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Growth Mindset and Entrepreneurial Intention among Final-Year Undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria: Does Gender Matter?

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Abstract

This study investigated gender differences in entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset among final-year undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria. A total six hundred and twenty final year students drawn from five federal universities in the South-East namely Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Federal University of Technology Owerri and Michael Okpara University Umudike participated in the study. Specifically, the study examined whether male and female students differed in their entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset and explored the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset. A competitive correlational research designs were adopted, and data were collected from final-year undergraduate students using standardized measures of entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset through online google form. The data were analyzed using independent samples t-test and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The findings revealed a significant gender difference in entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset among the participants. Furthermore, the results indicated a positive significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset, suggesting that students with a stronger growth mindset were more likely to demonstrate higher entrepreneurial intention. The study concludes that gender plays an important role in shaping entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset, while the development of a growth mindset may enhance students' entrepreneurial aspirations. It is recommended that higher education institutions and policymakers implement gender-sensitive entrepreneurship education and mindset development programs to foster entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial intention, growth mindset, gender difference, final-year undergraduates, South-East Nigeria.*

Introduction

Research has identified entrepreneurship as a strategic driver of economic growth, innovation, employment generation, and sustainable development across both developed and developing economies (Chang et al., 2022). According to Zimmerer and Scarborough (2018) developed economies have advanced in entrepreneurship, while in developing ones are still battling to find their fit. In Nigeria for instance, where graduate unemployment has remains a major socioeconomic challenge, entrepreneurship is considered an effective strategy for promoting self-employment and fostering youth engagement in economic activities. To achieve this aim, many Nigerian universities have invented entrepreneurship education in order to equip undergraduates with entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for venture creation. Despite these interventions, many university graduates still demonstrate little or no interest in entrepreneurial activities, suggesting that psychological and demographic factors may influence students' decisions to pursue entrepreneurial careers (Botsaris & Vamvaka, 2016).

Entrepreneurial intention is the sincerity of someone to conduct business activities. It is

defined as an individual's conscious state of mind, commitment, or willingness to establish a business venture in the future (Dada et al., 2023; Ilevbare et al., 2022). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), entrepreneurial intention is shaped by attitude toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Gender is an important demographic factor that influences entrepreneurial intention, which refers to an individual's willingness or commitment to start a new business. Research consistently shows that men generally report higher entrepreneurial intentions than women, although this gap is influenced by social, cultural, educational, and institutional factors rather than gender alone (Ajzen, 1991; Zhao et al., 2005; Olowookere & Asekun, 2024).

Gender differences often emerge because women may perceive greater barriers to entrepreneurship, including limited access to financial resources, lower self-efficacy, family responsibilities, and societal stereotypes regarding business leadership (Gupta et al., 2009). These factors can reduce women's confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities and, consequently, their intention to establish businesses. Empirical studies have also found that entrepreneurial intention among women increases when they receive entrepreneurial education, mentorship, and institutional support. Such interventions help improve entrepreneurial self-efficacy and reduce perceived barriers, thereby narrowing the gender gap in entrepreneurial intention (Wilson et al., 2007). Furthermore, cultural contexts that promote gender equality and provide equal access to entrepreneurial opportunities tend to exhibit smaller differences in entrepreneurial intention between men and women (Shinnar et al., 2012). Although gender remains a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention, its influence is mediated by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Policies and educational programs that foster equal opportunities and strengthen entrepreneurial competencies among both men and women can help reduce gender disparities in entrepreneurial intention.

Growth mindset refers to the belief that intelligence, abilities, and skills can be developed through effort, effective learning strategies, and persistence (Dweck, 2006). It has become an important construct in education, psychology, and entrepreneurship because it influences how individuals respond to challenges, setbacks, and opportunities for personal development. Researchers have examined whether gender influences the development and expression of a growth mindset, with findings suggesting that differences are generally small and are often shaped by socialization, educational experiences, and cultural expectations rather than biological sex (Good et al., 2012; Yeager et al., 2019). According to Dweck (2006), individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace challenges, persist in the face of obstacles, learn from criticism, and achieve higher levels of performance. Although both men and women can develop a growth mindset, gender stereotypes may affect how individuals perceive their abilities and respond to failure (Good et al., 2012).

