

ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDES AND INTENTIONS AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES¹²

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ABSTRACT

Economic development is largely driven by the business activities of entrepreneurs- those individuals who create private enterprises. For this development to occur, however, a nation must possess a significant mass of business people. The psychological literature suggests that attitude and intention precede corresponding behaviours; and in terms of entrepreneurship, research evidence suggests that university education promotes positive entrepreneurial attitude and intention, and ultimately entrepreneurial behaviour in individuals. Graduates are therefore regarded as potential entrepreneurs: the higher the number of undergraduates who hold positive entrepreneurial attitude and intention, the higher the number likely to create their own businesses after their graduation. This study therefore was designed to examine the prevalence of entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions among Nigerian undergraduates; and to investigate the roles of gender, Locus of Control, parents' occupation and social support as possible predictor variables. Male students were found to be more internal on the LOC trait than the females. This internality, as well as the entrepreneurial occupations and approval of respondents' mothers significantly predicted a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship. The paper concluded by recommending measures that can strengthen positive entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions in Nigerian undergraduates, and ultimately enhance business orientation rates among the nation's graduates.

KEY DESCRIPTORS: Entrepreneurial attitude, Entrepreneurial intention, Undergraduate Students, Locus of Control, Parental Support

INTRODUCTION

Privately-owned enterprises are well known for propelling national economic development (United Nations, 1993). In particular, indigenously-owned, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are perceived as the bedrock of sustainable economic development, partly because these SMEs are the firms that invariably survive in the struggle for economic revival when and if foreign-owned enterprises move out of a troubled economy (Moy, Luk, Sheehan and Sammapan, 2001). The individuals at the helm of private enterprises are the entrepreneurs. For our present purposes, we have adopted as a working definition the description of an entrepreneur as an individual who holds a majority interest in a privately-owned business, one who actively works in and manages that business, relying upon it as a primary source of income (Carland, Carland and Stewart, 2000).

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While the concept 'entrepreneur' refers to the person who creates and nurtures a private business, the term 'entrepreneurship' refers to processes and activities connected with creating, owning and managing a business firm (Carland et al., 2000). The entrepreneurial or venture creation process is however not a one-day or one-step activity. Rather, the process usually begins as an idea, a dream, thought, desire, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, which may or may not be acted upon. In other words, for a business idea to metamorphose into an enterprise, the person involved must act on his/her ideas and perform definite entrepreneurial behaviours (actions) such as, registration of business name, securing premises and other resources, among others.

This paper is an exploratory investigation into the attitude and intention phases of entrepreneurial behaviour among Nigerian management undergraduates. Three assumptions undergird the study design: as full-time students, these undergraduates will only pick up jobs after their graduation; as final-year students, they are likely to have tentative ideas or intentions of what those jobs would be; and, as is typical of the average person, their career choices would fall into two broad option-categories: self employment (entrepreneurial career) or paid employment. This paper therefore focuses on answering two research questions: To what extent do entrepreneurial attitude and intention exist among Nigerian undergraduates? What variables/factors predict entrepreneurial attitude and intention among Nigerian undergraduates? In other words, our objectives were to examine the prevalence of entrepreneurial attitude and intention in a sample of Nigerian undergraduates; and investigate the roles of gender, Locus of Control (LOC), parents' occupation and social support as probable predictors of these entrepreneurial attributes.

Our interest in university students is informed by research evidence which suggests that development of a critical mass of entrepreneurs within an economy benefits from university education in general (Venesaar, Kolbre and Piliste, 2006); and that university graduates are potential future entrepreneurs (Basu and Virick, 2008). Entrepreneurship education in particular is regarded as useful in promoting an awareness of self-employment as a career option, and equipping students with skills and attitudes required for effective business ownership (Kent, Sexton and Vesper, 1982); to the extent that graduates who were introduced to entrepreneurship concepts while at the university have been known to start businesses at twice the rate of their peers (Fleming, 1996; Smith-Hunter, 2003; Basu et al., 2008).

