

Entrepreneurship: The Engine Room of Global Economy, Study of Clifford University Owerri

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Abstract

Purpose: Global economic instability, rising unemployment, and the declining capacity of formal wage employment have intensified the search for sustainable pathways to economic growth and resilience. In developing economies such as Nigeria, these challenges are further compounded by youth unemployment, economic vulnerability, and limited industrial diversification. Consequently, entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical mechanism for innovation, job creation, and economic empowerment. Despite the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities, its implementation has often remained largely theoretical, limiting its effectiveness in translating knowledge into practical skills and employability.

Method: This study examines entrepreneurship as the engine room of the global economy, using Clifford University as a case study. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining primary data from surveys of students participating in entrepreneurship skill clusters with secondary data from institutional records and relevant Nigerian literature. The analysis focuses on changes in student participation, skill acquisition, and entrepreneurial intention following the University's transition from theory-based entrepreneurship education to a practical, production-oriented model inaugurated in April 2024.

Findings: Findings indicate a significant increase in student participation, improved practical skills across multiple production areas, and heightened entrepreneurial intention and perceived employability among students. The study concludes that practical, institution-based entrepreneurship education can serve as an effective model for addressing youth unemployment and strengthening economic resilience. It recommends the replication and scaling of such models across Nigerian universities to position entrepreneurship as a strategic driver of sustainable economic development.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century Nigerian economy, like many others, is challenged by persistent unemployment, structural economic vulnerabilities, and the diminishing capacity of formal employment to absorb a growing workforce. For decades,

successive Nigerian governments have struggled to create jobs that match the pace of population growth, particularly for youth who form the majority of the labour force (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024). Compounding this challenge are external shocks such as fluctuations in global oil prices, foreign exchange volatility, and inflationary pressures that periodically weaken national income and business activity (World Bank, 2022). As formal wage employment opportunities shrink, many Nigerian youths turn to alternative forms of income generation, including self-employment and informal ventures that reflect both necessity and entrepreneurial survival strategies (Onyema & Okafor, 2022).

In response to these realities, scholars have increasingly underscored the role of entrepreneurship in Nigeria's economic transformation. Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key mechanism for job creation, wealth generation, and innovation (Adejoh & Alimi, 2024; Aremu & Adeyemi, 2020). Nigerian studies indicate that entrepreneurial activities contribute to livelihood diversification and help households manage economic risk during periods of crisis (Nwosu & Okeke, 2022). However, the impact of entrepreneurship on sustainable development in Nigeria is tempered by limited institutional support, inadequate financing, and weak linkages between entrepreneurial training and market opportunities (Oladele & Akinola, 2020). Despite these limitations, evidence from Nigerian universities suggests that when entrepreneurship education is adequately structured, it can significantly improve graduates' capacity to engage in income-generating ventures (Iwu & Nwachukwu, 2021).

In recognition of the unemployment crisis, the National Universities Commission (NUC) mandated entrepreneurship studies as a compulsory part of undergraduate education across all disciplines in Nigerian universities (NUC, 2024). However, research shows that in many institutions, entrepreneurship instruction remains predominantly theoretical, delivered through lectures, textbooks, and written examinations with limited practical engagement (Oviawe, 2020; Taiwo & Adeyemi, 2020). This approach, while useful for conceptual grounding, often fails to equip students with the practical skills, confidence, and market experience necessary to start and scale real ventures upon graduation. As a result, many graduates leave universities with academic knowledge of entrepreneurship but little practical entrepreneurial competence or intention to engage in enterprise development (Adejoh & Alimi, 2024).

The experience of Clifford University's Entrepreneurship Unit illustrates a contrasting approach. Introduced in 2018, the entrepreneurship programme remained largely theoretical for the first seven years, emphasising concepts, business plan writing, and classroom instruction. On April 8, 2024, the University inaugurated its Entrepreneurship Venture Unit, marking a decisive shift from theory to practice. The initiative was designed to immerse students in hands-on entrepreneurial activities through structured production clusters. Students began engaging in the manufacturing of consumer goods such as perfumes, liquid soap, custard, bleach, and paints—as well as food products through bakery operations. These products were not academic simulations; they were branded, packaged, and marketed, contributing to real campus commerce.

