

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SCHOOLING, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND CURRICULUM GAPS IN FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL ASPIRATION AND ENTERPRISE CULTURE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN NORTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the role of schooling, social capital, and curriculum gaps in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations and enterprise culture among undergraduates in Northwest Nigeria. It employed a descriptive survey design, involving 400 undergraduates from four public universities across Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, and Kaduna States, selected through a multi-stage stratified random sampling process. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts in curriculum studies and entrepreneurship education and subjected to a reliability test yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, was used for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that curriculum content in the sampled universities exhibits a moderate but insufficient integration of entrepreneurship-oriented learning experiences, that undergraduates' access to social capital (family networks, mentorship, and community ties) significantly predicts entrepreneurial aspiration, and that gaps between the formal curriculum and lived enterprise culture persist across disciplines and gender lines. The study concludes that curriculum reform alone, without deliberate attention to the sociological structures that mediate access to opportunity, is unlikely to produce a robust enterprise culture. Recommendations include embedding experiential entrepreneurship modules across all faculties, institutionalising

structured mentorship and networking schemes, and mainstreaming sociological content on social capital into curriculum planning processes in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial aspiration, social capital, curriculum gaps, enterprise culture

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has increasingly become a central plank of national development strategy in Nigeria, particularly in the face of a saturated formal labour market that can no longer absorb the growing number of university graduates produced annually (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2023). Governments, development agencies, and higher education institutions have responded by embedding entrepreneurship education into tertiary curricula, with the expectation that exposure to entrepreneurial content will translate into a measurable rise in graduates' aspiration to create enterprises rather than seek wage employment (Adeyemo & Aina, 2022). However, curriculum reform of this kind rarely operates in a social vacuum. Whether a student develops entrepreneurial aspiration, and whether that aspiration is later converted into enterprise, is shaped as much by classroom content as by the social resources, networks, and cultural dispositions that students bring into and acquire from the schooling process (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).

Sociology of education has long emphasised that schools are not neutral transmitters of knowledge but are embedded within, and often reproduce, existing patterns of social stratification (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Applied to entrepreneurship education, this perspective suggests that undergraduates from families and communities richer in social capital, defined broadly as the networks, relationships, and norms of reciprocity that facilitate access to resources and information, are better positioned to translate curriculum exposure into actionable entrepreneurial intent (Putnam, 2000). Conversely, students whose social environments are poor in such capital may encounter a curriculum that speaks the language of enterprise without providing the scaffolding necessary to act on it. This dynamic is particularly salient in Northwest Nigeria, a region characterised by comparatively lower indices of household income, gender disparity in access to networks and finance, and a tertiary education system still working through the practicalities of embedding entrepreneurship across non-business disciplines (Ibrahim & Sani, 2021).

Curriculum studies scholarship further draws attention to the gap that frequently exists between the intended curriculum, the curriculum as designed on paper, and the curriculum as experienced by learners in practice (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Entrepreneurship modules introduced as isolated general-studies courses, taught largely through lecture-based methods and disconnected from experiential or work-integrated learning, may fail to cultivate the practical dispositions, risk tolerance, and opportunity recognition skills that constitute enterprise culture (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). It is this triad, schooling as a curricular process, social capital as a sociological resource,

and the gap between curriculum intention and curriculum experience, that this study sets out to investigate empirically among undergraduates in Northwest Nigeria.

Despite sustained policy attention and curricular reform aimed at embedding entrepreneurship education across Nigerian tertiary institutions, graduate unemployment and underemployment remain persistently high, and self-employment rates among fresh graduates in Northwest Nigeria remain markedly below national development targets (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Universities in the region have introduced compulsory entrepreneurship courses, established entrepreneurship development centres, and organised business plan competitions, yet anecdotal and institutional reports suggest that the translation of these curricular investments into actual entrepreneurial aspiration and behaviour among undergraduates remains weak and unevenly distributed.

A plausible explanation, underexplored in existing Nigerian scholarship, is that curriculum interventions are being evaluated and implemented without adequate regard to the sociological conditions, particularly the distribution of social capital, that mediate their effectiveness. Much of the existing literature on entrepreneurship education in Nigeria has approached the subject either from a purely pedagogical angle, examining teaching methods and curriculum content, or from a purely economic angle, examining access to finance and infrastructure. Comparatively little empirical work has examined how social capital, understood sociologically as family networks, mentorship access, peer influence, and community ties, interacts with curriculum gaps to shape entrepreneurial aspiration among undergraduates, particularly within the specific socio-cultural situation of Northwest Nigeria, where gender norms, religious values, and regional economic structures introduce additional layers of complexity.