Research further indicates that educational environments that promote effort, resilience, and continuous learning help foster growth mindsets among both male and female students (Karwowski & Gralewski, 2013). Interventions designed to cultivate a growth mindset have been found to improve academic motivation and resilience across genders, although the benefits may be particularly meaningful for individuals who face stereotype-related barriers (Yeager et al., 2019). Consequently, creating supportive learning environments and challenging limiting gender stereotypes can help ensure that both men and women develop the confidence and persistence associated with a growth mindset. Yeager et al. (2019) suggests that gender itself is not a strong determinant of growth mindset. Rather, differences that are observed are largely explained by contextual factors such as cultural expectations, educational practices, family influences, and exposure to gender stereotypes. Promoting equitable learning opportunities and encouraging the belief that abilities can be developed

through effort can strengthen growth mindsets among individuals regardless of gender.

One psychological construct receiving increasing attention in psychological and entrepreneurship research is growth mindset. Developed by Dweck (2006), a growth mindset reflects the belief that intelligence, talents, and abilities can be developed through effort, persistence, learning, and effective strategies (Kuratko et al., 2021). Individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace challenges, learn from failure, seek feedback, and remain resilient in uncertain situations. According to Burnette et al. (2019), growth mindset fosters entrepreneurial intentions by promoting a belief in one's ability to learn and improve, leading to greater resilience against challenges and a positive outlook on opportunities, which are crucial for aspiring entrepreneurs. This simply means that having growth mindset is likely to make people develop entrepreneurial self-efficacy, see problems as learning opportunities, and possess the determination needed to start and grow a business. Recent studies by Adedoye et al. (2025), Amadi (2022), Akinyemi (2023), and Xing et al. (2026) indicate that entrepreneurial growth mindset significantly enhances entrepreneurial intention directly and indirectly through cognitive flexibility and entrepreneurial alertness. Individual with a strong with a growth mindset may be more likely to pursue entrepreneurial goals despite setbacks.

Empirical literature showed that existing studies more especially in Nigeria have primarily examined entrepreneurial intention without adequately considering the potential contributions of gender and growth mindset, despite growing international evidence linking them to entrepreneurial outcomes. In this regard, this research considered it important to address this gap because understanding gender differences in growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention can assist universities, educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurship development agencies in designing evidence-based, gender-responsive interventions that strengthen entrepreneurial competencies among undergraduates. Such interventions could foster resilience, innovation, opportunity recognition, and venture creation among graduates, thereby contributing to employment generation and national economic development. It is against this backdrop that the present study examined gender differences among Nigerian university undergraduates in growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention. Specifically, the study investigated whether significant differences exist between male and female undergraduates regarding their levels of growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses has been posited to guide this study.

- i. There is a significant gender difference in entrepreneurial intention among university undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
- ii. There is a significant gender difference in growth mindset among university undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.
- iii. There is a significant relationship between growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention among university undergraduates in South-East, Nigeria.

Method

Participants

A total six hundred and twenty final year students drawn from five federal universities in the South-East namely Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Federal University of Technology Owerri and Michael Okpala University Umudike participated in the study. They were drawn via students' social media platforms for different university. The participants responded to questionnaires on the google form which was posted on their WhatsApp platforms. The participants

comprised of 242 male students (39.03%) and 378 female students (60.97%). The age range of the participants is from 21 to 30 years, with the mean age of 23.5. The distribution of participants across universities were as follows: Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka 208 (33.55%), University of Nigeria, Nsukka 115 (18.55%), Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-A like 86 (13.87%), Federal University of Technology Owerri 103 (16.61%) and Michael Okpara University Umudike 108 (17.42%).

Instruments

Two instruments were used to carry out the study.

Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ)

Entrepreneurial intention questionnaire is a measurement tool developed by Liñán and Chen (2009) to assess intention to become an entrepreneur. It is a 6 items questionnaire and each item is measured on a 7-point likert-type scales ranging from 1 (minimum attraction) to 7 (maximum attraction). Example items include "I'm ready to make anything to be an entrepreneur". EIQ has been found to have the composite reliability of 0.96, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.95. This indicates that the scale is reliable and can be used to measure entrepreneurial intention.

Growth Mindset Scale (GMS)

Growth mindset scale is a measurement tool developed by Dweck et al. (1995) to assess a person's beliefs about the malleability of intelligence, the relative importance of learning and perfect performance, and their attitudes toward effort and mistakes. It is a 10 items questionnaire and each item is measured on a 5-point likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for positively worded items and reverse for negatively worded items. Example items include "I often get angry when I get feedback about my performance". GMS has been found to have the composite reliability of 0.92, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91. This indicates that the scale is reliable and can be used to measure growth mindset.

Procedure

After obtaining ethical clearance from Nnamdi Azikiwe University ethical committee on human research, an online google form was developed and posted on student's WhatsApp group. The form contained sixteen items, numbers one to six measures entrepreneurial intention while numbers seven to sixteen measures growth mindset. Demographic factors like age, gender, marital status and institution were also on the form. The researchers maintained a time line of 14 days for members to attend to the questionnaire. Only data collected within the 14 days' deadline was used for analysis. Students were free to participate at their own discretion by filling the online Google form without monetary or any other incentives. They were also notified that the data was only for purpose and that the report will be published. To reduce the possibility of a respondent participating in the survey more than once, each respondent is required to provide his/her name and e-mail address.

Design/Statistics

Comparative research design and correlational design were employed for the study. First, comparative research design was adopted to test differences between two groups on two variables. Second, correlational design was also employed to establish relationship among two variables. T-test statistic was used for data analysis because the study aimed to see if there is a significant difference between two groups while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test relationship between variables.

Results

The results of data analysis for all the three hypotheses are as shown in the table below.

Table: 1 T-test Table Showing the Gender Differences of Undergraduates on Entrepreneurial Intention and Growth Mindset

Model	N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	t	Sig
Entrepreneurial Intentions	620	23.96	4.40	619	135.62	.00
Growth Mindset		34.65	4.68		184.27	.00

Constant: Gender at $p < .01$

From the table, it could be deduced that gender differences exist between male and female undergraduates on their level of entrepreneurial intention ($t = 135.62$, $df = 619$, $p < .00$). The results also showed that gender differences exist between male and female undergraduates on their level of growth mindset ($t = 184.27$, $df = 619$, $p < .00$). This means that first and second hypotheses were confirmed.

Table: 1 T-test Table Showing Relationship between Entrepreneurial Intention and Growth Mindset among Undergraduates

Model	N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	r	Sig
Entrepreneurial Intentions	620	23.96	4.40	618	.13	.01
Growth Mindset		34.65	4.68			

At $p < .01$

From the table, it could be deduced that significant positive relationship exist between undergraduates' level of entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset ($r = .13$, $df = 618$, $p < .01$). This means that hypothesis three was confirmed.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding showed that a significant gender difference exists in entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates in South-East Nigeria suggests that male and female students differ in their willingness and readiness to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies like Omotajo et al. (2024), Olowookere and Asekun (2024) and Gupta et al., (2009), which have generally reported that male undergraduates exhibit higher entrepreneurial intentions than their female counterparts. The observed difference may be attributed to variations in entrepreneurial self-efficacy, access to resources, societal expectations, risk-taking propensity, and cultural stereotypes that influence career choices. Within the South-East Nigerian context, entrepreneurship is often viewed as a viable pathway to employment due to high youth unemployment and the strong commercial culture of the region. However, female undergraduates may still encounter barriers such as limited access to finance, fewer entrepreneurial role models, family expectations, and persistent gender stereotypes regarding business ownership. These factors can reduce their confidence and willingness to pursue entrepreneurial careers despite receiving similar entrepreneurship education. The finding also aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that entrepreneurial intention is influenced by attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Male students often report higher perceived behavioral control and confidence in their entrepreneurial capabilities, whereas female students may perceive greater external constraints. Consequently, gender differences in entrepreneurial intention are likely to reflect differences in perceived opportunities and social

support rather than innate ability. Furthermore, this result agrees with Omotajo et al. (2024), who found that female undergraduates faced more barriers to entrepreneurship and demonstrated lower entrepreneurial intentions than male students in Nigerian federal universities. Similarly, Olowookere and Asekun (2024) reported significant gender differences in entrepreneurial intentions among Nigerian undergraduates, with male students showing stronger entrepreneurial aspirations than females.

