



ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND CAREER PATHWAYS: A STUDY OF EMPLOYMENT VERSUS SELF-EMPLOYMENT CHOICES AMONG UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN ANYIGBA, KOGI STATE - NIGERIA

¹Edime YUNUSA and ¹Ejuchegahi A. ANGWAOMAODOKO

¹Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba, Kogi State – Nigeria

ABSTRACT: Graduate unemployment and uncertain school-to-work transitions continue to shape career decisions in Nigeria, prompting renewed attention to entrepreneurship education and career pathways: a study of employment versus self-employment choices among university graduates in Anyigba, Kogi State Nigeria. The study examined the influence of entrepreneurship education on graduates' career choices, assessed the extent to which it affects preference for paid employment, and identified factors mediating the relationship between entrepreneurial training and career pathways. The study was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour. A cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was adopted, focusing on graduates residing in Anyigba and its environs. The study population comprised graduates who remained in the area before and after National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), with an estimated population of 900–1,000. A sample size of 25 participants was determined drawing from methodological guidance by Greg Guest and Johnny Saldaña and selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analysed using content analysis, supported by descriptive statistics and NVivo software. Findings revealed that entrepreneurship education significantly shapes graduates' awareness and attitudes toward self-employment but has limited direct influence on actual career decisions. The preference for paid employment remains dominant due to income stability concerns, economic uncertainty, and risk considerations. The study further found that access to finance, family expectations, and environmental constraints strongly mediate the transition from entrepreneurial intention to practice. The study concluded that entrepreneurship education influences mindset more than behaviour, and therefore recommended among others strengthening practical training, improving access to start-up support, and promoting a supportive environment for graduate entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship Education, Career Pathways, Employment, Self-Employment, University Graduates, Anyigba.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Across the world, the transition from university education to stable employment has become increasingly uncertain, particularly in developing economies where graduate unemployment remains high. Recent evidence indicates that young graduates face prolonged job searches and underemployment despite rising levels of educational attainment (International Labour Organization, 2022). In response, governments and higher education institutions

have intensified the integration of entrepreneurship education into university curricula as a strategy to equip graduates with the skills required for self-employment and job creation. Entrepreneurship education is expected to build competencies such as opportunity recognition, risk management, innovation, and business start-up skills, thereby influencing graduates' career decisions (OECD, 2023).

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In Nigeria, the introduction of compulsory entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions was formalized through policies of the National University Commission (NUC) with the aim of reducing reliance on paid employment and encouraging graduates to establish enterprises. However, the persistence of high youth unemployment rates raises questions about the effectiveness of such interventions. Reports from the World Bank (2023) show that many Nigerian graduates still prioritize formal employment due to perceived risks, limited access to finance, and structural constraints that affect business sustainability.

In Anyigba community and its environs, these challenges are evident in the limited absorption capacity of the formal labour market and the socio-economic conditions that shape career decisions. While entrepreneurship education has been institutionalized in universities within and around the region, there is limited empirical evidence on how it influences graduates' actual career pathways after graduation. Some graduates engage in small-scale enterprises, while others continue to seek salaried employment, suggesting variations in the outcomes of entrepreneurship education. Studies have shown that the impact of entrepreneurship education on self-employment intentions depends on contextual factors such as institutional quality, access to capital, and social support systems (Mahmood et al., 2022; Olokundun et al., 2023). This situation underscores the need to examine how entrepreneurship education shapes employment versus self-employment choices among graduates in this specific regional context.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the institutionalization of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities, graduate unemployment remains a persistent challenge, particularly in regions such as Anyigba in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State, Nigeria. Many graduates continue to depend on limited formal job opportunities, while only a fraction successfully transition into self-employment. This raises concerns about whether entrepreneurship education is achieving its intended objectives of fostering entrepreneurial behaviour and reducing unemployment.

Existing studies by Mahmood et al., (2022); Olokundun et al. (2023) among others have largely focused on entrepreneurial intentions rather than actual career outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the real-life choices graduates make after completing their education. Furthermore, structural barriers such as inadequate access to finance, poor infrastructure, and limited mentorship opportunities may weaken the influence of entrepreneurship education on self-employment decisions. Without clear evidence on how entrepreneurship education affects graduates' career pathways in this context, policy efforts may remain misdirected. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between entrepreneurship education and the employment versus self-employment choices of university graduates in Anyigba community and its environs.

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to examine the influence of entrepreneurship education on the career choices of university graduates in Anyigba, Kogi State Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought;

- i.to determine the extent to which entrepreneurship education affects graduates' preference for paid employment in Anyigba, Kogi State.
- ii.to assess the impact of preference for paid employment on the decision to engage in self-employment among graduates in Anyigba Kogi State.
- iii.to identify the factors that mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and career pathways among graduates in Anyigba Kogi State.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following questions:

- i.To what extent does entrepreneurship education influence graduates' preference for paid employment in Kogi East Senatorial District?
- ii.How does entrepreneurship education affect graduates' decision to engage in self-employment?
- iii.What factors shape the relationship between entrepreneurship education and graduates' career choices in the study area?



5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focused on university graduates within Anyigba in Kogi East Senatorial District, Nigeria. It examined graduates who have been exposed to entrepreneurship education during their undergraduate studies and explores their post-graduation career choices. The study was limited to the comparison between paid employment and self-employment pathways and considers relevant socio-economic and institutional factors influencing these choices within the specified geographical area.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study provides evidence on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in shaping graduates' career decisions, which is important for policymakers and educational administrators seeking to address unemployment. It contributes to academic discussions by shifting attention from entrepreneurial intentions to actual career outcomes among graduates. The findings will also be useful to universities in improving the design and delivery of entrepreneurship education programmes. In addition, the study offers insights for development agencies and stakeholders interested in youth employment and enterprise development in Nigeria, particularly in regions with limited formal employment opportunities.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature for this study was done in line with the aim and objectives under conceptual review, empirical review and theoretical framework as follows:

Conceptual Review

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been widely defined in recent scholarship as a process involving the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities for the creation of goods and services under conditions of uncertainty. Contemporary studies emphasize its role in innovation and economic development, noting that entrepreneurship extends beyond business start-up to include value creation in different contexts (Phiri & Chasaya, 2023; Amaral et al., 2024). Scholars argue that entrepreneurship involves behavioural orientation

characterized by proactiveness, risk-taking, and innovation, rather than merely business ownership. For instance, recent empirical work links entrepreneurship to entrepreneurial orientation and individual capacity to act on opportunities in dynamic environments (Amaral et al., 2024). Other authors stress its function in job creation and economic renewal, highlighting that entrepreneurship contributes to employment generation and societal development (Ndofirepi, 2020). While some definitions restrict entrepreneurship to venture creation, more recent perspectives adopt a broader view that includes opportunity exploitation within existing organizations. This study adopts the position that entrepreneurship is a process through which individuals identify and exploit opportunities by mobilizing resources to create economic value, whether through new ventures or innovative activities within existing structures.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is commonly described as a structured pedagogical process aimed at developing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies required for venture creation and innovation. Recent literature shows that entrepreneurship education has evolved from theoretical instruction to experiential and practice-oriented learning approaches that emphasize problem-solving, creativity, and opportunity recognition (Iwu et al., 2024; Amaral et al., 2024). Studies indicate that entrepreneurship education enhances students' competencies, self-efficacy, and readiness to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Amani et al., 2026; Phiri & Chasaya, 2023). It is also viewed as a mechanism for shaping career decisions by influencing entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour (Dabbous & Boustani, 2023). However, some scholars argue that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends on curriculum design, teaching methods, and institutional support systems, particularly in developing countries where implementation gaps persist (Olu et al., 2023). Given these perspectives, this study adopts entrepreneurship education as a formal and experiential learning process within higher education that equips students with the competencies, mindset, and



capabilities necessary to initiate and sustain entrepreneurial activities.

