

Institutional Support Systems and the Realization of Entrepreneurship Aspiration among Undergraduate Business Education Students in Public Universities in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Understanding the relationship between institutional support and the realisation of entrepreneurial aspirations can inform university entrepreneurship education. This study examined the associations of funding, university–industry collaboration, and support for lecturer capacity building with entrepreneurial aspiration realisation among undergraduate business education students in public universities in Abia State, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was employed, involving 260 students selected through proportionate stratified and simple random sampling from the two public universities offering business education programmes. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a four-point rating scale. Specialists in business education and measurement assessed its face and content validity, while Cronbach’s alpha indicated acceptable internal consistency. Mean scores and standard deviations summarised responses, and Pearson’s product–moment correlation coefficient was used to test the three null hypotheses at a significance level of .05. Funding, university–industry collaboration, and support for lecturer capacity building each demonstrated a statistically significant positive association with students’ realisation of entrepreneurial aspirations. These findings highlight the relevance of institutional support to entrepreneurial aspiration realisation within the participating universities. The study recommends increased budgetary provision for practical entrepreneurship training, stronger partnerships between business education

departments and industry, and sustained sponsorship of capacity building programmes for lecturers teaching entrepreneurship-related courses. It contributes contextual evidence to inform institutional planning and support for undergraduate entrepreneurship education.

Keywords: Business Education; Entrepreneurial Aspirations; Institutional Support; University–Industry Collaboration; Lecturer Capacity Building

Introduction

Graduate unemployment has remained one of the most persistent economic and social problems confronting Nigeria, with thousands of young men and women who pass through the tertiary education system yearly unable to secure paid employment. This situation has continued to shift attention toward entrepreneurship education as a deliberate strategy for reducing dependence on white-collar jobs and for positioning graduates to create employment rather than search endlessly for it. Entrepreneurship education is intended to expose learners to the knowledge, disposition and practical skills required to identify business opportunities, mobilize resources and manage ventures profitably. Within the university system, Business Education stands out as one of the programmes specifically structured to combine academic instruction with vocational and entrepreneurial skill acquisition, since its graduates are trained to function both as teachers of business subjects and as practitioners capable of establishing and managing small and medium scale enterprises.

Business Education, as offered in Nigerian universities, is made up of courses such as Accounting, Office Technology and Management, Marketing, Cooperative Economics and Management, alongside core entrepreneurship-related courses that expose students to business plan preparation, small business management, salesmanship and practical workshops. Students are also required to undergo the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme, which places them in offices, firms and business establishments for a period of practical exposure outside the classroom. These arrangements are meant to build in students the confidence and competence to consider self-employment as a genuine career option after graduation, rather than restricting their ambition to salaried employment. Aneke and Aduaka (2022) similarly observed that entrepreneurship education shapes the career intentions and aspirations of tertiary education students in South-East Nigeria,

reinforcing the expectation that such structured exposure should orient graduates toward self-employment rather than salaried employment (Dada et al., 2023). The desire, intention and determination of a student to establish and operate a personal business venture after school constitutes what may be described as entrepreneurship aspiration, and the actual translation of that desire into practice constitutes the realization of such aspiration.

The extent to which entrepreneurship aspiration is realized among Business Education graduates, however, does not depend solely on curriculum content but also on the support structures that the university puts in place to back up classroom instruction. Balogun (2025) similarly found that the self-employment aspirations of Nigerian undergraduates are shaped as much by the surrounding institutional and support environment as by the entrepreneurship education content itself, a view consistent with the framing of aspiration realization as a sociological process of constructing entrepreneurial identity (Fouzi Djamel Eddine, 2025). Funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support constitute the three institutional support variables examined in this study. Despite the deliberate inclusion of entrepreneurship components in the Business Education curriculum, observation suggests that a good number of graduates from the programme still gravitate toward searching for salaried appointments rather than establishing personal businesses, raising concern about the extent to which entrepreneurial aspiration is genuinely being realized (Alhassan et al., 2025; Nor et al., 2025). It is against this background that this study set out to determine the relationship between institutional support systems and the realization of entrepreneurship aspiration among undergraduate Business Education students in public universities in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the deliberate infusion of entrepreneurship components into the Business Education curriculum of Nigerian universities, a considerable number of graduates from the programme continue to seek salaried employment rather than establish personal business ventures upon completion of their studies, even though they have been exposed to courses in business plan preparation, small business management, and the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). This persistence raises a fundamental concern as to whether entrepreneurship aspiration cultivated during the programme is genuinely translated into actual venture creation, or whether it remains a theoretical disposition with little practical outcome. This disconnect appears closely tied to the