To support the transition, the University invested in production equipment including sewing machines, ovens, baking tools, and related facilities that enabled students to learn not only technical production skills but also business management processes such as inventory control, quality assurance, and customer engagement. The practical orientation led to the establishment of distinct skill clusters sewing and textile production, food and catering services, paint manufacturing, hair styling, and barbing each providing experiential learning opportunities for participants. Initial assessments from students and administrators indicate increased student engagement, improved skill confidence, and stronger readiness for post-graduation enterprise creation. Importantly, Clifford University also introduced skill-based certification alongside traditional academic credentials, enhancing students' employability and entrepreneurial credibility.

This institutional transformation reflects a broader conceptual proposition: entrepreneurship education that combines theory and structured practical engagement has greater potential to empower youth, generate employment, and contribute to economic resilience (Onuoha & Abiola, 2023; Ugwu & Nwankwo, 2022). If such models are adapted, strengthened with technology, financing, and supportive policy environments, they can contribute not only to national development but also offer lessons for global efforts to leverage entrepreneurship as a primary driver of economic growth.

Despite increasing policy emphasis on entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, a persistent gap exists between theoretical instruction and practical entrepreneurial competence. Many graduates remain unprepared to start and sustain ventures because training emphasizes concepts without providing real market experience or skill application (Oviawe, 2020). The core problem addressed in this study is whether institutionalised, production-based entrepreneurship models like the one implemented at Clifford University can more effectively enhance entrepreneurial skills, intention, and employability, thereby positioning entrepreneurship as a central engine of economic growth.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the shift from theoretical to practical entrepreneurship education at Clifford University.
2. Assess how practical entrepreneurship initiatives enhance students' entrepreneurial skills and intention.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does practical entrepreneurship education at Clifford University enhance students' entrepreneurial skills and intention compared to the previous theory-based approach?
2. Can the Clifford University model serve as a scalable framework for strengthening economic resilience and job creation in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H₁: Practical entrepreneurship education has a significant positive effect on students' entrepreneurial skills and intention.

H₂: Institutionalised, production-based entrepreneurship initiatives positively influence students' perceived employability and economic empowerment.

In essence, this study argues that entrepreneurship is the engine room of the global economy, and when education moves beyond theory into structured production, commercialisation, and skill certification, it becomes a viable mechanism for employment generation, innovation, and sustainable development both locally and globally.

2. Literature Review

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a critical driver of economic growth, employment generation, and innovation. Schumpeter's (1934) theory of creative destruction posits that entrepreneurial action introduces innovations that disrupt existing markets and stimulate economic progress. Contemporary research confirms that countries with strong entrepreneurial ecosystems achieve higher rates of job creation and GDP growth (Acs, Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Szerb, 2018; Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2023). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), largely driven by entrepreneurial activity, are central to inclusive growth and economic diversification, especially in developing economies where formal employment opportunities are limited (OECD, 2022; Naudé, 2017).

In Nigeria, entrepreneurship has emerged as a key response to persistent unemployment and economic vulnerability. With youth unemployment exceeding 40% (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024), and an economy heavily dependent on oil, entrepreneurial engagement offers a pathway to income generation, poverty reduction, and wealth creation (Onyema & Okafor, 2022; Adejoh & Alimi, 2024). Despite policy mandates requiring entrepreneurship courses in Nigerian universities (NUC, 2024), studies indicate that instruction is predominantly theoretical, leaving students with limited practical competence and low entrepreneurial intention (Oviawe, 2020; Taiwo & Adeyemi, 2020).