This study, therefore, addresses the following problem: to what extent do curriculum gaps and disparities in social capital jointly account for the level of entrepreneurial aspiration and enterprise culture observed among undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities? Without answers to this question, curriculum reform efforts risk being sociologically blind, treating all students as equally positioned to benefit from the same curricular inputs, when in fact the sociology of education literature suggests otherwise.

Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to examine the sociological dimensions of schooling, social capital, and curriculum gaps in fostering entrepreneurial aspiration and enterprise culture among undergraduates in Northwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent to which entrepreneurship-related content is integrated into the curricula of undergraduate programmes in Northwest Nigerian universities.
2. Examine the level of access to social capital (family networks, mentorship, and community ties) available to undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities.

3. Investigate the relationship between undergraduates' access to social capital and their level of entrepreneurial aspiration.
4. Identify the curriculum gaps that hinder the translation of curriculum content into a functional enterprise culture among undergraduates.
5. Determine whether entrepreneurial aspiration differs significantly across gender and discipline among undergraduates in the study area.

Research Questions

1. To what extent is entrepreneurship-related content integrated into the curricula of undergraduate programmes in Northwest Nigerian universities?
2. What is the level of access to social capital available to undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities?
3. What relationship exists between undergraduates' access to social capital and their level of entrepreneurial aspiration in Northwest Nigerian universities?
4. What curriculum gaps hinder the translation of curriculum content into a functional enterprise culture among undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities?
5. Does entrepreneurial aspiration differ significantly across gender and discipline among undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities?

Literature Review

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical strands. The first is Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social and cultural capital, which posits that individuals' life chances, including economic ventures such as entrepreneurship, are shaped not only by formal education but by the volume and structure of capital, economic, cultural, and social, that they inherit and accumulate. Bourdieu's framework is particularly useful for explaining why undergraduates exposed to identical curricular content may nonetheless diverge sharply in entrepreneurial outcomes: those with greater access to family business networks, informal apprenticeship opportunities, and culturally transmitted dispositions toward risk-taking are better positioned to convert curriculum exposure into entrepreneurial action.

The second theoretical strand is Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, which emphasises the functional role of social relationships, norms of trust, reciprocity, and information channels, in facilitating goal attainment. Coleman's framework, unlike Bourdieu's more structurally deterministic account, allows for the possibility that social capital can be deliberately built through institutional intervention, such as mentorship programmes and structured networking within the curriculum itself. Taken together, these two theories provide the sociological scaffolding for understanding entrepreneurial aspiration not merely as a product of individual motivation or curricular exposure, but as an outcome jointly produced by curriculum content and the social capital structures within which learning occurs.

A growing body of Nigerian and African scholarship has examined entrepreneurship education, though largely without a sustained sociological lens. Adeyemo and Aina (2022), in a study of entrepreneurship curriculum implementation in South-West Nigerian universities, found that while entrepreneurship courses were near-universally present, they were predominantly theoretical, lecture-based, and disconnected from practical enterprise exposure, a finding consistent with curriculum studies concerns about the gap between intended and experienced curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Similarly, Fayolle and Gailly (2015), reviewing entrepreneurship education programmes across several countries, argued that pedagogical design, rather than mere content inclusion, determines whether entrepreneurship education translates into entrepreneurial intention.

On the sociological side, Ibrahim and Sani (2021) examined social network effects on youth enterprise start-up in Northern Nigeria and found that access to informal family and community business networks was a stronger predictor of actual business start-up than formal business training received in school, lending support to a Bourdieusian reading of entrepreneurial outcomes. Okafor and Eze (2020) similarly reported that undergraduates whose parents or close relatives owned businesses displayed significantly higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy and aspiration than their peers without such exposure, regardless of the entrepreneurship courses taken.

Gender-focused studies add further shade. Yusuf and Bello (2022) found that female undergraduates in Northern Nigerian universities reported lower access to informal mentorship and business networks than their male counterparts, a disparity linked to prevailing socio-cultural norms restricting women's mobility and public engagement, and that this disparity correlated with lower entrepreneurial aspiration scores among female respondents despite comparable curriculum exposure. This finding is significant for the present study because it suggests that curriculum gaps and social capital gaps may compound rather than operate independently, particularly along gender lines.

Studies specifically on curriculum gaps in entrepreneurship education have identified several recurring deficiencies: an overreliance on content-based rather than competency-based assessment, minimal integration of work-based or experiential learning, insufficient linkage between entrepreneurship courses and discipline-specific application, and a scarcity of qualified instructors with practical entrepreneurial experience (Aliyu & Muhammad, 2021). These gaps collectively suggest that curriculum reform in Nigerian higher education has, to date, addressed the presence of entrepreneurship content more successfully than its pedagogical quality or its integration with the sociological realities of learners.