strength, or weakness, of the institutional support systems, namely funding (Murad, Othman & Kamarudin, 2024), school-industry collaboration (Fichter & Tiemann, 2018) and lecturers' capacity building support (Otache, 2019), that are supposed to reinforce classroom instruction. There appears to be limited empirical evidence specifically examining the relationship of these three institutional support systems with entrepreneurship aspiration realization among undergraduate Business Education students in public universities in Abia State. It is this gap that the study addresses.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine institutional support systems and the realization of undergraduate business education students' entrepreneurship aspiration in public universities in Abia State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between funding and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria.
2. Examine the relationship between institutional provision of school-industry collaboration and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria.
3. Determine the relationship between lecturers' capacity building support and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What relationship exists between funding and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria?
2. What relationship exists between institutional provision of school-industry collaboration and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria?
3. What relationship exists between lecturers' capacity building support and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between funding and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria.

H02: There is no significant relationship between institutional provision of school-industry collaboration and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria.

H03: There is no significant relationship between lecturers' capacity building support and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria.

Significance and Scope of the Study

The findings are expected to benefit undergraduate business education students, lecturers, university administrators and planners, regulatory agencies such as the National Universities Commission, and government at state and federal levels, in addition to adding to the growing body of knowledge on entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities (Kilonzo & Iwara, 2025; Sharma et al., 2024). The study was restricted to the two public universities in Abia State that offer business education as an undergraduate programme, with content scope covering funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support and their relationship with the realization of entrepreneurship aspiration. Respondents were drawn from the higher levels of the programme, since these students had already passed through the core entrepreneurship-related courses and the industrial attachment exercise.

Theory and Literature

Concept of Institutional Support Systems

Institutional support systems refer to the deliberate structures, resources and arrangements that an organization puts in place to enable its members to achieve set objectives. Within a university setting, institutional support takes several forms, including financial provisions, physical infrastructure, staff development programmes and collaborative arrangements with outside bodies, all directed at strengthening the quality of instruction and the practical outcomes expected of graduates. Nor et al. (2025) similarly

emphasize the central role of higher education institutions in promoting entrepreneurship development through exactly these kinds of structural arrangements, determinants also documented among higher education institutions in Brazil (Alves et al., 2019). For business education students, three dimensions of institutional support stand out: funding, which determines the extent to which practical activities can be organized and sustained; school-industry collaboration, which bridges theoretical instruction and business realities; and lecturers' capacity building support, since the competence and currency of those who teach entrepreneurship-related courses shape the quality of exposure students receive, consistent with evidence that institutional environments and cultural norms shape entrepreneurial attitudes among university students (Ogunsade et al., 2021).

Concept of Entrepreneurship Education and Realization of Aspiration

Entrepreneurship education may be described as the deliberate process of equipping learners with the knowledge, attitude, disposition and practical skills required to identify viable business opportunities, mobilize the needed resources and establish and manage ventures profitably (Shuaibu et al., 2021), delivered through pedagogical approaches that vary considerably across higher education institutions (Rodrigues, 2023), although not all pedagogical models achieve the desired shift toward self-employment equally well (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2019). Entrepreneurship aspiration refers to the desire, intention and determination that a student holds toward establishing and running a personal business venture after completing the programme (Miço & Cungu, 2023), which may vary in intensity depending on the human and social capital available to the individual (Lajqi & Krasniqi, 2017). The realization of entrepreneurial aspiration goes a step further than merely holding such a desire; it refers to the actual translation of that desire into observable steps such as drawing up a business plan, sourcing start-up capital, registering a business name or commencing operation of a small enterprise, a gap also attributed to persistent challenges inherent in entrepreneurship education itself (Hameed & Irfan, 2019).