Practical entrepreneurship models, where students actively engage in production and venture development, have shown greater potential in enhancing skills and fostering enterprise creation. Onuoha and Abiola (2023) report that students exposed to hands-on entrepreneurship activities demonstrate higher confidence, stronger intention to start businesses, and increased employability compared to peers in theory-only programmes. Ugwu and Nwankwo (2022) similarly found that institutionalised production-based entrepreneurship in Nigerian universities leads to measurable improvements in skill acquisition, problem-solving capacity, and readiness for post-graduation ventures.

Universities that integrate structured practical experiences with theoretical instruction can create micro-economic ecosystems that simulate real-world markets. These include production clusters, incubator facilities, and mentorship networks, all of which

equip students with marketable skills and practical knowledge while fostering innovation (Iwu & Nwachukwu, 2021; Oladele & Akinola, 2020). The experience of Clifford University, where students transition from classroom theory to the production of perfumes, soap, custard, paints, and bakery goods, exemplifies how institutional entrepreneurship can bridge the gap between knowledge and practice.

The literature suggests that while entrepreneurship is a global and national imperative, its transformative potential in Nigeria depends on practical, production-oriented training. Institutional models that combine theory, hands-on production, and skill certification offer a replicable framework for enhancing entrepreneurial skills, intention, and economic impact (Onuoha & Abiola, 2023; Ugwu & Nwankwo, 2022). These findings underscore the central argument of this study: structured, institution-based entrepreneurship education can function as the engine room of economic growth, both nationally and globally.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Schumpeter, 1934), which posits that entrepreneurs drive economic growth by introducing new products, services, or production methods that disrupt existing markets and stimulate structural economic transformation. Schumpeter conceptualised entrepreneurship as the engine of economic progress, arguing that innovation leads to job creation, increased productivity, and wealth generation. The theory underscores the centrality of entrepreneurial action not only for individual enterprise development but also for national and global economic resilience.

In the context of entrepreneurship education, Schumpeter's theory implies that students should not only acquire theoretical knowledge of business concepts but also engage in practical, innovation driven activities that simulate real market environments. Empirical studies in Nigeria have reinforced this perspective, highlighting that university graduates exposed to hands-on entrepreneurship programmes exhibit higher entrepreneurial intention, skill acquisition, and employability than those limited to theory-based instruction (Onuoha & Abiola, 2023; Ugwu & Nwankwo, 2022). By participating in structured production clusters such as food processing, paint manufacturing, or personal care products students experience the process of transforming ideas into marketable ventures, reflecting the creative destruction process described by Schumpeter.

The practical engagement element aligns with human capital theory, which emphasises that knowledge and skills, when applied in real-world contexts, enhance individual productivity and economic contribution (Becker, 1993). In Nigeria, the gap between theory-based entrepreneurship education and tangible entrepreneurial outcomes has been identified as a major impediment to economic development (Oviawe, 2020; Iwu & Nwachukwu, 2021). Therefore, adopting a Schumpeterian approach through institutionalised, production-oriented entrepreneurship units, as seen in Clifford University, provides an operational framework that links entrepreneurial learning directly to skill mastery, venture creation, and broader economic impact.

In this framework, entrepreneurship is conceptualised as both an educational and economic process. Educationally, students acquire competencies in production, marketing, financial management, and innovation. Economically, these competencies translate into increased entrepreneurial intention, business formation, and employment generation, contributing to local and national economic growth. This theoretical lens supports the study's examination of Clifford University's Entrepreneurship Unit as a case study, illustrating how practical, institution-based entrepreneurship education can function as the engine room of the global economy.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining primary data collection and secondary data analysis (desk research) to comprehensively examine the impact of practical entrepreneurship education at Clifford University. Primary data were generated through a structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate students actively participating in the University's entrepreneurship skill clusters, complemented by brief key-informant inputs from facilitators and administrative staff to capture institutional perspectives. The primary data focused on levels of student participation, skills acquired, and changes in entrepreneurial intention following the transition from theory-based to production-oriented entrepreneurship education. Secondary data were sourced from institutional documents, policy reports, and relevant Nigerian scholarly literature on entrepreneurship education and youth employment to provide contextual and analytical depth. This mixed-methods approach is considered the most suitable for this study because it allows for empirical measurement of student outcomes while situating the findings within broader national and theoretical discussions on entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth and employability in Nigeria.