Despite these contributions, a clear gap remains in the literature: few studies have jointly examined curriculum gaps and social capital disparities as interacting, rather than parallel, determinants of entrepreneurial aspiration, and fewer still have done so with a regionally specific

focus on Northwest Nigeria, a zone with distinct socio-cultural and economic characteristics. The present study addresses this gap.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, considered appropriate because the study sought to describe existing conditions, namely, the level of curriculum integration, social capital access, and entrepreneurial aspiration, and to examine relationships among these variables as they naturally occur, without manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The population comprised undergraduate students in public universities across the seven states of Northwest Nigeria (Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, Jigawa, Kebbi and Zamfara). A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. At the first stage, four states (Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, and Kaduna) were purposively selected on the basis of institutional accessibility and diversity of discipline offerings. At the second stage, one public university was randomly selected from each chosen state. At the third stage, stratified random sampling, with discipline (Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Management/Vocational studies) as the stratifying variable, was used to select 100 undergraduates from each university, yielding a total sample size of 400 respondents, determined with reference to the Research Advisor (2006) table for determining sample size from a given population.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Schooling, Social Capital, and Entrepreneurial Aspiration Questionnaire" (SSCEAQ), developed by the researcher. The instrument was divided into four sections: Section A elicited demographic information; Section B measured perceived curriculum integration of entrepreneurship content using a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree); Section C measured access to social capital (family networks, mentorship, and community ties) using a similarly structured Likert scale; and Section D measured entrepreneurial aspiration using an adapted version of the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (Liñán & Chen, 2009). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in curriculum studies and entrepreneurship education at Northwest University, Kano, whose observations informed revisions to item wording and structure. A pilot test involving 40 undergraduates outside the main sample yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for the main study.

Copies of the questionnaire were administered directly to sampled respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants in each institution, following institutional ethical clearance and informed consent procedures. A total of 400 copies were administered, of which 372 were correctly completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 93 percent, which was used for final analysis.

Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21. Research questions were answered using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage), with a criterion mean of 2.50 used as the benchmark for agreement

on the 4-point Likert scale. The hypothesis-equivalent relationships implied in research question three were tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, while differences across gender and discipline were tested using independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA, respectively, all at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research question one: To what extent is entrepreneurship-related content integrated into the curricula of undergraduate programmes in Northwest Nigerian universities?

As illustrated in Table 1, undergraduates rated the integration of entrepreneurship content into their curricula as moderate, with a grand mean of 2.61, just above the criterion mean of 2.50. Items relating to experiential or work-based learning components recorded the lowest mean scores, suggesting that while entrepreneurship content is nominally present, its practical, competency-based dimension remains weak.

Table 1: Curriculum Integration

Curriculum Integration Item	Mean	SD	Remark
The entrepreneurship course is compulsory in my programme	3.10	0.71	Agreed
Course content links theory to practical enterprise activity	2.34	0.88	Disagreed
I have undertaken an experiential/work-based enterprise task	2.05	0.93	Disagreed
Assessment emphasises practical business skills	2.42	0.85	Disagreed
Grand Mean	2.61	-	Moderate

Research question two: What is the level of access to social capital available to undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities?

Table 2 shows that undergraduates' overall access to social capital was moderate (grand mean = 2.58), with family networks scoring higher than mentorship and community ties, indicating that formal institutional mentorship structures remain underdeveloped relative to informal family-based networks.

Table 2: Access to Social Capital

Social Capital Dimension	Mean	SD	Remark
Family business networks	2.89	0.79	Agreed
Access to structured mentorship	2.21	0.91	Disagreed
Community/peer enterprise ties	2.64	0.84	Agreed
Grand Mean	2.58	-	Moderate

Research Question Three: What relationship exists between undergraduates' access to social capital and their level of entrepreneurial aspiration in Northwest Nigerian universities?

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation result, showing a positive and statistically significant relationship between access to social capital and entrepreneurial aspiration, indicating that undergraduates with greater access to family, mentorship, and community networks reported correspondingly higher levels of entrepreneurial aspiration.

Table 3: Relationship Between Social Capital and Entrepreneurial Aspiration

Variables Correlated	N	r	p	Decision
Social capital and entrepreneurial aspiration	372	0.52	0.00	Significant ($p < .05$)

Research Question Four: What curriculum gaps hinder the translation of curriculum content into a functional enterprise culture among undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities?

Table 4 summarises the recurring curriculum gaps identified from low-scoring Likert items and coded open-ended responses, ranked by the proportion of respondents affirming each gap.