Career Pathways

Career pathways refer to the structured or evolving sequences of occupational roles and decisions that individuals pursue over time based on their skills, education, and opportunities. Recent studies conceptualize career pathways as dynamic and influenced by personal aspirations, labour market conditions, and institutional factors rather than as fixed trajectories (Ramos-Rodriguez et al., 2023). In the context of graduates, career pathways increasingly involve non-linear transitions, including movement between employment and self-employment. Scholars emphasize that education, particularly entrepreneurship education, plays a significant role in shaping these pathways by expanding available options and influencing decision-making processes. While some authors frame career pathways in terms of progression within formal employment systems, others highlight the inclusion of entrepreneurial routes as legitimate and increasingly relevant career options. This study adopts career pathways as the range of employment and self-employment trajectories available to graduates, shaped by education, individual preferences, and contextual opportunities.

Employment

Employment is generally defined as a work arrangement in which an individual provides labour or services to an organization or employer in exchange for wages or salaries under agreed conditions. Recent scholarship situates employment within broader labour market structures, emphasizing issues such as job security, underemployment, and the changing nature of work in developing economies (Phiri & Chasaya, 2023). Employment is often viewed as the traditional and preferred career pathway for graduates due to perceived stability and income predictability. However, contemporary studies highlight that formal employment opportunities are increasingly limited, particularly in contexts with high youth unemployment, leading to a shift in focus toward alternative career options. Some scholars

also distinguish between formal and informal employment, noting that many graduates in developing countries engage in informal work due to labour market constraints. In this study, employment is defined as participation in paid work under an employer–employee relationship within formal or informal organizational settings.

Self-Entrepreneurship (Self-Employment)

Self-entrepreneurship, often used interchangeably with self-employment, refers to a form of economic activity in which individuals create and manage their own businesses or income-generating ventures rather than working for an employer. Recent studies describe self-employment as a key outcome of entrepreneurship and a viable response to unemployment challenges, particularly among graduates (Amaral et al., 2024). Scholars emphasize that self-entrepreneurship involves autonomy, risk-bearing, and responsibility for business outcomes, distinguishing it from wage employment. It is also linked to entrepreneurial intention and the practical application of skills acquired through entrepreneurship education (Phiri & Chasaya, 2023). However, some authors caution that not all self-employment reflects opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, as some individuals engage in it out of necessity due to limited job opportunities. This study adopts self-entrepreneurship as the process by which individuals initiate and manage their own economic activities with the aim of generating income and sustaining livelihood independent of formal employment.

The Influence of Entrepreneurship Education on the Career Choices of University Graduates

Recent empirical research shows that entrepreneurship education plays a significant role in shaping the career decisions of university graduates by influencing both their cognitive orientation and behavioural intentions toward entrepreneurial activities. Studies conducted across different national contexts indicate that exposure to entrepreneurship courses increases the likelihood that graduates will consider self-employment as a viable career option rather than relying solely on traditional wage employment. For instance, Nowiński et al. (2022) found that students who participated in structured



entrepreneurship programmes demonstrated significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions and a stronger inclination toward venture creation compared to those without such exposure. Similarly, Bignotti and le Roux (2023) reported that entrepreneurship education enhances opportunity recognition skills and self-efficacy, both of which are critical determinants of career choice.

The mechanism through which entrepreneurship education shapes career pathways is largely linked to its ability to build entrepreneurial mindset and competencies. Hassan et al. (2022) showed that experiential learning approaches such as business simulations and start-up incubation significantly influence students' readiness to pursue entrepreneurial careers. In practical terms, graduates who have engaged in project-based entrepreneurship training often transition more confidently into business ownership. Evidence from Nigeria supports this position, as Aderibigbe et al. (2023) observed that graduates exposed to entrepreneurship education were more likely to initiate small-scale enterprises within two years of graduation compared to those without such training.

However, the influence of entrepreneurship education is not uniform across contexts. While it increases awareness and intention, actual career decisions are often moderated by structural conditions such as access to finance and labour market realities. Ogunleye and Adeyemi (2022) found that although many Nigerian graduates express entrepreneurial aspirations after training, a significant proportion still pursue paid employment due to economic uncertainty. This suggests that entrepreneurship education functions more as an enabler of career flexibility rather than a direct determinant of self-employment outcomes.

In assessing these perspectives, it is evident that entrepreneurship education influences career choices by expanding the range of options available to graduates and equipping them with relevant competencies. However, its impact is contingent on contextual factors that either support or constrain entrepreneurial action. This study therefore adopts the view that entrepreneurship education shapes career pathways by enhancing graduates' capacity and willingness to consider both employment and self-employment, while recognizing that final decisions are influenced by external conditions.

The Extent to Which Entrepreneurship Education Affects Graduates' Preference for Paid Employment

The relationship between entrepreneurship education and graduates' preference for paid employment remains an area of active debate, as empirical findings reveal both reinforcing and substitutive effects. Some studies suggest that entrepreneurship education reduces dependence on paid employment by encouraging self-reliance, while others indicate that it may complement traditional employment aspirations by enhancing employability skills. Liu et al. (2022) found that entrepreneurship education improves graduates' adaptability, problem-solving ability, and innovation capacity, making them more attractive to employers. As a result, some graduates perceive paid employment as a platform for gaining experience before transitioning into entrepreneurship.

Quantitative evidence highlights the persistence of preference for paid employment despite exposure to entrepreneurship education. A study by Ismail et al. (2023) reported that over 60% of graduates who received entrepreneurship training still preferred salaried jobs immediately after graduation, citing income stability and lower risk as primary reasons. This trend is particularly evident in developing economies where economic volatility increases the perceived risks associated with business start-ups. In Nigeria, Afolabi et al. (2022) observed that graduates often view paid employment as a necessary step for capital accumulation, which can later support entrepreneurial ventures.

At the same time, entrepreneurship education has been shown to alter the nature rather than the existence of preference for paid employment. Ribeiro-Soriano et al. (2023) argue that graduates with entrepreneurial training tend to seek employment in dynamic and innovative sectors where they can apply entrepreneurial skills. This indicates a shift from passive job seeking to strategic career planning. Practical examples can be seen in technology-driven sectors where graduates combine employment with entrepreneurial side projects, thereby blending both career pathways.

Despite these positive effects, structural constraints continue to reinforce preference for paid employment.