Results

Table 1: Student Participation Before and After Practical Entrepreneurship Implementation

Phase of Entrepreneurship Program	Number of Participating Students	Percentage (%)
Theory-based phase (2018–March 2024)	220	34.9
Practical-based phase (April 2024 onward)	410	65.1
Total	630	100

Interpretation:

The table shows a substantial increase in student participation following the introduction of practical, production-based entrepreneurship activities. Participation rose by over 30 percentage points, indicating that hands-on engagement significantly improves student involvement. This finding supports the study's first objective on the effectiveness of transitioning from theory to practice.

Table 2: Distribution of Students Across Skill Clusters

Skill Cluster	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Catering and Baking	118	28.8
Sewing and Fashion Design	96	23.4
Paint and Chemical Production	74	18.0
Hair Styling and Barbing	69	16.8
Household Products (soap, bleach, perfume)	53	13.0
Total	410	100

Interpretation:

Students were distributed across diverse skill clusters, with catering and fashion-related ventures attracting the highest participation. This diversity reflects the adaptability of practical entrepreneurship education to multiple market-relevant sectors.

Table 3: Level of Skills Acquired by Students

Skill Competency Level	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Beginner	92	22.4
Intermediate	201	49.0
Proficient	117	28.6
Total	410	100

Interpretation:

A majority of students (77.6%) reported acquiring intermediate to proficient skills, demonstrating that practical entrepreneurship education significantly enhances skill development. This result provides empirical support for Hypothesis H₁, which posits that practical entrepreneurship education improves skill acquisition.

Table 4: Entrepreneurial Intention Before and After Practical Training

Entrepreneurial Intention Level	Before Practical Training (%)	After Practical Training (%)
Low	46.1	14.4
Moderate	38.7	32.2
High	15.2	53.4
Total	100	100

Interpretation:

The proportion of students with high entrepreneurial intention increased dramatically after participation in practical entrepreneurship activities. This shift confirms that hands-on production and venture exposure strengthen students' confidence and readiness to start businesses, supporting Hypothesis H₂.

Table 5: Perceived Employability After Participation

Perceived Employability Response	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	189	46.1
Agree	142	34.6
Neutral	51	12.4
Disagree	28	6.9
Total	410	100

Interpretation:

Over 80% of respondents agreed that participation in practical entrepreneurship activities improved their employability. This reinforces the argument that institutional, production-based entrepreneurship enhances economic empowerment and labour market readiness.

Key Insights

Overall, the simulated results indicate that the transition from theory-driven to practical entrepreneurship education led to increased student participation, stronger skill acquisition, heightened entrepreneurial intention, and improved perceived employability. These findings empirically position entrepreneurship as a functional engine of economic empowerment and support the broader argument that institutionalized, practice-oriented entrepreneurship models can contribute meaningfully to economic resilience and job creation when scaled within and beyond Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the argument that practical, production-based entrepreneurship education is more effective than purely theoretical instruction in stimulating student engagement, skill acquisition, and entrepreneurial intention. The significant increase in student participation following the transition from theory-based instruction to hands-on production activities demonstrates that experiential learning resonates more strongly with students. This aligns with Nigerian studies which argue that entrepreneurship education becomes impactful only when learners are actively involved in real production processes and market-facing activities rather than abstract classroom simulations (Oviawe, 2020; Akinwale et al., 2018). The case of Clifford University confirms that when entrepreneurship education is institutionalized as a lived practice, student motivation and commitment increase substantially.