The second finding reveals a significant gender difference exists in growth mindset among undergraduates in South-East Nigeria indicates that male and female students differ in their beliefs about the extent to which abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence. Although growth mindset is considered a psychological construct that can be cultivated irrespective of gender, differences may arise due to variations in socialization, cultural expectations, educational experiences, and exposure to supportive learning environments. This finding can be explained by Dweck's (2006) Growth Mindset Theory, which posits that individuals who believe their abilities can be improved through effort are more likely to embrace challenges, persist after setbacks, and view failure as an opportunity for learning. Gender differences in growth mindset may therefore reflect differences in students' experiences rather than inherent differences between males and females. In the South-East Nigerian context, cultural norms, family expectations, and educational opportunities may shape how male and female undergraduates perceive their abilities and respond to academic and personal challenges. The finding is consistent with research suggesting that gender stereotypes and societal expectations can influence students' beliefs about their capabilities. Good et al. (2012) found that female students' sense of belonging and confidence may be affected in environments where gender stereotypes are prevalent, which can influence the development of a growth mindset. Likewise, Yeager et al. (2019) demonstrated that growth mindset interventions improve motivation and achievement across genders, but contextual factors determine the extent to which individuals benefit from such interventions. The observed gender difference may also be attributed to differences in encouragement, access to mentoring, and exposure to challenging learning experiences. Male students may receive greater societal encouragement to take risks and persist in difficult tasks, while female students may face expectations that limit confidence in certain academic or professional domains. Conversely, in institutions where supportive educational practices and equal opportunities are emphasized, these differences may become less pronounced.

The third finding established a significant positive relationship between growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in South-East Nigeria. This indicates that students who believe that intelligence, abilities, and entrepreneurial skills can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence are more likely to express stronger intentions to establish and manage business ventures. A growth mindset encourages resilience, adaptability, creativity, and perseverance, which are essential psychological characteristics for entrepreneurial success. This finding supports Dweck (1986) Growth Mindset Theory, which posits that individuals with a growth mindset are more willing to embrace challenges, persist despite setbacks, and continuously improve their abilities. These characteristics naturally enhance entrepreneurial intention because entrepreneurship involves uncertainty, innovation, and continuous learning. Students who perceive challenges as opportunities for growth are therefore more likely to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Furthermore, the finding aligns with previous empirical studies by Adedoye et al. (2025), Amadi (2022), Akinyemi (2023) that established a positive association between growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention among university students. These studies suggest that individuals with stronger growth mindsets possess greater entrepreneurial self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, problem-

solving abilities, and resilience, all of which contribute to higher entrepreneurial intentions. The findings underscore the importance of promoting growth mindset development within entrepreneurship education in universities across South-East Nigeria. Educational institutions should integrate teaching strategies that foster resilience, innovation, persistence, and confidence while also implementing interventions that address gender-related barriers to entrepreneurship. Such efforts are likely to strengthen entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates and contribute to graduate self-employment, job creation, and sustainable economic development.

The findings of this study have important implications for entrepreneurship education, educational psychology, university management, policymakers, and researchers. First, the significant gender differences observed in entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset imply that male and female undergraduates may differ in their entrepreneurial aspirations and beliefs about developing entrepreneurial competencies. This suggests that universities should design gender-responsive entrepreneurship education programs that provide equal opportunities, mentorship, funding access, and capacity-building initiatives for both male and female students. Such interventions can help reduce gender disparities and encourage greater participation in entrepreneurship regardless of gender. Second, the significant positive relationship between growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention indicates that fostering a growth mindset can enhance students' willingness to pursue entrepreneurial careers. This implies that entrepreneurship education should extend beyond teaching business skills to include psychological competencies such as resilience, perseverance, adaptability, creativity, and confidence. Integrating growth mindset training into entrepreneurship curricula could strengthen students' entrepreneurial intentions and better prepare them for self-employment and innovation. Third, the findings provide empirical support for the application of Growth Mindset Theory in understanding entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in South East Nigeria. This contributes to the growing body of literature by demonstrating that students' beliefs about the malleability of their abilities play an important role in shaping their entrepreneurial aspirations. The study therefore expands existing knowledge on the psychological determinants of entrepreneurial intention within the Nigerian context.