We hope that the paper will contribute useful insight toward fostering entrepreneurial attitude, intention and activity among graduates, thereby ameliorating over-dependence on ready-made paid jobs, and ultimately unleashing benefits of entrepreneurship in developing economies like Nigeria. In the sections that follow, relevant streams of the literature are reviewed, data collection and analysis techniques are described, inference are drawn from the results obtained and policy prescriptions proffered.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Differentiating between existing and intending entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship is virtually inseparable from business formation (Pendergast, 2004). The concept has indeed been defined as the "creation of new enterprise" (Low and MacMillan 1988: 141, cited in Mazzarol, Volery, Doss and Thein, 1999: 49). Business formation however is a step-by-step process that may take many years to evolve (Mazzarol et al., 1999). In line with this conceptualisation of entrepreneurship as a process, entrepreneurs have been categorised according to the stages in the new venture creation process - from merely thinking of business ownership to conception of a business idea, new venture creation and business closure (Venesaar et al., 2006). Some authors have indeed differentiated between potential (intending) entrepreneurs and confirmed (existing) entrepreneurs. Confirmed or existing entrepreneurs are those individuals who actually start a business; while potential or intending entrepreneurs are those who possess a strong desire for

business ownership or those who have given serious thought to establishing a business, even if they have not proceeded for some reason (Fleming, 1996; Mazzarol et al., 1999). In other words, potential or intending entrepreneurs have the intention of starting their own venture at a future date.

Theoretical framework: The Attitude-intention-behaviour continuum

The psychology literature suggests that attitude, intention and behaviour constitute a link-chain or continuum of increasing likelihood that particular thoughts, feelings and beliefs would result in corresponding behaviours, if certain intervening factors fall in place. In this section, these concepts and the complex relationship among them are described, against the back-drop of our research concerns.

Attitudes:

Within the field of psychology, attitudes refer to relatively fixed patterns in people's thoughts, feelings, and dispositions to act toward an aspect of their environment (Arnold, Cooper and Robertson, 1995). An attitude is also regarded as an "emotionally charged idea that predisposes action toward a stimulus"; but attitudes are not directly observed; they are only inferred from emotions (feelings) or actions (Berry, 1998: 269). Three components or facets of attitudes have been identified: (i) cognition- also referred to as thoughts, cognitive or informational facet; (ii) affect- also referred to as the affective, feeling or emotional facet; and (iii) behavioural or predisposition component. The cognitive or thought component pertains to information, opinions, perceptions or beliefs which someone has about a person, an issue or object. Affect is either a positive, neutral or negative feeling about the said person, issue or object. The behavioural component is the intention, tendency or predisposition (not actual behaviour) to behave in a certain manner toward the person, issue or object in question (Luthans, 1992; Arnold et al., 1995; Robbins, 2003). In general, however, 'attitude' is usually taken as referring to the affective (feeling) facet. If an individual declares that he/she likes to be self-employed that individual has a positive attitude about self-employment (Robbins, 2003).

Intentions:

An intention refers to a decision to act in a given way (Robbins, 2003), or a state of mind that focuses a person's attention and decision making toward a specific method of behaving (Mazzarol et al., 1999). Intentions are important antecedents of actual behaviour (Iakovleva and Kolvereid, 2009), and they exist in the form of individuals' thoughts, ideas, plans or dreams (Mazzarol et al., 1999). In the context of entrepreneurship, intentions are made up of two constructs- perceived feasibility and perceived desirability. Perceived feasibility refers to an individual's self-assessment of his/her ability to establish a business. Perceived desirability on the other hand refers to an evaluation of the attractiveness of starting a business (Shapero and Sokol, 1982); and it is regarded as the attitude component of entrepreneurial intention (Iakovleva et al., 2009). Additional insight about intentions is provided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposed by Ajzen and Madden (1986) and Ajzen (1991), as cited in Arnold et al. (1995). This theory views intention as being determined by individuals' attitudes, their perceptions of social pressure, and degree of perceived behaviour control (PBC). The concept of PBC in this theory refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can perform the behaviours required in a given situation and is similar to the concept of perceived feasibility proposed by Shapero et al. (1982).

Behaviour:

Behaviour on its part refers to an activity or series of activities which are performed in order to achieve definite results (Koontz, O'Donnell and Wehrich, 1984). Behaviour, like attitudes, has been differentiated into separate facets: (i) covert behaviour which itself comprises two components: feelings- also referred to as affective behaviour, as well as beliefs- also known as cognitive behaviour; and (ii) overt behaviour comprising actions (Sagie and Elizur, 1999). Knowledge of these

constitutive facets of attitudes, intention and behavior facilitates an appreciation of their complexity and inter-relationships-there is an attitude facet in intention and behavior, and an intention facet in attitude. Further, the cognitive facets (thoughts) set the stage for the affect (feeling) facet, but affect may or may not lead to actual behaviour (Luthans, 1992).