Limited access to start-up capital, regulatory challenges, and fear of business failure remain significant barriers. Karimi et al. (2022) found that perceived financial risk significantly reduces the likelihood of choosing self-employment even among entrepreneurship graduates. Consequently, while entrepreneurship education influences attitudes, it does not completely eliminate preference for paid employment.

This study therefore adopts the position that entrepreneurship education moderates rather than replaces graduates' preference for paid employment by making them more strategic and flexible in their career choices while still acknowledging the economic realities that sustain demand for salaried jobs.

Impact of Preference for Paid Employment on the Decision to Engage in Self-Employment among Graduates

Preference for paid employment has a direct and often limiting effect on graduates' transition into self-employment, particularly in contexts characterized by economic uncertainty. Empirical findings suggest that graduates who strongly prefer salaried jobs are less likely to initiate entrepreneurial ventures immediately after graduation. Nguyen et al. (2022) demonstrated that preference for job security significantly reduces entrepreneurial action, even when individuals possess the necessary skills and training. This indicates that psychological factors such as risk aversion play a crucial role in shaping career outcomes.

The impact of this preference is also reflected in delayed entrepreneurial entry. Many graduates adopt a sequential approach, where they first engage in paid employment before considering self-employment. Sorgner et al. (2023) found that prior work experience in paid employment can positively influence later entrepreneurial success, as it provides access to capital, networks, and industry knowledge. However, this delay may also reduce the likelihood of eventual transition into entrepreneurship, particularly when individuals become accustomed to stable income structures.

In developing economies, the preference for paid employment is often reinforced by socio-economic

pressures. Oluwatobi et al. (2022) observed that family expectations and financial responsibilities compel graduates to prioritize immediate income generation over entrepreneurial risk-taking. This dynamic is particularly relevant in regions such as Kogi East, where economic conditions may limit the feasibility of starting new ventures without external support.

On the other hand, some studies highlight a complementary relationship between paid employment and self-employment. Block et al. (2022) argue that hybrid career pathways, where individuals combine employment with entrepreneurial activities, are becoming increasingly common. This approach allows graduates to mitigate risk while gradually building their businesses. Practical examples include graduates who maintain formal employment while running small-scale enterprises such as digital services or retail businesses.

Despite these variations, the overall evidence suggests that strong preference for paid employment tends to reduce immediate engagement in self-employment, although it may not eliminate long-term entrepreneurial potential. This study therefore adopts the view that preference for paid employment acts as both a constraint and a transitional mechanism, influencing the timing and likelihood of graduates' entry into self-employment.

Factors that Mediate the Relationship Between Entrepreneurship Education and Career Pathways

The relationship between entrepreneurship education and career pathways is shaped by several mediating factors that determine whether graduates translate acquired knowledge into actual career decisions. One of the most significant mediators is access to financial resources. Zhang et al. (2023) found that access to start-up capital significantly increases the likelihood of transitioning from entrepreneurial intention to self-employment. Without adequate funding, the impact of entrepreneurship education remains largely theoretical.

Another critical factor is entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks. Newman et al. (2022) showed that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between education and entrepreneurial behaviour, with



higher levels of confidence leading to greater likelihood of venture creation. Entrepreneurship education contributes to this by providing practical experience, but its effectiveness depends on the quality of training and exposure.

Institutional and environmental conditions also play a central role. Regulatory frameworks, infrastructure, and market opportunities influence the feasibility of entrepreneurial activities. Acs et al. (2022) emphasized that supportive ecosystems, including access to mentorship and business development services, significantly enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. In Nigeria, infrastructural challenges and policy inconsistencies often weaken this relationship, limiting the translation of skills into practice.

Social and cultural factors further mediate career outcomes. Neneh (2022) found that societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship influence graduates' willingness to engage in self-employment. In environments where entrepreneurship is perceived as risky or less prestigious, graduates may prefer paid employment despite having entrepreneurial training. Family expectations and peer influence also shape career decisions, particularly in collectivist societies.

Work experience and exposure to real business environments represent another important mediator. Frese and Gielnik (2023) argue that practical experience strengthens the impact of entrepreneurship education by bridging the gap between theory and practice. Case studies from university incubation centres show that students who participate in start-up programmes are more likely to establish businesses after graduation compared to those who receive only classroom instruction.

In light of these findings, it is clear that entrepreneurship education alone is insufficient to determine career pathways. Its impact is filtered through a combination of financial, psychological, institutional, and social factors. This study therefore adopts the position that the relationship between entrepreneurship education and career outcomes is mediated by contextual and individual variables that either facilitate or constrain the transition from learning to action.

Empirical Reviews

Ikram Abbes (2024) conducted a study on Shaping Entrepreneurial Intentions Through Education: An Empirical Study” in Saudi Arabia, focusing on students at Tayma University College. The investigation was anchored on the Entrepreneurial Intention Model and the Entrepreneurship Education Framework, which explain how educational exposure influences behavioural intentions. A quantitative research design was adopted, utilizing a sample of 135 undergraduate students selected through a survey approach. Data were gathered using structured questionnaires and analyzed through Structural Equation Modelling. The findings revealed that course content, teaching methods, and institutional support significantly enhanced students' perception of the feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurship, while attitude acted as a mediating variable between education and career inclination . The study concluded that entrepreneurship education positively shapes entrepreneurial intentions when pedagogical approaches are interactive and context-specific. However, the work concentrated mainly on intention rather than actual career outcomes after graduation. This creates a gap for the present study, which sought to move beyond intention by examining real employment versus self-employment choices among graduates in Anyigba Kogi State Nigerian. Adeniyi (2023) carried out an empirical investigation on the Mediating Effects of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy in the Relationship Between Entrepreneurship Education and Start-Up Readiness” in Nigeria. The study was grounded in social cognitive theory with emphasis on self-efficacy as a behavioural driver. A quantitative design was employed using survey methodology, and respondents were drawn from science and engineering graduates, although the exact sample frame included a structured dataset analyzed statistically. Primary data were collected through standardized instruments measuring self-efficacy and entrepreneurial readiness. The results showed that entrepreneurship education significantly improves start-up readiness, but this relationship is strongly mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy . The conclusion emphasized that without confidence in personal capability, educational exposure alone does not translate into business creation.



While the study provided strong evidence on psychological mediators, it did not adequately examine external constraints such as labour market conditions or employment preferences. The current research addressed this limitation by incorporating broader contextual variables influencing graduates' career pathways in Anyigba Kogi State Nigeria.

Adetayo and Oloruntoba (2024) conducted a study titled “Assessing the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education Degree Programme on Students’ Entrepreneurial Attitude and Intention” in South-West Nigeria. The research was informed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which links attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control to entrepreneurial intention. A quantitative research design was adopted with data collected from university students through structured questionnaires. The sample consisted of undergraduates exposed to entrepreneurship programmes, selected using a stratified sampling approach. Analysis indicated that entrepreneurship education significantly improved students’ attitudes toward business creation and strengthened entrepreneurial intentions, aligning with national policy expectations of producing job creators . The authors concluded that entrepreneurship programmes are effective in shaping mindset but noted that translating intention into actual enterprise remains uncertain. The limitation of the study lies in its focus on students still within the university system rather than graduates already navigating the labour market. This gap was directly addressed in the present study by focusing on post-graduation career decisions arising from entrepreneurship education.