Furthermore, the findings have policy implications for government agencies and educational authorities. Institutions such as the Federal Ministry of Education, the National Universities Commission (NUC), and entrepreneurship development agencies should formulate policies that promote entrepreneurship education alongside mindset development programs. Such policies could increase graduate self-employment, reduce graduate unemployment, stimulate innovation, and contribute to national economic growth. The findings also have implications for university administrators and lecturers as they need to create learning environments that encourage innovation, problem-solving, calculated risk-taking, and persistence. Lecturers should employ instructional strategies that reinforce students' belief in their ability to develop entrepreneurial skills through continuous learning and effort.

Despite the valuable contributions of this study, certain limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study relied on self-report questionnaires to collect data. Although this method is appropriate for measuring psychological constructs, participants may have provided socially desirable responses or may not have accurately reported their true beliefs and intentions. This could have introduced response bias into the findings. Second, the study was limited to undergraduate students in selected universities in South East Nigeria. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to undergraduates in other geopolitical zones of Nigeria, students in private universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, or

individuals outside the university setting. Future studies should include more diverse populations to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. First, universities should strengthen entrepreneurship education programs by integrating practical entrepreneurial experiences, innovation projects, business incubation, and mentorship programs into the curriculum. This will help increase students' entrepreneurial intention and prepare them for self-employment after graduation. Second, growth mindset development should be incorporated into entrepreneurship education. Lecturers and university counsellors should provide training and activities that foster resilience, perseverance, adaptability, problem-solving, and confidence, enabling students to view challenges as opportunities for learning and growth. Third, university management should implement gender-inclusive entrepreneurship initiatives. Since gender differences were observed in entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset, institutions should ensure that both male and female students have equal access to entrepreneurship training, mentorship, business competitions, funding opportunities, and entrepreneurial support services. Career counsellors and psychologists should design intervention programs that enhance students' entrepreneurial self-belief, resilience, and motivation, particularly for students who demonstrate low entrepreneurial intention or a fixed mindset.

Future researchers should investigate other psychological and environmental factors that may influence entrepreneurial intention, such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy, resilience, locus of control, personality traits, socioeconomic status, entrepreneurship education, and access to financial resources. Future studies should also employ longitudinal or experimental research designs and include participants from other geopolitical zones and different categories of higher institutions to improve the generalizability of the findings.

This study examined gender differences in entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset, as well as the relationship between growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates in South East Nigeria. The findings revealed significant gender differences in both entrepreneurial intention and growth mindset, indicating that male and female undergraduates differ in their entrepreneurial aspirations and beliefs about developing their abilities through effort and learning. The study also found a significant positive relationship between growth mindset and entrepreneurial intention, suggesting that students with a stronger growth mindset are more likely to exhibit higher entrepreneurial intention. These findings underscore the importance of psychological factors, particularly growth mindset, in shaping entrepreneurial intention among university students. They also highlight the need for higher education institutions to adopt gender-sensitive and psychologically informed approaches to entrepreneurship education. By fostering resilience, perseverance, adaptability, and confidence, universities can better prepare students to recognize and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities.

In conclusion, developing a growth mindset among undergraduates, while addressing gender-related differences in entrepreneurial development, has the potential to strengthen entrepreneurial intention, enhance graduate self-employment, reduce unemployment, and contribute to sustainable economic growth and national development. It is therefore essential for stakeholders in higher education to implement strategies that cultivate both entrepreneurial competencies and a growth-oriented mindset among university students.

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