In the context of entrepreneurship, it is being speculated that attitudes manifesting as desire breed intentions, which then direct action (behaviour) (Venesaar et al., 2006; Iakovleva et al., 2009). We therefore infer that attitude (more or less feelings and desire) and intention (more or less thoughts and opinions) are mental states that co-exist in an individual's mind, and involve varying degrees of readiness to act or to exhibit particular behaviours. In other words, attitude and intention precede behavior; they are not seen but can only be inferred from actual behaviour. The behaviour itself may be exhibited at any time the need arises and other factors are supportive.

In the context of this paper, concepts learned at the university inform undergraduates' thoughts and opinions about entrepreneurship: possibly that it is about being one's own master, having autonomy, the associated risk of failure, and so on. These information, thoughts, and opinions breed positive, neutral or negative attitude toward entrepreneurship, which in turn breed intentions for or against entrepreneurial careers. Intentions have been likened to pre-organisations, while business creation is viewed as the translation of pre-organisations into organisations (Mazzarol et al., 1999). Authors have indeed posited that entrepreneurial intention is the best predictor of venture creation (Audet, 2000; Basu et al., 2008).

Inconsistency among the trio of entrepreneurial attitude, intention and behaviour:

It is pertinent to mention that studies in psychology have shown that attitudes do not automatically translate to intentions neither do intentions perfectly translate to behaviour. The observed inconsistency has been traced to the influence of intervening variables. Interestingly, however, almost the same set of intervening variables has been applied in explaining the inability of attitudes to perfectly translate to intentions, and of intentions to translate to behaviour (Luthans, 1992; Arnold et al., 1995; Robbins, 2003).

To start with, the degree to which people's attitudes translate to corresponding behaviours (what they actually do) is determined by the importance of the attitude and existence of social pressure in support of or against the attitude or behaviour; possession of direct experience with the attitude, among other intervening variables (Robbins, 2003). Looking at 'importance' for instance, attitudes which are important to an individual are those that embody fundamental values; self-interest; or identification with 'significant others', that is, people the individual hold dear or respect. Important attitudes tend to exhibit a strong relationship to behaviour. As regard social pressure, where there is a strong pressure to behave in a certain way as opposed to behaving in other ways, individuals may opt to behave in line with social expectations rather than act in line with their feelings or opinions. When this happens, discrepancies between attitudes and behaviour will be observed (Luthans, 1992; Robbins, 2003).

Likewise failure of entrepreneurial intentions to automatically translate to behaviour may stem from the fact that entrepreneurial intentions are made up of two constructs- perceived feasibility and perceived desirability, as earlier mentioned. Just as attitudes in general can be influenced by social pressure, so perceived desirability- the attitude component of entrepreneurial intentions- is influenced by social norms, that is, social pressure that stems from the opinions of important people or 'significant others' in an individual's life (Shapiro et al., 1982). An individual who perceives a course of action as desirable (attractive) but un-feasible in view of discomfiting social norms is not likely to pursue that course of action and vice versa. A positive entrepreneurial attitude would fail to translate to the expected behaviour in such a case.

The observed inconsistencies have also been explained in terms of perceptions of obstacles to business creation on the part of undergraduates. Because of perceived obstacles, a significant

proportion of undergraduates, despite knowing and thinking about entrepreneurship while still at the university do not wish to start their own business soon after graduation, preferring to wait till a future date. Commonly mentioned obstacles include lack of experience and necessary skills, lack of finance, fear of failure, among others (Fleming, 1996; Venesaar et al., 2006). Perceptions of obstacles then can be likened to 'perceived un-feasibility' in the context of Shapero and Sokol's theorising and perceived lack of behavioural control in the context of Ajzen and Madden's theory.

On the overall, however, it has been observed that the more specific the attitude, intention and behaviour, the stronger the correlation among them. For instance, asking people about their intention to remain with their present employers for the next six months is likely to predict voluntary resignation more accurately than asking about their satisfaction with their pay. Hence, opinions lean toward a measurable chain-like link among attitude, intention and behaviour (Luthans, 1992; Robbins, 2003). The degree to which attitude and intention translate to corresponding entrepreneurial behaviour however depends on the influence of intervening variables or determinants (Robbins, 2003), which moderate the attitude-intention-behaviour link. This brings us to considering determinants of attitudes, intentions and behaviour.