Afriyie (2025) conducted a study titled “Does the Entrepreneurship Learning Approach Influence Self-Efficacy? The Role of Students’ Entrepreneurial Competence and Satisfaction” within Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions. The research was anchored on experiential learning theory and self-efficacy theory. A quantitative design was utilized, with participants drawn from students exposed to entrepreneurship training programmes, although the study emphasized competence-based learning environments. Data collection involved survey instruments assessing

competence, satisfaction, and self-efficacy. Findings showed that practical learning approaches significantly enhance entrepreneurial competence and confidence, which in turn stimulate entrepreneurial intentions and readiness for venture creation . The study concluded that experiential pedagogy is critical for effective entrepreneurship education outcomes. Nevertheless, the research concentrated on training environments and psychological outcomes without examining how these translate into actual employment or self-employment decisions. This limitation presents a gap that the current study filled by linking educational exposure with concrete career choices among university graduates in Anyigba.

Theoretical Framework – Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour was proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1991. The theory explains how human action is guided by three core determinants, namely attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The central assumption is that individuals are more likely to engage in a particular behaviour when they hold favourable evaluations of that behaviour, perceive social support or approval from significant others, and believe they possess the capacity and resources to perform the behaviour. In the context of career decision-making, the theory posits that intention serves as the immediate predictor of behaviour, meaning that graduates’ choices between employment and self-employment are shaped by their prior attitudes, perceived expectations, and confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities.

The strength of this framework lies in its strong predictive power and wide applicability in explaining career intentions and entrepreneurial behaviour across different socio-economic contexts. Empirical studies from 2022 onward consistently demonstrate that the constructs of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control significantly predict entrepreneurial intention and subsequent action among graduates. The framework also provides a structured way to integrate both individual-level and social influences, making it particularly relevant for examining how entrepreneurship education affects career



pathways. Its adaptability allows researchers to incorporate contextual variables such as access to finance, institutional support, and labour market conditions, which aligns with the realities of developing economies such as Nigeria.

Despite its relevance, the theory has certain limitations. It places considerable emphasis on rational decision-making and may not fully account for spontaneous or necessity-driven entrepreneurship, which is common in environments characterized by economic instability. It also assumes that intention always leads to behaviour, whereas empirical evidence shows that external barriers such as lack of capital and infrastructural constraints can hinder the translation of intention into actual self-employment. Additionally, the model does not explicitly capture environmental or structural dynamics unless they are introduced as extensions, which may limit its explanatory scope in contexts with significant systemic challenges.

The application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour to this study is direct and compelling. Entrepreneurship education can be understood as an intervention that shapes graduates' attitudes toward self-employment by exposing them to entrepreneurial knowledge and experiences. It also influences subjective norms by legitimizing entrepreneurship as a credible career option within the university environment and broader society. Furthermore, it enhances perceived behavioural control by equipping students with skills, competencies, and confidence required to start and manage a business. These three components collectively determine whether graduates develop a preference for paid employment or self-employment. In Kogi East Senatorial District, where economic conditions and social expectations play a significant role, the theory provides a useful framework for explaining why some graduates, despite receiving entrepreneurship education, still prefer salaried jobs, while others pursue entrepreneurial ventures. It therefore offers a coherent basis for analyzing how educational exposure interacts with personal and contextual factors to shape career pathways in the study area.

8. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted cross sectional survey research design as the most appropriate approach for examining the

relationship between entrepreneurship education and career pathways among university graduates. The choice of survey design was informed by its suitability for collecting data from a relatively large number of respondents within a specific population at a single point in time. It allows for the systematic gathering of information on graduates' experiences, perceptions, and career decisions, which are central to the objectives of the study. The design also enabled the researcher to establish patterns and relationships between variables such as exposure to entrepreneurship education and subsequent employment or self-employment choices. In addition, the survey approach provides flexibility in capturing both descriptive and explanatory data, making it relevant for studies that seek to understand behavioural outcomes in real-life contexts.

9. STUDY AREA

The area of the study was Anyigba in Kogi East Senatorial District of Kogi State, Nigeria, which hosts Prince Abubakar Audu University. The selection of Anyigba was deliberate due to the presence of the university, which has produced a large number of graduates over the years. A significant proportion of these graduates remain in the town after completing their studies and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), either in search of employment opportunities or while engaging in small-scale entrepreneurial activities. This concentration of graduates within a defined geographical area provided a suitable setting for examining how entrepreneurship education influences career decisions in a real-life context.

10. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprised of all university graduates residing in Anyigba community and its environs who recently completed their studies at Prince Abubakar Audu University or other institutions and continued to live in the area before and after their NYSC experiences. Due to the absence of an official database capturing this specific category of graduates, the population was estimated based on available institutional records and observable trends in graduate retention within the town. It was estimated that approximately 1000 graduates currently reside in Anyigba,



considering annual graduation outputs and the proportion of individuals who remain in the locality after NYSC. This estimated population provides a reasonable basis for sampling and data collection, ensuring that the study captures diverse experiences of graduates across different fields and career pathways.

11. SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION

Given that the estimated population of graduates residing in Anyigba falls between 900 and 1,000, this study determines its sample size using the principle of saturation, which is widely accepted in qualitative research. Unlike quantitative studies that rely on statistical formulas such as those proposed by Taro Yamane, qualitative inquiries prioritize depth of information over numerical representation. Saturation is reached when additional interviews no longer yield new insights or themes. Drawing from methodological guidance by Greg Guest and Johnny Saldaña, studies employing in-depth interviews typically achieve meaningful saturation within a range of 15 to 30 participants, depending on the homogeneity of the population and the scope of the research questions. In this study, a sample size of approximately 20–25 graduates was considered adequate to capture diverse perspectives on employment and self-employment pathways while still allowing for detailed exploration of individual experiences.

12. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The sampling technique adopted was purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the study. In this case, only graduates who reside in Anyigba before and after completing their National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and who have been exposed to entrepreneurship education during their university studies are selected. This approach ensures that respondents have direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for qualitative studies where the objective is not generalization but the generation of rich, contextualized insights. It also allows the researcher to include participants across different disciplines, employment statuses, and

entrepreneurial engagements, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the findings.

13. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were collected exclusively through in-depth interviews, which provided an opportunity for participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and career decisions in their own words. The in-depth interview method was suitable for exploring complex issues such as career pathways and the influence of entrepreneurship education because it allows for probing, clarification, and the emergence of unanticipated themes. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to ensure consistency across interviews while maintaining flexibility for participants to elaborate on issues they consider important. Each interview was conducted in a conducive environment, on both face-to-face and through virtual platforms where necessary, and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure accuracy in data capture. Field notes were also taken to complement recorded data and to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

14. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected were analyzed using content analysis, which involves systematically identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns and themes within the interview transcripts. The process begins with transcription of recorded interviews, followed by repeated reading to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and later organized into broader thematic categories that reflect the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics were also used in a limited capacity to summarize basic demographic characteristics of the participants, such as age, gender, field of study, and employment status, thereby providing contextual background to the qualitative findings.