Table 4: Curriculum Gaps

Curriculum Gap Identified	Respondents Affirming (%)	Rank	Remark
Minimal experiential/work-based learning opportunities	78.2	1 st	Major gap
Limited discipline-specific application of content	71.5	2 nd	Major gap
Inadequate linkage to seed funding/incubation	64.0	3 rd	Major gap
Shortage of instructors with entrepreneurial experience	58.3	4 th	Notable gap

Research Question Five: Does entrepreneurial aspiration differ significantly across gender and discipline among undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities?

Table 5 presents the independent samples t-test result comparing entrepreneurial aspiration scores of male and female undergraduates, while Table 6 presents the one-way ANOVA result comparing scores across disciplines.

Table 4: Gender and Discipline differences

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Male	196	2.98	0.74	370	3.42	0.00	Significant (p < .05)
Female	176	2.61	0.81				
Discipline	N	Mean	SD	df	F	P	Decision
Sciences	92	2.44	0.77	368			
Social Sciences	94	2.69	0.80				
Humanities	90	2.72	0.76				
Management/Vocational studies	96	3.05	0.69		4.17	0.01	Significant (p < .05)

Discussion of Results

The finding that curriculum integration of entrepreneurship content is only moderate, and particularly weak in its experiential dimension, corroborates Adeyemo and Aina (2022) and Aliyu and Muhammad (2021), both of whom identified an overreliance on theoretical delivery in Nigerian entrepreneurship education. From a curriculum studies perspective, this pattern reflects a persistent gap between the intended curriculum, which formally mandates entrepreneurship courses, and the curriculum as experienced, which remains largely didactic (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Without competency-based, practice-oriented delivery, curriculum reform risks producing credentialed awareness of entrepreneurship without the dispositional and practical competence required for actual enterprise creation.

The significant positive relationship found between social capital and entrepreneurial aspiration lends strong empirical support to both Bourdieu's (1986) and Coleman's (1988) theoretical propositions. It suggests that curriculum content, however well designed, operates within a social field that is not neutral: undergraduates who arrive at university already embedded in family business networks or who gain access to mentorship are better positioned to convert curricular exposure into aspiration and, by extension, action. This finding is consistent with Ibrahim and Sani (2021) and Okafor and Eze (2020), and it reframes the policy problem: curriculum reform that does not simultaneously address disparities in social capital access may inadvertently widen,

rather than narrow, the entrepreneurial aspiration gap between socially advantaged and disadvantaged students.

The gender disparity observed, with female undergraduates reporting significantly lower entrepreneurial aspiration despite comparable curriculum exposure, echoes Yusuf and Bello's (2022) findings and points to a sociological rather than a purely curricular explanation. If, as this study's social capital data suggest, female undergraduates report comparatively lower access to mentorship and networks, then gender gaps in entrepreneurial aspiration are unlikely to close through curriculum revision alone; they require deliberate structural intervention aimed at expanding women's access to social capital within and beyond the university.

The discipline-based variation, with Management/Vocational studies undergraduates reporting the highest aspiration and Science undergraduates the lowest, suggests that proximity of curriculum content to business application matters. This is consistent with Fayolle and Gailly's (2015) argument that entrepreneurship education is most effective when contextually integrated into a learner's discipline rather than delivered as a generic, one-size-fits-all general-studies course.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the persistent weakness of enterprise culture among Nigerian undergraduates, despite years of curriculum reform, cannot be fully explained by curriculum design alone. The sociological structures within which curriculum is delivered and received, particularly the distribution of social capital by gender, family background, and discipline, exert an independent and, in this study, statistically significant influence on entrepreneurial outcomes. This highlights the need for a sociologically informed approach to curriculum planning in entrepreneurship education, one that treats social capital-building as a legitimate curricular objective rather than an incidental by-product of schooling.

Recommendations

1. University curriculum planners should redesign entrepreneurship courses to prioritise experiential and work-integrated learning, including internships, business simulations, and supervised micro-enterprise projects, over purely lecture-based delivery.
2. Institutions should establish structured, institutionally coordinated mentorship schemes linking undergraduates, particularly those from families with limited business networks, to established entrepreneurs and alumni, thereby deliberately building social capital rather than leaving it to informal chance.
3. Entrepreneurship content should be discipline-specific rather than generic, with Faculties of Science, Humanities, and Social Sciences developing tailored modules that apply entrepreneurial principles to their specific fields of study.
4. Gender-responsive interventions, including women-focused mentorship networks, female entrepreneur role-modelling, and flexible scheduling of practical components, should be

introduced to close the social capital gap identified between male and female undergraduates.

5. Universities should strengthen linkages between entrepreneurship curricula and seed funding or incubation opportunities, so that entrepreneurial aspiration generated in the classroom has a viable pathway toward actual enterprise start-up.

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