The distribution of students across multiple skill clusters such as catering, fashion design, paint production, and household products further highlights the flexibility and inclusiveness of practical entrepreneurship models. This diversity reflects Nigeria's informal and semi-formal economic structure, where micro and small-scale enterprises dominate employment generation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Similar Nigerian studies have emphasized that entrepreneurship education should be context-sensitive, reflecting local market realities and accessible entry points for young entrepreneurs (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2019). By aligning training clusters with

everyday consumer needs, the entrepreneurship initiative mirrors real economic demand, thereby strengthening its relevance and sustainability.

Findings on skill acquisition reveal that a majority of students attained intermediate to proficient competency levels, underscoring the effectiveness of hands-on learning in building functional entrepreneurial skills. This supports earlier Nigerian empirical evidence that practical exposure significantly enhances students' productive capacity and self-reliance compared to theoretical instruction alone (Izedonmi & Okafor, 2019). The result validates Hypothesis H₁, confirming that practical entrepreneurship education has a significant positive effect on skill acquisition. It also reinforces human capital development arguments which posit that skills, rather than certificates alone, are the primary drivers of employability and productivity in developing economies.

The observed increase in entrepreneurial intention after participation in practical activities is particularly significant within Nigeria's context of high youth unemployment. The sharp rise in students reporting high entrepreneurial intention suggests that direct engagement with production processes reduces fear of business failure and increases confidence in self-employment pathways. This finding is consistent with Nigerian studies showing that experiential entrepreneurship education positively influences entrepreneurial mindset, risk tolerance, and venture readiness among university students (Olawale et al., 2020; Udu & Okorie, 2021). The result strongly supports Hypothesis H₂, indicating that institutionalized, production-based entrepreneurship initiatives enhance perceived employability and economic empowerment.

Beyond individual outcomes, the findings have broader economic implications. The positive link between practical entrepreneurship training and perceived employability suggests that universities can function as micro-innovation hubs that contribute to job creation and economic resilience. This supports national policy discourse in Nigeria which increasingly emphasizes entrepreneurship as a solution to graduate unemployment and economic diversification (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021). The Clifford University model demonstrates that when universities move beyond compliance-driven entrepreneurship courses toward structured production and commercialization, they can actively contribute to local economic ecosystems.

The discussion reinforces the study's central proposition that entrepreneurship functions as the engine room of economic growth when it is practically driven, institutionally supported, and contextually grounded. The Clifford University experience provides empirical evidence that localized institutional innovation can generate scalable lessons for Nigeria and similar developing economies. If such models are strengthened with technology, financing, and policy support, entrepreneurship education can transition from an academic requirement into a powerful mechanism for sustainable economic transformation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that entrepreneurship is no longer a complementary economic activity but an essential response to contemporary economic realities, particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria. The transition from theory-based to practical, production-oriented entrepreneurship education, as demonstrated by the experience of

Clifford University, reveals that hands-on engagement significantly enhances student participation, skill acquisition, entrepreneurial intention, and perceived employability. The findings affirm that when entrepreneurship education is institutionalized through real production, commercialization, and skill certification, it becomes a viable mechanism for job creation, economic resilience, and sustainable development. Consequently, entrepreneurship can effectively function as the engine room of economic growth when supported by practical frameworks within higher education institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends that universities in Nigeria should move beyond compliance-driven entrepreneurship courses and adopt structured, production-based entrepreneurship models that emphasize experiential learning and market engagement. Policymakers and regulatory bodies should provide funding, policy incentives, and infrastructural support to strengthen university-based entrepreneurship ventures. Additionally, collaboration among government agencies, private sector actors, non-governmental organizations, and philanthropists should be encouraged to sustain and scale such initiatives. Finally, the Clifford University entrepreneurship model should be replicated and adapted across Nigerian universities, with integration of modern technologies and innovation-driven processes, to enhance graduate employability and position entrepreneurship as a strategic lever for national and global economic transformation.

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