To enhance the rigour and transparency of the analysis, the study employed NVivo for data management and coding. NVivo facilitates the organization of large volumes of textual data, supports systematic coding, and enables the identification of relationships between themes. The use of this software also improved the reliability of the analysis



by allowing for consistent application of codes and easy retrieval of data segments. Through this combined approach, the study was able to generate detailed and well-

supported interpretations of how entrepreneurship education influences graduates' career pathways in Anyigba and its environs.

15. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (in years)	20–24 years	6	24.0
	25–29 years	11	44.0
	30–34 years	5	20.0
	35 years and above	3	12.0
Sex	Male	14	56.0
	Female	11	44.0
Marital Status	Single	15	60.0
	Married	9	36.0
	Divorced/Separated	1	4.0
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	18	72.0
	Postgraduate Diploma	3	12.0
Field of Study	Master's Degree	4	16.0
	Social Sciences	7	28.0
	Management Sciences	6	24.0
	Natural/Applied Sciences	5	20.0
	Arts/Humanities	4	16.0
Employment Status	Education	3	12.0
	Fully Employed	10	40.0
	Self-Employed	7	28.0
	Unemployed	5	20.0
Years After Graduation	Underemployed	3	12.0
	1–2 years	8	32.0
	3–4 years	9	36.0
	5 years and above	8	32.0

Field Survey Research, 2026

The age distribution of the respondents on Table 1 shows that a larger proportion falls within the 25–29 years category, accounting for 44% of the sample, followed by those aged 20–24 years at 24%. Respondents aged 30–34 years represent 20%, while those 35 years and above constitute 12%. This distribution indicates that the majority of participants are within the early and mid-youth

stage, a period typically associated with active career exploration and decision-making. The dominance of this age group suggests that most respondents are at a critical transition point between education and stable employment or business establishment. The implication for the study is that the findings largely reflect the perspectives of individuals who are still in the formative phase of their



career trajectories, making their responses particularly relevant for understanding how entrepreneurship education influences early career choices.

The gender composition shows that 56% of the respondents were male, while 44% were female. This relatively balanced distribution provides a fair representation of both genders, although males are slightly more represented. This pattern reflects broader participation trends in employment and entrepreneurial activities within the study area. The implication is that the study captures perspectives from both male and female graduates, allowing for a more inclusive understanding of how entrepreneurship education shapes career pathways across gender lines. However, the slight male dominance may also suggest that men are more visible or accessible in the labour market or entrepreneurial space within the locality.

The marital status of the participants revealed that 60% of the respondents were single, 36% were married, and 4% were divorced or separated. The predominance of single individuals aligns with the youthful age structure of the sample. This suggests that many respondents may have fewer family responsibilities, which could influence their willingness to take risks associated with self-employment. Conversely, the presence of married respondents indicates that a notable proportion may prioritize income stability, potentially favouring paid employment. The implication is that marital status plays a role in shaping career preferences, with single graduates more likely to experiment with entrepreneurial ventures compared to their married counterparts.

The majority of respondents, representing 72%, hold a bachelor's degree, while 16% possess a master's degree and 12% have a postgraduate diploma. This distribution indicates that most participants have attained the minimum qualification required for entry into the labour market, with a smaller proportion advancing to higher levels of education. The implication for the study is that the findings primarily reflect the experiences of first-degree holders who are the main targets of entrepreneurship education programmes in Nigerian universities. The presence of postgraduate degree holders also suggests exposure to advanced knowledge, which may influence more strategic career decisions.

The respondents were drawn from diverse academic backgrounds, with 28% from social sciences, 24% from management sciences, 20% from natural or applied sciences, 16% from arts and humanities, and 12% from education. This spread indicates that the study captures a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. The higher representation of social and management sciences reflects their stronger alignment with entrepreneurship-related courses. The implication is that differences in academic training may influence how graduates perceive and apply entrepreneurship education, with those from business-related fields potentially more inclined toward self-employment.

The employment status distribution shows that 40% of respondents are fully employed, 28% are self-employed, 20% are unemployed, and 12% are underemployed. This pattern indicates that while a significant proportion has secured paid employment, a notable segment is engaged in self-employment, reflecting the influence of entrepreneurship education. However, the presence of unemployment and underemployment highlights ongoing labour market challenges. The implication is that graduates adopt diverse career pathways, and entrepreneurship education may be contributing to self-employment as an alternative to limited formal job opportunities.

The data indicate that 36% of respondents graduated 3–4 years ago, while 32% fall within 1–2 years and another 32% have spent 5 years or more after graduation. This relatively even distribution suggests that the study includes both recent graduates and those with longer post-graduation experience. The implication is that the analysis captures both immediate and longer-term career outcomes, providing a broader understanding of how entrepreneurship education influences career decisions over time.

Presentation and Analysis of Data Based Research Objectives

Research Objective 1: To determine the extent to which entrepreneurship education affects graduates' preference for paid employment in Anyigba, Kogi State.

i. How would you describe your experience with entrepreneurship education during your university studies,



and in what ways did it influence your thinking about possible career options after graduation?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“My experience with entrepreneurship education during my time in the university was quite engaging, especially because it was one of the few courses where we were asked to think beyond passing exams. We developed business plans, carried out feasibility studies, and even simulated running small ventures. Before that time, my mindset was fixed on graduating and securing a government or corporate job because that was what everyone around me expected. However, the exposure I got from those classes gradually shifted my thinking. I started seeing business opportunities around me, even within the Anyigba environment. By my final year, I was already considering combining job search with starting something small. That experience planted the idea that I didn’t have to depend entirely on paid employment, and it eventually influenced my decision to go into self-employment after NYSC” **(IDI/1/ Male/Self-Employed/Business Administration Graduate/39yrs/ Anyigba).**

“The entrepreneurship classes gave me a different perspective while I was still in school. We were taught that job opportunities are limited and that we should think about creating jobs instead of waiting for them. At that time, it sounded encouraging, but after graduation, I realized that starting a business is not as straightforward as it was presented in class. Despite that, the experience still influenced my mindset. Instead of relying only on job applications, I now think of alternative ways to earn income, even though I haven’t fully established a business yet. It changed how I see my options, even if I haven’t fully acted on it” **(IDI/1/Male/Sociology Graduate /34yrs/Anyigba).**

“The entrepreneurship education I received was informative, but at the same time, it felt somewhat disconnected from my main field of study. It introduced me to concepts like opportunity identification and small business management, which I found interesting. It made me aware that I could venture into areas like agro-processing or small-scale production related to my discipline. However, it didn’t completely change my career

direction immediately. I still focused on securing employment because I felt that my professional training required structured experience first. That said, the course influenced my thinking in the sense that I now see entrepreneurship as a future possibility rather than something reserved for people without formal education” **(IDI/1/ Female /Microbiology Graduate/Fully Employed/28yrs/Anyigba).**

ii. Can you explain how the knowledge and skills you acquired from entrepreneurship courses shaped your decision to pursue either paid employment or self-employment?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“The knowledge I gained from entrepreneurship education, especially in areas like bookkeeping, cost management, and basic financial planning, played a major role in my decision to start my own business. After NYSC, I didn’t get a stable job immediately, so I decided to use the skills I had to start a small tailoring business. What really helped me was the ability to manage my finances properly, keep records, and plan for growth. Even though I faced challenges like low capital and competition, the knowledge I had gave me confidence to continue. Without that training, I don’t think I would have taken that step” **(IDI/1/ Male/Self-Employed/Accounting Graduate/29yrs/ Anyigba).**