Funding and Realization of Entrepreneurial Education

Funding remains central to the practical delivery of entrepreneurship education because nearly every hands-on component of the programme, from equipping workshops with modern tools to organizing business plan competitions and study visits, requires financial commitment. A department with adequate budgetary allocation is better positioned to procure materials, sponsor students for entrepreneurship fairs and provide

seed support for viable student business ideas, provisions that mirror design principles recommended for making entrepreneurship education broadly available to learners (Baggen et al., 2022). Where funding is poor, departments may be forced to rely almost entirely on lecture-based instruction, producing graduates who can discuss entrepreneurship theoretically but who lack the practical grounding and confidence to take the entrepreneurial step. On this basis, funding is expected to relate positively with the realization of entrepreneurial aspiration, since better-funded practical training builds the competence and self-assurance required to move from merely wanting to run a business to actually establishing one.

School-Industry Collaboration and Realization of Entrepreneurial Education

School-industry collaboration describes the deliberate linkage that a university establishes with business organizations, industries and practising entrepreneurs for purposes of practical training, internship placement, mentorship, guest lectures and joint projects, a structured arrangement similarly described in teaching-factory-based vocational settings (Parida et al., 2026). Such linkage exposes students to customer relations, record keeping, pricing decisions and the day-to-day discipline required to keep a business running profitably, motivations that Syed, Omar and Rasool (2024) found to underlie business schools' pursuit of industry collaboration. Where collaboration is strong, students benefit from mentorship, firsthand understanding of market demands, and networks useful for setting up their own ventures (Setiawan et al., 2024); where it is weak, students may complete attachment requirements as a formality without meaningful exposure (Perry, 2026). Institutional provision of school-industry collaboration is therefore expected to relate positively with the realization of entrepreneurial aspiration, a best practice also documented in vocational internship programmes in Indonesia (Muzani et al., 2019).

Lecturers' Capacity Building Support and Realization of Entrepreneurial Education

Lecturers' capacity building support refers to the continuous training, workshops, conferences, sabbatical attachments and other developmental programmes made available to teaching staff to keep them professionally current and practically exposed. Otache (2019) found that entrepreneurial lecturers who are themselves practically exposed play a decisive role in enhancing the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education delivered to students, a challenge also linked to gaps in lecturers' capacity building within business education delivery more broadly (Onyesom & Onyesom, 2023). Lecturers who benefit

from regular capacity building are better positioned to bring current business practice into the classroom and guide students through practical exercises with greater confidence, consistent with evidence that school-enterprise partnerships improve vocational teacher education (Huo & Zhang, 2025) and with the tripartite approach to entrepreneurial capacity-building described by Towers et al. (2020). Lecturers' capacity building support is therefore expected to relate positively with the realization of entrepreneurial aspiration among business education students.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on human capital theory, which holds that investment in education and training builds the knowledge, skills and capabilities of individuals in ways that improve their productivity and widen their range of available opportunities, including the opportunity for self-employment. Winterton and Cafferkey (2019) note that despite decades of critique, human capital theory remains useful for understanding how investment in people translates into economic and career outcomes, including self-employment (Hooley, 2021). Applied to this study, funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support all represent forms of investment in the human capital of business education students, an application consistent with the view that human capital theory provides a sound foundation for understanding investment decisions among the young generation (Hasbiah & Hasdiansa, 2024). The resource-based perspective equally lends support to the study, since it views an organization's access to valuable financial, relational and human resources as central to its capacity to achieve desired outcomes. Taken together, these two perspectives provide a coherent basis for expecting a positive relationship between the institutional support variables under investigation and the realization of entrepreneurship aspiration.

Summary of Reviewed Literature

The literature reviewed established that institutional support systems, comprising funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support, occupy a central place in determining whether entrepreneurship education translates into genuine business aspiration and eventual practice among students, a framework for delivering experiential entrepreneurship education that Bell and Bell (2020) similarly emphasize. The human capital and resource-based perspectives both provide theoretical grounding for expecting a positive relationship between these support systems and the realization of

entrepreneurial aspiration. What remains largely unexamined, and what this study investigated, is the actual pattern and strength of this relationship among undergraduate business education students in public universities in Abia State, notwithstanding Johannisson's (2018) broader caution about the limits of what entrepreneurship education delivered purely within an academic context can be expected to achieve.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study adopted a correlational survey design, considered appropriate because the study was concerned with determining the relationship between three institutional support variables, namely funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support, and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students, without any form of manipulation of the variables as they naturally occur.

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in Abia State, in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which hosts two public universities running undergraduate business education as a recognized programme within their faculties of education.