Determinants of entrepreneurial intention, attitudes and behaviour

It is interesting that almost the same sets of intervening variables determine attitudes, intentions and behaviour. These variables consist of situational, personality and environmental factors. To start with, attitudes are determined by situational factors such as the social context which provides information that people use in forming the affective or feeling component of their attitudes, and also by personality traits (Luthans, 1992). Entrepreneurial intention and behaviour are also known to be determined by personality or psychological traits, such as the Locus of Control (LOC) and achievement motive; by situational or contextual variables such as family background, education, religion and gender; and environmental variables -mainly social, economic, political and infrastructural development factors (Mazzarol et al., 1999; Lumpkin and Erdogan, 1999; Venesaar et al., 2006). Many entrepreneurship studies adopt an integrative approach that examines combinations of these variables (Lumpkin et al., 1999).

This paper was therefore written from the theoretical perspective that attitude, intention and behaviour to a significant degree constitute a link-chain that can be predicted by personality, situational and environmental factors. More specifically, the paper examined the role of the LOC personality trait, alongside a number of situational factors: employment status of parents, parental approval (support), membership in social clubs, and gender, in explaining entrepreneurial attitude and intention among the sampled undergraduates. We however took sideways glances at environmental determinants of entrepreneurship to illustrate the points that had to be made. In the section that follows, these determinants are described.

Locus of control and entrepreneurship:

Rotter's (1966) LOC theory is one of the two most commonly applied theories in studies of entrepreneurship- the other being McClelland's (1961) theory of the need to achieve (Littunen, 2000). The LOC theory describes a fundamental personality trait which determines individuals' general expectancy about the outcome of life events. According to Rotter, some individuals tend to perceive the outcomes of events that happen to them as being beyond their personal control, attributing these outcomes to luck, fate, significant others, acts of God or in sum, to happenstance. Those who explain life outcomes in this manner are said to possess an external LOC; they exhibit externality on the LOC trait. By contrast, individuals are said to possess internal LOC, or, exhibit internality on the LOC trait if they perceive life outcomes as being determined by their behaviour, effort and other relatively permanent personal characteristics (Rotter, 1966, as cited in Brockhaus, 1982; Boone, De Brabander, and van Witteloostuijn, 1996). Besides individuals, entire societies can also be rated on the LOC scale regarding the internality or externality of their belief systems. In this

vein, 'internal' cultural belief systems that espouse self-determination and belief in one's ability to succeed have been associated with higher rates of entrepreneurial activity and vice versa (Smith-Hunter, 2003).

Locus of control and intention:

Opinions are divided on the relationship between LOC and entrepreneurship. While some research findings suggest that internality is a predictor of entrepreneurial intentions (Brockhaus, 1982), some authors point out that entrepreneurship thrives even in societies with manifest external LOC, where fatalism seems to be culturally embedded. Such exceptional situations have been taken as suggesting that internality in itself may not necessarily be better for entrepreneurship just as externality may not be totally bad (Gasse, 1982). Nonetheless, opinions lean toward positive associations between internality and the desire for an entrepreneurial career (Brockhaus, 1982; Lumpkin et al., 1999; Smith-Hunter, 2003; van Praag, van der Sluis and van Witteloostuijn, 2004). Based on a hypothesised positive association between internality and entrepreneurship, some authors have suggested that entrepreneurship courses should include LOC training module, targeted at reducing the external individual's perception of lack of-control and facilitating a shift toward internality (Marsh, Richards and Barnes, 1986, cited in van Praag et al., 2004: 15).

Gender and entrepreneurship:

Most of the gender-related differences that we came across in the literature pertain to confirmed, and not to intending entrepreneurs. To start with, female and male entrepreneurs appear to differ with respect to their business and personal profiles in key areas such as the sectors where they start and run businesses; the kinds of products and services offered; the manner in which their businesses are structured, and so on (Verheul and Thurik, 2003). In particular, men are about twice as likely to be involved in entrepreneurship as women (Fleming, 1996); although there is substantial variation between countries in respect of male-female entrepreneurial activity ratios (Verheul et al., 2003). However, no gender differences have been found with regard to the most frequently investigated psychological traits such as the LOC construct, need for achievement, and so on (Catley and Hamilton, 1998).