“The skills I acquired were useful, but not necessarily for starting a business immediately. They helped me develop a different way of thinking, especially in terms of problem-solving and planning. In my current job, I apply those skills in managing tasks and improving efficiency. Although I chose paid employment, I believe the entrepreneurship training has made me more productive and open to opportunities. It didn’t push me directly into business, but it shaped how I approach work and decision-making” **(IDI/1/ Male/Political Science Graduate/Unemployed /24yrs/Anyigba).**

“The course taught me how to identify opportunities and market products, which I found very practical. After graduation, while I was still searching for a stable job, I decided to start a small online business selling fashion items. Even though it is not yet at a large scale, it has



helped me generate some income. The skills I acquired influenced my decision to not remain idle while waiting for employment. It gave me the confidence to try something on my own” (IDI/1/ Female /English Graduate/Fully Employed/26yrs/Anyigba).

iii. Looking back after graduation, to what extent do you think entrepreneurship education prepared you for real-life career decisions, and how has it affected the path you eventually chose?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“I would say entrepreneurship education prepared me to some extent, especially in understanding how businesses operate. However, real-life challenges are more complex than what we were taught. Issues like access to capital, customer trust, and market competition were not fully addressed in class. Despite these gaps, the knowledge I gained gave me a foundation to start my business. It influenced my decision to choose self-employment, but I had to learn many practical aspects on my own after graduation” (IDI/1/ Male/Self-Employed/Economics Graduate/30yrs/ Anyigba).

“The course prepared me mentally by exposing me to the idea of entrepreneurship, but it didn’t fully equip me for practical realities. Starting a business requires more than theoretical knowledge. That is why I decided to go into paid employment first. However, the exposure I got still plays a role in my long-term plans because I intend to start something of my own in the future” (IDI/3/ Male/Education Graduate /31yrs/Unemployed /Anyigba).

“The entrepreneurship education I received was informative, but at the same time, it felt somewhat disconnected from my main field of study. It introduced me to concepts like opportunity identification and small business management, which I found interesting. It made me aware that I could venture into areas like agro-processing or small-scale production related to my discipline. However, it didn’t completely change my career direction immediately. I still focused on securing employment because I felt that my professional training required structured experience first. That said, the course influenced my thinking in the sense that I now see

entrepreneurship as a future possibility rather than something reserved for people without formal education” (IDI/1/ Female /Microbiology Graduate/Under-Employed/24yrs/Anyigba).

The responses under this objective show that entrepreneurship education has a noticeable influence on how graduates think about their career options, but its effect is largely cognitive rather than decisional. Many participants described a shift in mindset from complete dependence on paid employment to awareness of alternative pathways such as self-employment. Exposure to business planning, opportunity identification, and basic management skills introduced graduates to the idea that they could initiate ventures within their immediate environment. However, this influence appears uneven. While a few respondents, particularly those who are self-employed, directly attributed their career decisions to the knowledge and confidence gained from entrepreneurship education, others indicated that the training only broadened their perspective without translating into immediate action.

A consistent pattern across the responses is the gap between theoretical exposure and practical readiness. Graduates acknowledged that entrepreneurship education provided foundational knowledge, but it did not sufficiently prepare them for real-world challenges such as accessing capital, navigating market competition, or managing uncertainty. This limitation explains why many respondents adopted a cautious approach, combining entrepreneurial awareness with a preference for employment. The implication is that entrepreneurship education in this context functions more as an orientation tool that shapes thinking rather than a decisive factor that determines career outcomes. It influences intention and awareness, but the transition to actual self-employment depends on additional conditions beyond the classroom.

Research Objective 2: To assess the impact of preference for paid employment on the decision to engage in self-employment among graduates in Anyigba Kogi State.

i. After completing your university education, what factors influenced your preference for paid employment despite your exposure to entrepreneurship education?



In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“The knowledge I gained from entrepreneurship education, especially in areas like bookkeeping, cost management, and basic financial planning, played a major role in my decision to start my own business. After NYSC, I didn’t get a stable job immediately, so I decided to use the skills I had to start a small tailoring business. What really helped me was the ability to manage my finances properly, keep records, and plan for growth. Even though I faced challenges like low capital and competition, the knowledge I had gave me confidence to continue. Without that training, I don’t think I would have taken that step” **(IDI/2/ Male/Self-Employed/Accounting Graduate/27yrs/ Anyigba).**

“The skills I acquired were useful, but not necessarily for starting a business immediately. They helped me develop a different way of thinking, especially in terms of problem-solving and planning. In my current job, I apply those skills in managing tasks and improving efficiency. Although I chose paid employment, I believe the entrepreneurship training has made me more productive and open to opportunities. It didn’t push me directly into business, but it shaped how I approach work and decision-making” **(IDI/2/Male/Political Science Graduate /24yrs/Anyigba).**

“The course taught me how to identify opportunities and market products, which I found very practical. After graduation, while I was still searching for a stable job, I decided to start a small online business selling fashion items. Even though it is not yet at a large scale, it has helped me generate some income. The skills I acquired influenced my decision to not remain idle while waiting for employment. It gave me the confidence to try something on my own” **(IDI/2/ Female /English Graduate/Fully Employed/26yrs/Anyigba).**

ii. In what ways did entrepreneurship education change or reinforce your perception of salaried jobs compared to starting your own business?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“The My preference for paid employment was mainly influenced by the need for financial stability. Starting a business requires capital, which I didn’t have after graduation. Even though I studied entrepreneurship, I needed a steady income to support myself and my family. The economic situation also made it risky to start a business immediately” **(IDI/2/ Male/Self-Employed/Accounting Graduate/39yrs/ Anyigba).**

“I preferred paid employment because of the uncertainty associated with business. The economy is not stable, and there is no guarantee that a business will succeed. I felt it was safer to secure a job first before considering entrepreneurship.” **(IDI/2/ Male/Self-Employed/Computer Science Graduate/35yrs/ Anyigba).**

“My family played a major role in my decision. They expected me to get a job after graduation, not start struggling with a business. That expectation influenced me to focus on employment.” **(IDI/2/ Female/Under-Employed/Sociology Graduate/28yrs/ Anyigba).**

iii. Can you describe whether your preference for paid employment was influenced more by personal circumstances, economic conditions, or the nature of the entrepreneurship training you received?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“The entrepreneurship education I received made me see that employment is not the only option. It changed my mindset and made me more open to business opportunities. I now see self-employment as more flexible and potentially more rewarding.” **(IDI/2/ Male/Self-Employed/Marketing Graduate/29yrs/ Anyigba).**

“My perception of salaried jobs didn’t change much. I still see them as more secure compared to business. Entrepreneurship is good, but the risks are too high.” **(IDI/2/ Male/Self-Employed/Biochemistry Graduate/39yrs/ Anyigba).**

“It made me appreciate entrepreneurship, but it also made me realize how challenging it is. That is why I still prefer to get a job first.” **(IDI/2/ Male/Unemployed/History and International Studies Graduate/30yrs/ Anyigba).**

The responses indicate that entrepreneurship education has a limited capacity to displace graduates’ preference for



paid employment. Despite exposure to entrepreneurial training, a significant number of participants still expressed a strong inclination toward salaried jobs. The dominant reasons for this preference include the need for financial stability, fear of business risks, and prevailing economic conditions. Many respondents emphasized that paid employment offers predictable income and security, which are critical considerations in a context where business failure can have severe consequences.

