are positively attributed to their level of entrepreneurial motivation and that entrepreneurial knowledge significantly enhances this relationship (Alhamad and Donyai, 2021; Meoli et al., 2020). These findings are consistent with those of prior studies where student entrepreneurial motivation (EM) was a direct predictor of entrepreneurial intentions (Jermstipparsert *et al*, 2020; Andy and Gitten, 2023; Suanpong *et al*, 2025).

Specifically, Jermstipparsert *et al* (2020) opined that higher levels of psychological and motivational variables like entrepreneurial attitude (individual's willingness to take calculated risk, innovate and turn ideas into reality for business purposes), perceived behavioural control (individual's belief about the level of difficulty in becoming an entrepreneur), need for success and economic motivations (improving one's financial status, being self-employed) increased individual intention to own a business or create a new venture. Also, the positive moderating influence of entrepreneurial knowledge on the EM-EI relationship as revealed by results in Table 2 fundamentally embodies three distinct strands of prior empirical research. First, it is in accord with the findings from prior entrepreneurial intention studies, which demonstrate that entrepreneurial motivation plays a crucial role in developing students' entrepreneurial intentions and ultimately their start-up behaviour (Hasche and Linton, 2021; Pocek *et al.*, 2022). Second, this finding further concurs with the opinion that access to entrepreneurial knowledge through entrepreneurial education could translate

students' entrepreneurial motivation into intention to establish and run their businesses (Longva, 2021; Williams-Middleton et al., 2020). Lastly, this finding echoes the findings of extant studies regarding the impact of students' entrepreneurial knowledge on students' EM-EI transition (Meoli et al., 2020) and more importantly, provides a nuanced understanding of the extent of influence entrepreneurial knowledge has on the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and students' development of entrepreneurial intention.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

The study focused on a comprehensive predictive model to test the influence of entrepreneurial motivation on entrepreneurial intention of university students in Nigeria and how students' entrepreneurial knowledge moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial intentions. This comprehensive model was developed by combining the psychological offerings of the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and some variables that are considered antecedents to EI. Evidences suggest that entrepreneurial motivation variables i.e. entrepreneurial attitude, perceived behavioural control, need for independence, need for success and economic motivation have significant positive influence on entrepreneurial intentions and that entrepreneurial knowledge moderates the EM-EI relationship. Hence, it was concluded that entrepreneurial motivation has significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intentions and that of university students in Nigeria.

The findings of this study have some practical implications. First, they substantiate the theory that entrepreneurial motivation influences entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, policymakers should strive to establish a favourable national and institutional entrepreneurial climate aiming to create entrepreneurship awareness among university students and motivate them towards entrepreneurship. Second, the research findings further confirm the positive moderating effect of entrepreneurial knowledge, garnered through entrepreneurial education, in the EM-EI relationship. Hence, entrepreneurship courses in the universities should be made compulsory and beyond the classroom teaching, the curricula should be re-designed to include student exposures to real life entrepreneurship through internships, mentorship programmes, etc. The acquisition of both head knowledge and experiential knowledge will greatly motivate and enhance students' entrepreneurial intention and the likelihood of translating their intentions into action.

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International Journal of Finance and Management in Practice

Volume 11, Number 1, June 2026

ISSN: 2360-7459(Print) 2795-3084(Online)

Published By

International Centre for Integrated Development Research, Nigeria

In collaboration with

Copperstone University, Luanshya, Zambia

Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research, 26(5), 887–909.
doi:10.1108/IJEER-04-2018-0263.

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