With particular reference to the relationship between gender and entrepreneurial intention, research has produced mixed results. For example, a comparative investigation into entrepreneurial intention among fresh graduates as well as final year business undergraduates in Hong Kong and Thailand revealed that more female than male Thai students intended to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Among the Hong Kong students, however, more male than female students had these dreams (Moy et al., 2001). Other writers have similarly found that men are more likely to have the intention to start a business than women (Verheul et al., 2003).

Parents' employment status:

Research evidence indicates that a high percentage of confirmed and aspiring entrepreneurs have closely observed one or both parents, and at times siblings and relatives who are self-employed in business or farming (Brockhaus, 1982; Fleming, 1996). There is evidence also, that the influence of self-employed parents is gender-specific, that is, a son rather than a daughter is more likely to become self-employed if the father is self-employed, and vice versa. In other words, there exists a high degree of same-sex occupational inheritance in self-employment (Delmar and Gunnarsson, 2001). It has however been pointed out that many individuals without parental role models choose entrepreneurial careers, suggesting that other environmental and social learning experiences influence career decisions (Schindehutte, Morris and Brennan, 2003).

Process by which self-employed parents influence their children:

Authors who have explained the way parents' self-employment status impacts their children's desire for self-employment usually draw upon two theories. One of these is Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory (SLT), also known as social cognitive theory. The other is the Social Resources Theory, better known as social network theory- SNT. Bandura's (1986) SLT, as cited in Delmar et al. (2001) proposes that role models create interest and provide critical experience for other people through the process of vicarious learning. Applying the principles of the SLT to entrepreneurship therefore suggests that individuals who have been exposed to successful entrepreneurs, who, based on their experiences hold positive rather than negative views of entrepreneurship, are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial ventures later in life (Delmar et al., 2001; Smith-Hunter, 2003; Basu et al., 2008).

The Social Network Theory (SNT) uses the concept of 'entrepreneurial networks' in explaining parental influence on entrepreneurial attitude and intention. Entrepreneurial networks are known to be of two types: informal and formal networks (Littunen, 2000). Informal entrepreneurial networks consist of personal relationships/alliances with family members such as parents, friends, associates in social clubs and religious groups, and business contacts (Shaw and Conway, 2000). These personal contact networks have been found to generate social support, provide access to information, advice and the like, all of which result in time and cost savings, thereby compensating for the limited resources and increasing the strategic competencies of a small and/or young firm (Pendergast, 2004). Formal networks consist of venture capitalists, banks, accountants, creditors, lawyers and trade associations, which render specific services on request and often with fee payment attached (Shaw et al., 2000). In the section that follows, we describe the methods employed in obtaining the research sample and in collecting and analysing data to arrive at the study's conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample and sampling procedure

The population of interest in this study consisted of a combined class of final year Accounting, Banking and Finance, and Business Administration majors in the Management Sciences Faculty of a Nigerian Federal University. The three categories of students are in four-year Bachelor of Science degree programmes. In addition to courses related to their specialties, these students were jointly taught courses in general management and entrepreneurship. During a combined class in a second semester course titled entrepreneurial development, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to all the students who were present, thus making this a convenience sample. We however perceive that there is some in-built randomisation in this sample that derives from the admission process. On average, between 150 and 200 students attend each lecture in this course offering, but only 135 useable questionnaires were retrieved, resulting in a sample size of 135.

The Research instrument and variables

The questionnaire was in two parts, where the first part, which is referred to as the Personal Value Questionnaire (PVQ), consisted of 37 items for assessing the LOC trait. These items were adopted from Boone et al. (1996), who had earlier modified Rotter's (1966) I – E scale for their own study. The original Rotter's scale consists of 23 LOC items and 6 filler items. The filler items however were increased from 6 to 14 by Boone et al (1996) so as to better disguise the purpose of the test. Each scale item is presented as a two-pronged statement. As an illustration, the 'a' part of the 4th item (a filler item) declares: "one should always be willing to admit mistakes", while its complement states that "it is usually best to cover up one's mistakes." Respondents were expected to tick the sub-statement that expressed their views. The number of internal alternatives chosen were counted to obtain the LOC score for each respondent (minimum 0 and maximum 23). A higher score reflects higher internality (Boone et al., 1996).