Population of the Study

The population comprised all undergraduate business education students in the two public universities in Abia State. Records obtained from the departments put the number of students in the upper levels of the programme, who had already passed through the core entrepreneurship-related courses and the industrial attachment exercise, at approximately six hundred and twenty.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of two hundred and sixty respondents was drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation of students from both universities, followed by simple random sampling within each stratum to select individual respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire titled Institutional Support Systems and Entrepreneurship Aspiration Realization Questionnaire was developed and used for data collection. The instrument was divided into five sections: Section A elicited demographic information; Section B contained items on funding; Section C contained items on school-industry collaboration; Section D contained items on lecturers' capacity building support; and Section E contained items on the realization of entrepreneurial education. All items were structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, with values of four, three, two and one assigned respectively.

Validation and Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by specialists in business education and by an expert in measurement and evaluation. Reliability was established through a pilot test administered to thirty business education students in a public university outside Abia State, whose responses were excluded from the final analysis. Cronbach alpha yielded reliability coefficients of 0.79 for funding, 0.82 for school-industry collaboration, 0.77 for lecturers' capacity building, and 0.84 for realization of entrepreneurial education — coefficients considered sufficiently high to confirm internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the sampled respondents by the researcher with the assistance of two trained research assistants, using direct administration in respondents' respective departments, with retrieval immediately after completion.

Method of Data Analysis

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, with a criterion mean of 2.50 adopted as the cut-off point on the four-point scale; item means of 2.50 and above indicated agreement, while means below 2.50 indicated disagreement. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the three null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance, with the calculated r-value compared against the critical table value at the appropriate degree of freedom; a null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated r-value exceeded the critical value.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Funding

What relationship exists between funding and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Funding

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The department receives adequate budgetary allocation for practical entrepreneurship training.	2.61	0.71	Agree
2	Workshops and laboratories used for entrepreneurship practice are well equipped.	2.58	0.74	Agree
3	Students receive some form of financial support for business plan projects.	2.55	0.78	Agree
4	Funds are made available for entrepreneurship fairs and exhibitions.	2.49	0.80	Disagree
5	Seed capital or grants exist to support viable student business ideas.	2.44	0.82	Disagree

Table 1 shows that all items on funding recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, except the item on availability of seed capital or grants which had a mean of 2.44, indicating that funding-related support generally existed within departments, although direct start-up capital for student business ideas remained an area of relative weakness.

Research Question 2: School-Industry Collaboration

What relationship exists between institutional provision of school-industry collaboration and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on School-Industry Collaboration

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The department has established linkage with business organizations for industrial attachment.	2.69	0.66	Agree
2	Guest entrepreneurs are regularly invited to give talks and demonstrations.	2.57	0.73	Agree
3	Students understudy practising entrepreneurs during attachment.	2.63	0.70	Agree
4	Mentorship arrangements exist between students and industry practitioners.	2.47	0.79	Disagree
5	Joint projects exist between the department and business organizations.	2.41	0.83	Disagree

Table 2 shows that most items recorded means above the criterion mean of 2.50, with the exception of mentorship arrangements (2.47) and joint projects (2.41), suggesting that while attachment and exposure arrangements are reasonably established, structured

mentorship and joint activity between departments and industry remain areas requiring improvement.

Research Question 3: Lecturers' Capacity Building Support

What relationship exists between lecturers' capacity building support and the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in Abia State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Lecturers' Capacity Building Support

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lecturers handling entrepreneurship courses attend regular training workshops.	2.66	0.69	Agree
2	Lecturers are sponsored to relevant conferences on entrepreneurship education.	2.52	0.77	Agree
3	Lecturers bring current business practice into classroom instruction.	2.60	0.72	Agree
4	Lecturers with entrepreneurial experience share practical insight with students.	2.54	0.75	Agree
5	The department organizes in-house capacity building sessions for lecturers.	2.46	0.81	Disagree

Table 3 shows that all items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with in-house capacity building sessions recording the comparatively lowest mean of 2.46, indicating that while external training and conference sponsorship are moderately available, in-house departmental training requires further strengthening.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis

Hypothesis	Variable	r-calculated	r-critical	df	Decision
H01	Funding	0.52	0.113	258	Rejected
H02	School-industry collaboration	0.58	0.113	258	Rejected
H03	Lecturers' capacity building support	0.49	0.113	258	Rejected

Table 4 shows that the calculated r-values for all three hypotheses exceeded the critical r-value of 0.113 at 258 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, all three null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support each have a significant positive relationship with the realization of entrepreneurial education among undergraduate business education students in public universities in Abia State.