At the same time, entrepreneurship education appears to have modified, rather than eliminated, this preference. Some graduates reported that while they still preferred paid employment, they now view it as a temporary or strategic step rather than a permanent career endpoint. Others indicated that the training encouraged them to consider hybrid approaches, such as combining employment with small-scale business activities. This suggests that entrepreneurship education contributes to a more flexible career orientation, even when it does not immediately shift preferences away from employment.

The findings also reveal that personal and contextual factors outweigh educational influence in shaping career preferences. Family expectations, economic pressure, and lack of start-up resources were repeatedly cited as stronger determinants than the content of entrepreneurship training. The implication is that entrepreneurship education alone cannot significantly alter employment preferences unless it is supported by favourable economic and institutional conditions.

Research Objective 3: To identify the factors that mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and career pathways among graduates in Anyigba Kogi State.

i. What challenges or enabling factors have you encountered that affected your ability to apply the entrepreneurial skills acquired during your university education?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“My preference for paid employment was mainly influenced by the need for financial stability. Starting a business requires capital, which I didn’t have after graduation. Even though I studied entrepreneurship, I needed a steady income to support myself and my family.

The economic situation also made it risky to start a business immediately.” **(IDI/3/ Female/Self-Employed/Banking and Finance Graduate/31yrs/ Anyigba).**

“I preferred paid employment because of the uncertainty associated with business. The economy is not stable, and there is no guarantee that a business will succeed. I felt it was safer to secure a job first before considering entrepreneurship.” **(IDI/3/ Male/Self-Employed/Biotechnology Graduate/26yrs/ Anyigba).**

“My family played a major role in my decision. They expected me to get a job after graduation, not start struggling with a business. That expectation influenced me to focus on employment” **(IDI/3/ Female/Self-Employed/Mass Communication Graduate/29yrs/ Anyigba).**

ii. How have external factors such as access to finance, family expectations, or social environment influenced your decision to either remain in paid employment or engage in self-employment?

In-depth Interview sessions on the above question generated the following responses from the participants:

“The entrepreneurship education I received made me see that employment is not the only option. It changed my mindset and made me more open to business opportunities. I now see self-employment as more flexible and potentially more rewarding.” **(IDI/3/ Male/Self-Employed/Mathematics Graduate/28yrs/ Anyigba).**

“My perception of salaried jobs didn’t change much. I still see them as more secure compared to business. Entrepreneurship is good, but the risks are too high.” **(IDI/2/ Male/Self-Employed/Education Graduate/36yrs/ Anyigba).**

“It made me appreciate entrepreneurship, but it also made me realize how challenging it is. That is why I still prefer to get a job first” **(IDI/3/ Male/Self-Employed/Public Administration Graduate/40yrs/ Anyigba).**

The responses clearly demonstrate that the relationship between entrepreneurship education and actual career outcomes is mediated by a combination of structural, social, and individual factors. Access to finance emerged as the most critical constraint, with several participants noting that lack of capital prevented them from applying



the skills acquired during their training. This highlights a major disconnect between knowledge acquisition and practical implementation. In addition to financial barriers, infrastructural challenges such as unreliable electricity and limited business support systems were identified as significant obstacles.

Social influences also play a central role in shaping career pathways. Family expectations were frequently mentioned as a factor pushing graduates toward paid employment, particularly in cases where financial responsibility and social stability are prioritized. Similarly, societal perceptions that favour salaried jobs over small-scale

entrepreneurship contribute to reluctance in pursuing self-employment. These social dynamics reinforce conservative career choices despite exposure to entrepreneurial training.

On the enabling side, factors such as family support, mentorship, and practical experiences during programmes like NYSC were found to facilitate entrepreneurial engagement. Graduates who had access to supportive networks or relevant experiences were more likely to transition into self-employment. This suggests that entrepreneurship education is more effective when complemented by real-life exposure and support systems.

NVivo Thematic Analysis Output

Node Summary (Major Themes and Coding Frequency)

Theme (Node)	Number of References	Number of Participants
Entrepreneurial Awareness and Mindset Shift	21	9
Preference for Income Stability	24	12
Practical Skill Acquisition	18	8
Theory–Practice Gap	20	10
Access to Finance Constraints	22	11
Family and Social Influence	17	9
Economic and Environmental Barriers	16	8
Hybrid Career Strategies	12	6
Role of Experience (NYSC/Internship)	14	7
Self-Efficacy and Personal Interest	15	7

Thematic Network (Hierarchical Coding Structure)

Parent Node 1: Influence of Entrepreneurship Education

- Child Node: Entrepreneurial Awareness
- Child Node: Skill Acquisition
- Child Node: Self-Efficacy Development
- Child Node: Theory–Practice Gap

Parent Node 2: Employment Preference Dynamics

- Child Node: Income Stability Consideration
- Child Node: Risk Aversion

- Child Node: Family Expectations

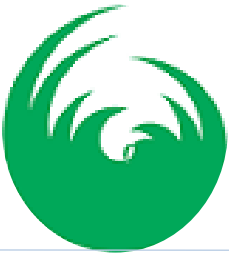
- Child Node: Perception of Job Security

Parent Node 3: Mediating Factors

- Child Node: Financial Constraints
- Child Node: Social Influence
- Child Node: Infrastructure Challenges
- Child Node: Experiential Exposure
- Child Node: Hybrid Pathways

Word Frequency Query Output (Top 15 Words)

Word	Count	Weighted Percentage
Business	48	4.5%



Word	Count	Weighted Percentage
Job	44	4.1%
Experience	39	3.7%
Capital	35	3.3%
Skills	33	3.1%
Employment	31	2.9%
Education	29	2.7%
Start	27	2.5%
Income	25	2.3%
Opportunity	23	2.1%
Risk	22	2.0%
Family	20	1.9%
Support	19	1.8%
Training	18	1.7%
Environment	17	1.6%

Matrix Coding Query (Objectives vs Themes)

Themes / Objectives	Obj. 1 Influence	Obj. 2 Preference	Obj. 3 Mediators
Entrepreneurial Awareness	High	Moderate	Low
Skill Acquisition	High	Low	Moderate
Income Stability Preference	Low	High	Moderate
Financial Constraints	Moderate	High	High
Family Influence	Low	High	High
Theory–Practice Gap	High	Moderate	High
Experiential Learning	Moderate	Low	High

Thematic Interpretation (NVivo Analytical Memos)

Memo 1: Entrepreneurship Education as Cognitive Influence

Coding reveals that entrepreneurship education strongly contributes to awareness and mindset change but shows weaker links to actual behavioural outcomes. Most participants referenced exposure and understanding rather than direct action.

Memo 2: Dominance of Economic Rationality

Nodes related to income stability and financial security recorded the highest references. This indicates that

economic realities override educational influence in shaping career decisions.