The second part of the questionnaire fielded eight questions, with the first four seeking information on respondents' situational variables: gender; parents' primary and secondary occupations (whether paid employment or own-business); and respondents' participation in social clubs. The last four questions explored the likelihood that respondents would pursue entrepreneurial careers after graduation. First, respondents were to gauge their parents' likely reaction (support or disapproval) to their choice of self-employment- whether their parents would be happy with such a decision (rated as 3), unhappy with it (rated as 1) or indifferent (2). Respondents' general attitude toward entrepreneurship was evaluated with the question: What do you expect to be 5 years after graduation? Responses that indicated expectations of being in an entrepreneurial career were rated as 3; those that indicated expectations of straddling paid employment and business ownership were rated as 2; and those that indicated preference for full-time paid employment were rated as 1. Respondents' career intention was evaluated with the question: Do you intend to start a business of your own within the first 5 years of your graduation? This type of single-item dichotomous measure of students' entrepreneurial intention (yes=2; no=1) was similarly used by Venesaar et al. (2006).

Techniques of analysis

Respondents' background data were descriptively analysed, while the determinants of entrepreneurial attitude and intention were evaluated with the multiple regression statistical technique. Two regression models were tested: in one model, the dependent variable was general attitude toward entrepreneurship, while in the second model the dependent variable was intention to pursue an entrepreneurial career upon graduation. Both models were tested with the same set of independent variables: LOC trait, fathers' primary job, fathers' secondary job, mothers' primary job, mothers' secondary job, respondents' participation in social clubs, father's reaction, mother's reaction, and gender.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 135 respondents, 44 (32.6%) were males while 91(67.4%) were females. Their ages (\pm SD) averaged 26.71 years (2.26), and ranged from 23 to 40 years. In this section, we examine the relationships of the nine independent factors to the two dependent variables.

Determinants of attitude to entrepreneurship

In response to the questionnaire item concerning the jobs they expected to be doing five years from their graduation, 41.3% of the respondents indicated that they expected to be in paid employment, 38.9% expected to be full-time owner/managers of their own businesses, while 19.8% expected that they would be combining organisational jobs with managing their own ventures. When the last two response categories were combined, the picture that emerged was that 58.7% of these students would be in self-employment either on full-time or part-time basis, while 41.3% would be in paid jobs. We therefore inferred that slightly more than half of the sample had a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship. Regression analysis showed that four independent variables: LOC trait, mothers' primary and secondary occupations and mothers' probable reactions were significant predictors (at 5% level of significance) of this positive attitude (see Table 1).

Table 1: Regression results for predictors of general attitude toward entrepreneurship

	Variables	T values	P values
1.	Locus of control	-2.443	0.02 ^a
2.	Gender	-0.174	0.86
3.	Club participation	0.324	0.75
4.	Father's primary	-0.119	0.3

	job		
5.	Father's secondary job	-0.476	0.91
6.	Mother's primary job	-2.098	0.04 ^b
7.	Mother's secondary job	3.062	0.01 ^c
8.	Father's reaction	-0.726	0.47
9.	Mother's reaction	2.346	0.02 ^d

^{a,b,c,d} *P values were significant (P<0.05)*

Sources: Field Survey

As regard these predictors of entrepreneurial attitude, starting with the LOC trait, data analyses revealed an overall mean (\pm SD) score of 12.9 (3.4) for the entire sample; a mean score of 14.0 (2.5) for the males; and a mean score of 12.7 (3.5) for the females; with the scores for the males being significantly higher than for the females ($P<0.05$). These findings suggest that male students were more internal than the females and that the sampled undergraduates on the whole exhibited weak internality which nonetheless correlated with a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship.

The students' low internality score might be traceable to factors within the Nigerian social-cultural environment, factors that reflect a Nigerian 'external' belief system. With regard to career choices in particular, our personal experiences and general knowledge of the Nigerian socio-economic environment point to an enduring expectation that a university graduate ought to work at white-collar paid jobs in the civil service or in blue-chip companies. This preference is informed by the belief that working for pay guarantees a steady income unlike self-employment with its uncertainties and risks. Most graduates only venture into creating their own micro businesses after years of fruitless job search. Additionally, the emergence of the crude oil sector from the 1970s onward made the Nigerian society heavily dependent on resources controlled and distributed by government such as jobs in the civil service, contracts for businesses, and so on. With the economic crisis and subsequent structural adjustment of the mid 1980s, however, state-distributed resources and privileges dwindled, self-employment became a forced choice for fresh graduates and retrenched workers, and private businesses began to be seriously promoted as the nation's engine of economic growth (Forrest, 1994; Hamalai, 1999; Guyer, 2003).