DISCUSSION

Funding

Respondents agreed that funding-related items were largely in place, with item means ranging from 2.44 to 2.61, although the item on seed capital or grants recorded the lowest mean. Hypothesis one yielded a calculated r-value of 0.52 against a critical value of 0.113, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming a significant positive relationship between funding and the realization of entrepreneurial education. This aligns with the position that adequate financial provision underlies the practical delivery of entrepreneurship instruction (Fichter & Tiemann, 2018) and with the emphasis Baggen et al. (2022) place on adequate resourcing as a design principle for effective entrepreneurship programmes.

School-Industry Collaboration

Respondents agreed that school-industry collaboration items were fairly well established, with item means ranging from 2.41 to 2.69, though joint projects recorded the lowest mean. Hypothesis two produced a calculated r-value of 0.58 against the critical value of 0.113, confirming a significant positive relationship between institutional provision of school-industry collaboration and the realization of entrepreneurial education. This supports the view that practical linkage with industry builds the confidence and exposure students require to move from aspiration to actual business establishment, a pattern also reported by Setiawan et al. (2024) and Muzani et al. (2019).

Lecturers' Capacity Building Support

Respondents agreed that lecturers' capacity building items were moderately in place, with item means ranging from 2.46 to 2.66, with in-house sessions recording the lowest mean. Hypothesis three yielded a calculated r-value of 0.49 against the critical value of 0.113, confirming a significant positive relationship between lecturers' capacity building support and the realization of entrepreneurial education. This reinforces the position that continuously trained and practically exposed lecturers are better positioned to deliver instruction that builds genuine competence and confidence in students (Otache, 2019; Onyesom & Onyesom, 2023).

Implications

Taken together, the three findings indicate that institutional support systems, whether expressed through funding, industry linkage or lecturer development, each bear a meaningful and positive relationship with how well business education students convert entrepreneurial knowledge into genuine aspiration and practice. The comparatively stronger relationship recorded for school-industry collaboration suggests that practical exposure to real business settings may carry particular weight in shaping students' readiness to pursue self-employment, though funding and lecturer capacity building remain equally indispensable, since neither industry exposure nor quality instruction can be sustained without adequate financial backing and well-prepared teaching staff. For practice, university administrators should treat these three support systems as complementary levers rather than isolated interventions; for policy, regulatory bodies and government may use the findings to inform funding formulas and minimum academic standards for entrepreneurship components of business education curricula.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine institutional support systems and the realization of undergraduate business education students' entrepreneurship aspiration in public universities in Abia State, focusing on funding, school-industry collaboration and lecturers' capacity building support. The findings established that each of these three institutional support variables bears a significant positive relationship with the extent to which students translate their entrepreneurial knowledge and interest into concrete aspiration and eventual business practice. It can therefore be concluded that the realization of entrepreneurship aspiration among business education students is not left to chance or to curriculum content alone, but is substantially shaped by the quality of institutional backing made available to support practical training, industry exposure and lecturer competence. Universities that wish to produce graduates genuinely disposed toward self-employment must therefore pay deliberate attention to strengthening these support systems, since the mere inclusion of entrepreneurship courses in the curriculum, without adequate backing, is unlikely to yield the desired outcome of self-reliant, business-minded graduates.

Recommendations

1. University authorities should increase budgetary allocation to business education departments specifically for practical entrepreneurship training, including the procurement of modern workshop equipment and the provision of seed support for viable student business ideas.
2. Business education departments should deliberately strengthen and formalize their linkage with business organizations and industries through structured internship placements, mentorship arrangements and joint projects, rather than leaving industrial attachment as a mere formality.
3. University management and relevant education agencies should sustain and expand sponsorship of capacity building programmes, workshops and conferences for lecturers handling entrepreneurship-related courses, to keep them practically exposed and professionally current.
4. Business education departments should establish structured mechanisms, such as business incubation units, through which students can pilot business ideas with proper mentorship before graduation.
5. Government at state and federal levels should consider special grants and low-interest funding schemes targeted at final year students and recent graduates of business education who wish to establish businesses in their areas of training.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Further research could compare institutional support systems and entrepreneurship aspiration realization between business education students in public and private universities, examine the moderating influence of gender or family business background on the relationship investigated, or extend similar investigation to other vocational and technical education programmes beyond business education in Abia State and other states in Nigeria.

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