Memo 3: Structural Constraints as Key Mediators

High coding density around financial constraints and environmental barriers shows that external conditions significantly limit the translation of entrepreneurial knowledge into practice.

Memo 4: Emergence of Hybrid Career Pathways

A recurring pattern across coded data indicates that some graduates combine employment with small-scale business activities, suggesting a transitional career model.



Memo 5: Importance of Experiential Exposure

References linked to NYSC and internships highlight that real-life exposure plays a stronger role in shaping career direction than classroom instruction alone.

Model Output (Conceptual Relationships)

Entrepreneurship Education → (Awareness + Skills + Self-efficacy)



Filtered through:

- Financial Constraints
- Family Expectations
- Economic Conditions
- Infrastructure



Leads to:

- Paid Employment Preference
- Delayed Entrepreneurship
- Hybrid Career Pathways
- Limited Immediate Self-Employment

The NVivo-based thematic output showed that entrepreneurship education primarily influences cognitive and attitudinal dimensions, while actual career outcomes are shaped by strong external mediators. Paid employment remains dominant due to economic necessity, while self-employment emerges gradually under supportive conditions. The data also reveal a transition pattern where graduates navigate between employment and entrepreneurship rather than choosing one exclusively.

16. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings relating to the first objective showed that entrepreneurship education exerts a clear influence on the career thinking of university graduates, particularly at the level of awareness, orientation, and mindset formation. Participants consistently indicated that exposure to entrepreneurship courses broadened their understanding of career possibilities beyond salaried employment and introduced them to the idea of venture creation. However, this influence was largely cognitive and attitudinal rather than decisional. While some respondents translated this exposure into self-employment, many others retained a cautious approach, citing gaps between theoretical instruction and real-world practice. This outcome aligns

with the position of Nowiński et al. (2022), who found that entrepreneurship education significantly enhances entrepreneurial intentions but does not necessarily guarantee immediate entrepreneurial action. Similarly, the findings are consistent with the work of Adetayo and Oloruntoba (2024), which established that entrepreneurship programmes shape students' attitudes and intentions but do not automatically lead to business start-up. In contrast, the findings partially diverge from Abbes (2024), who reported a stronger link between entrepreneurship education and career direction, suggesting that contextual differences, particularly in economic conditions, may explain variations in outcomes. The present study therefore reinforces the argument that entrepreneurship education is effective in shaping perceptions and expanding career awareness, but its ability to determine actual career pathways is limited by external realities.

With respect to the second objective, the study revealed that entrepreneurship education does not significantly reduce graduates' preference for paid employment. Despite exposure to entrepreneurial training, many respondents expressed a strong inclination toward salaried jobs due to the need for income stability, risk aversion, and prevailing economic uncertainty. This suggests that employment remains the dominant and more secure pathway for graduates, particularly in contexts where financial vulnerability is high. These findings support the observations of Ismail et al. (2023), who reported that a majority of graduates still prefer paid employment even after undergoing entrepreneurship education. The results also align with Afolabi et al. (2022), who emphasized that economic pressures and the need for financial security often outweigh entrepreneurial aspirations. However, the findings also indicate that entrepreneurship education modifies the nature of employment preference rather than eliminating it, as some graduates view paid employment as a temporary or strategic step toward eventual self-employment. This perspective is consistent with Ribeiro-Soriano et al. (2023), who argued that entrepreneurship education encourages more strategic career planning rather than outright rejection of salaried work. On the other hand, the findings contrast with studies such as Amaral et al.



(2024), which suggest a stronger shift toward entrepreneurial orientation following entrepreneurship education. The divergence highlights the role of contextual constraints in shaping career decisions.

In relation to the third objective, the findings demonstrated that the relationship between entrepreneurship education and career pathways is significantly mediated by a range of structural, social, and individual factors. Access to finance emerged as the most critical barrier, with many participants indicating that lack of capital prevented them from applying the skills acquired during their training. This finding strongly supports the work of Zhang et al. (2023), who identified financial resources as a key determinant of entrepreneurial action. Additionally, social influences such as family expectations and societal perceptions were found to shape career choices, often favouring paid employment over self-employment. This is consistent with Neneh (2022), who emphasized the role of social norms in influencing entrepreneurial behaviour. Environmental factors, including inadequate infrastructure and limited institutional support, further constrained the translation of entrepreneurial knowledge into practice, aligning with the position of Acs et al. (2022) on the importance of supportive ecosystems. At the individual level, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and prior exposure to practical experiences such as NYSC or internships were identified as enabling factors. These findings corroborate Newman et al. (2022) and Adeniyi (2023), who highlighted the mediating role of self-efficacy in linking entrepreneurship education to entrepreneurial outcomes. Overall, the study confirms that entrepreneurship education alone is insufficient to determine career pathways, as its impact is filtered through a combination of contextual and personal variables.

The findings of this study are well supported by the Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Ajzen (1991), which provides a useful framework for understanding how entrepreneurship education influences career decisions. The theory posits that behaviour is driven by intention, which is shaped by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In this study, entrepreneurship education contributed significantly to shaping positive attitudes toward self-employment and

enhancing perceived behavioural control through skill acquisition. However, subjective norms, particularly family expectations and societal preferences for salaried employment, as well as perceived constraints such as lack of capital and economic instability, limited the translation of these intentions into actual entrepreneurial behaviour. This explains why many graduates, despite being exposed to entrepreneurship education, still prefer paid employment or delay entry into self-employment. The findings therefore validate the assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour by demonstrating that career outcomes are not determined solely by educational exposure but by the interaction of individual attitudes, social pressures, and perceived capacity to act.

17. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that entrepreneurship education plays an important but limited role in determining graduates' career pathways. It is effective in shaping mindset and expanding possibilities, but it does not independently drive career outcomes. For entrepreneurship education to achieve its intended purpose of promoting self-employment and reducing reliance on salaried jobs, it must be complemented by practical support systems and contextual interventions that address the structural barriers faced by graduates.

18. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the above conclusions and findings, the study suggested the following:

- i. There is a need to strengthen the practical component of entrepreneurship education within universities by integrating experiential learning approaches that go beyond classroom instruction. This can be achieved through structured incubation programmes, industry partnerships, and compulsory business start-up projects that expose students to real market conditions before graduation. Such initiatives will help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby improving graduates' readiness to engage in self-employment.
- ii. Access to start-up capital and post-graduation support should be prioritised through targeted interventions



involving government agencies, financial institutions, and private sector stakeholders. Establishing graduate-focused funding schemes, microcredit facilities, and mentorship programmes within and around Anyigba will provide the necessary support for graduates to translate entrepreneurial intentions into viable enterprises. Without addressing financial and institutional constraints, the impact of entrepreneurship education will remain limited.

iii. There is also a need to reorient societal and institutional perceptions of career success by promoting entrepreneurship as a credible and respectable pathway alongside paid employment. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, success stories of local entrepreneurs, and policy incentives that recognise and support small-scale enterprises. Encouraging a more supportive social environment will reduce the pressure on graduates to conform exclusively to salaried employment and create space for more individuals to explore entrepreneurial opportunities.

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