The findings in regard to the mothers' primary and secondary occupations, as well as the mothers' reaction are particularly noteworthy. Analysis of the occupations of respondents' parents showed that 66.7% and 42.9% of them had fathers who were engaged in paid (wage) employment as primary and secondary jobs, respectively. About thirty percent (33.3%) and 57.1% of them had fathers who were engaged in their own ventures as primary and secondary occupations, respectively. By contrast, 41.7% and 22.2% of respondents' mothers held paid employment as primary occupation and secondary occupations, respectively. In other words, most of the respondents had entrepreneurial mothers who were engaged in their own businesses as either primary (58.3%) or secondary (77.8%) occupations.

As regard possible parental reactions to choice of an entrepreneurial career, 72.7% of the respondents anticipated support from their mothers, while 68% anticipated support from their fathers; 21.6% and 19.5% of them anticipated indifference from their fathers and mothers, respectively; while 10.4% and 7.8% anticipated disapproval from their fathers and mothers, respectively. As earlier mentioned, multiple regression analysis showed that the mothers' primary

and secondary occupations as well as their reaction significantly predicted respondents' entrepreneurial attitude (see Table 1).

These results suggest that mothers who are entrepreneurs are important role models who inspire in their children a generally positive attitude toward entrepreneurship. Previous research evidence indeed indicates that close interaction with entrepreneurial parents stimulate desire for business ownership in their children (Shapiro et al., 1982; Schindehutte et al., 2003). Entrepreneurial mothers are likely to discuss with their children their business experiences as well as behaviours needed for success in business; hence the children 'learn the ropes' very early.

Determinants of intention to pursue entrepreneurial careers

Most of the undergraduates (84.3%) indicated an intention to start their own businesses within 5 years of graduation, while the remaining 15.7% did not have such intentions. The only significant factor (at 5% level of significance) that predicted entrepreneurial intention was expected mother's reaction (see Table 2). As noted above, a larger number of respondents anticipated support from their mothers (72.7%), compared to 68% who anticipated support from their fathers.

Of particular interest to us is the finding that a larger number of students (84.3%) expressed entrepreneurial intention compared to the number (58.7%) that expressed a positive entrepreneurial attitude. This contrasts sharply with earlier research findings which had shown that a larger number of students tend to hold a generally positive attitude toward entrepreneurship compared to the number that actually intend to start businesses after graduation. In one study, while 55% of graduates expressed preference (positive attitude) for business ownership, only 5% expressed an intention to pursue entrepreneurial careers when they were asked to state their most likely career choice (intention) considering their actual situations (Fleming, 1996). In another study by Venesaar et al. (2006), only 17% of the respondents planned to start their own ventures soon after graduation; majority indicated that they would wait until a more distant future.

Table 2: Regression results for predictors of intention toward starting own business

	Variables	T values	P values
1.	Locus of control	-0.914	0.37
2.	Gender	-0.73	0.47
3.	Club participation	0.246	0.81
4.	Father's primary job	-0.269	0.79
5.	Father's secondary job	0.122	0.90
6.	Mother's primary job	-0.483	0.63
7.	Mother's secondary job	1.189	0.24
8.	Father's reaction	-0.656	0.52
9.	Mother's reaction	-2.346	0.02 ^a

^a P value was significant ($P < 0.05$)

This seeming contradiction between our findings and earlier results might derive from the time dimension presented to respondents to make decisions. Whereas previous studies sought to know the careers in which students would likely be engaged 'soon after graduation', the present study specified a five-year, post-graduation time frame within which career options were considered. More students might consider five years adequate for acquiring necessary resources for starting their own businesses and would therefore respond in the affirmative. Indeed, the literature shows that as graduates mature the proportion that proceeds beyond desire or intention to actually starting their own ventures increases; and this suggests that graduates use paid employment as temporary avenues for gathering experiences and resources needed for future business ownership (Fleming, 1996).

This finding can also be explained in terms of Nigerians' penchant for combining paid jobs with various forms of self-employment. A survey of the civil services in African countries actually found that many civil servants combine their public-sector jobs with own-ventures, largely to augment their salaries (Harvey, 1996). From our personal experiences, we surmise that even workers in the private sector straddle paid jobs and private businesses. This insight informed our asking respondents about their parents' primary and secondary occupations. Given the absence of social security programmes in Nigeria, this practice offers a safety net in the event of delays in payment of salaries or retrenchment, in addition to the more fundamental function of supplementing monthly salaries. Many of these businesses are micro, sole proprietor enterprises that do not last beyond the life-time of their owners, and they are usually established after some period of being in paid jobs and discovering reasons for alternative income sources.

It would be understandable for undergraduates who have observed others combining own-ventures with paid jobs in this manner to indicate that they would have businesses of their five years from their graduation. Such intentions would probably be motivated by the same needs as the desire to augment salaries from paid jobs, as earlier explained. Motives for business formation were however not investigated in the present study.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought answers to two research questions: "to what extent do entrepreneurial attitude and intention exist among Nigerian undergraduates?" and "what variables/factors predict entrepreneurial attitude and intention in these potential entrepreneurs, as undergraduates are perceived to be?" We found that Nigerian undergraduates are weakly 'internal', although the weak internality still predicted a positive entrepreneurial attitude. Secondly, more than half of the sample (58.7%) demonstrated a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship, while virtually all the respondents (84.3%) intended to start their own businesses within five years of graduating from the university. This finding contrasted somewhat with results of comparable earlier studies which had shown that many undergraduates desire entrepreneurial careers but few plan to start businesses soon after their graduation. Thirdly, out of the nine independent variables that were expected to predict the two dependent variables- entrepreneurial attitude and intention-, four predicted entrepreneurial attitude while one predicted entrepreneurial intention.

Deriving from these findings, the paper concludes that positive entrepreneurial attitude and intention exist to a remarkable degree among Nigerian undergraduates. It was necessary, however, to look beyond the nine hypothesised explanatory variables, to factors within the country's socio-economic milieu for additional explanation. It would appear that the perception that a five-year post-graduation period should be long enough to establish businesses, as well as a prevailing practice wherein Nigerians tend to combine paid jobs and various forms of self-employment, might explain why a large proportion of students indicated entrepreneurial intentions. In the next section, measures that would enhance rate of business start-up among Nigerian graduates are suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Deriving from the findings of this study, it seems to us that there is a dire need to promote new perspectives of business ownership, that emphasise other positive aspects of entrepreneurial careers beside the prevailing view that they are supplementary income sources. New perspectives of entrepreneurial careers need to be promoted, to the effect that they are jobs in their own right with the potential to generate higher incomes than paid jobs; and that successful entrepreneurship does not necessarily depend on good fortune, but on principles of business management which can easily be taught and imbibed.

The Nigerian public need to be educated to believe more in individual efforts and active striving as requirements for success in business, or any form of success for that matter. Some Nigerian print media are already devoting space to entrepreneurship themes- factors of business success, potential business ideas, and so on; which, indeed is a very positive development. More importantly, entrepreneurship educators in the universities should focus on impacting practical skills in the functional areas of business- recognition of business opportunities, conducting feasibility studies, networking to obtain information about markets and advanced production technology, and so on. By so doing, undergraduates will be equipped to establish businesses that will do more than augment salaries from organisational jobs; they will form businesses that can grow into world-class companies.

Additionally, the strong association between respondents' entrepreneurial intention and their mothers' support suggests that measures which facilitate women's participation in entrepreneurship would increase the number of entrepreneurial mothers who would raise future generations of entrepreneurs for the economic development of Nigeria. Furthermore, it is needful to review existing government programmes to make support services for nascent entrepreneurs more pragmatic and accessible at minimal costs in terms of the time and money required for paper work. Effective formulation and implementation of these measures would make real the hypothesised role of university graduates as a reservoir of future entrepreneurs, a much needed factor of economic development in developing countries like Nigeria.

Future studies could explore the influence of the specific course of study on students' preference for entrepreneurial careers. Again, whereas this study employed single-item measures (single questions) in exploring respondents' attitude and intention, future studies could use attitude scales such as Kolvereid's (1996) scale for measuring attitude toward self-employment, in order to obtain more generalizable results. Longitudinal studies that track rates of venture creation over time among particular sets of graduates, will further enrich our understanding of the correlation between entrepreneurial attitude, intention and actual behaviour.

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