

Moderating effect of Entrepreneurial Motivation on Entrepreneurial Intention-Behaviour Gap among Fresh Graduates in Nigeria: A Proposed Model

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Abstract

The current economic realities of countries around the world enduring economic hardship, high unemployment and poverty, have made entrepreneurial development widely acknowledged and highly emphasized globally, with particular emphasis on developing Countries like Nigeria. However, it is very worrisome that despite the level of entrepreneurial education and intention among young graduates in Nigeria, the level of entrepreneurial behaviour, like venture creation, is still low, as majority of graduates still end-up looking for white collar jobs after graduating. This study therefore, adopt a critical review of relevant literatures, to assess the moderating effect of entrepreneurial motivation on the entrepreneurial intention-behaviour gap among fresh graduates in Nigeria. Moreover, the study proposed to advance the dimensions of Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, being a popular theory used in entrepreneurial intention research. Literature revealed that Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, and Entrepreneurship Education, are major determinants of entrepreneurial intention which precedes entrepreneurial behaviour. Though, there seems to be a missing link between entrepreneurial intention and behaviour among fresh graduates in Nigeria, entrepreneurial motivation should moderate the relationship. This study, however, recommends that empirical research be conducted to validate the predictive model developed in the study.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Behaviour, Entrepreneurial Intention, Entrepreneurial Motivation, Corps Members.

1.0 Introduction

The economic realities of many nations experiencing economic hardship, high rate of unemployment and poverty, in recent time, have made the role of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial development much more recognized and greatly emphasized in all nations, particularly in the developing world including Nigeria. It has been shown in previous studies that entrepreneurship plays a vital role in creating employment opportunities all over the world (Farooq *et al.*, 2018; Dana, 2021; Adenutsi, 2023). This has become more important in developing countries such as Nigeria, because the public sector alone cannot cater for its growing population in terms of providing the needed job opportunities.

Consequently, Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and other bodies, with vested interest, have made several efforts to develop entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria. Despite these efforts, the twin economic malaises of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria have reached an alarming level, a situation that may become worse with the increasing level of inflation and dwindling revenue. This is why governments at all levels have been making efforts to enhance and promote the development of Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) and its resultant Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB) as they are major parts of the cornerstones in any initiative geared towards employment generation (Wardana *et al.*, 2023).

However, being an entrepreneur or developing an EB begins with intention (Shirokova et al., 2022). Therefore, how to develop EI that will translate to EB among Nigerians, especially young graduates, has been the obsession of FGN. In spite of government efforts, particularly, to encourage self-employment among young graduates, such as the establishment of entrepreneurship centres in tertiary institutions across the country, establishment of entrepreneurship incubation centres and hubs, introduction of Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) in to National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programmes and the establishment of microfinance institutions and specialized banks to promote the development of EI and its resultant EB among Nigerians Youths, the dispositions towards EB, especially among young graduates, remain poor (Akinwale et al., 2024), and this suggests that government efforts have not obtained the desired results.

Since predicting behaviour has been the major objective of psychological theorists, they are very useful in investigating the underlying cause of behaviour. Hence, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has been found to be very useful in predicting a wide range of behaviour (Alam *et al.*, 2019; Ajzen, 2020). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that TPB will provide a very good foundation for us to investigate the determinants of EI and their effect on the formation of EB among fresh graduates in Nigeria. TPB by Ajzen emphasises three driving factors that underlie the formation of an individual's intentions, which include; Attitude, Subjective Norms (SN) and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC). Just like these identified three general factors of EI, Entrepreneurial Education (EE) has equally been recognized by researchers (Adekiya & Ibrahim, 2016; Utami *et al.*, 2017) as one of the major factor driving EI in Nigeria. Though, not included in the TPB by Ajzen, EE has been seen as a tool of influence in the formation of EI by instilling the spirit of entrepreneurship.

Previous studies (Kurniawa *et al.*, 2019; Ranga *et al.*, 2019) have restricted the application of Ajzen theory to EI with only a handful of researches extending the application to EB (Bako *et al.*, 2017; Ohanu & Ogbuanya, 2018; Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015). In entrepreneurship, intention is not an end, but a means to an end. However, it has been observed that many EIs do not lead to EB as they ended up at the level of intention (Bako *et al.*, 2017; Akinwale et al., 2024). Other previous researches have equally focus mainly on EI (Usman & Yenita, 2019; Kautonen *et al.*, 2015) which has little or no entrepreneurial value if such intention does not lead to EB. Although it is expected that the relationship between EI and EB may be influenced by Entrepreneurial Motivation (EM) (Akinwale et al., 2024), Alam *et al.* (2019) has posited that this aspect in entrepreneurial research has been under-researched and calls for more research attention.

Against this background, this study seeks to contribute to existing knowledge by assessing the moderating effect of EM on the relationship between the determinants of EI (Attitude, SN, PBC, & EE) and EB among serving fresh graduates in Nigeria, while extending the TPB.

The specific objectives of this study include the following:

- i. To assess the effects of the determinants of EI (Attitude, SN, PBC, & EE) on EB of serving fresh graduates in Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the moderating effect of EM on the relationship between EI and EB among fresh graduates in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

The section begins with review of related literature on the concepts of EI with special attention on its determinants (attitude, SN, PBC, and EE) and EB. Also reviewed are the previous studies on EM with regards to its moderating effect on the relationship between EI and behaviour.

The theoretical framework, which consists of the underpinning theories of the study, as well as the empirical review and conceptual framework are explained and depicted. Conclusively, the summary of the literature review is presented.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Entrepreneurial Behaviour

Behaviour is a notion that we already have a tacit mastery, which means it is a very familiar concept. It is an action or reaction of an individual to internal or external stimulus (Akinwale et al., 2024). Understanding an individual behaviour involves understanding what he/she will do in response to an event or situation. Mostly, behaviour is a function of human nature or the nature of a situation or event.

Based on the difference in individual's behaviour in response to different situations and stimuli, human behaviour can be classified into different categories. The common categories as contained in the work of Fatima (2019) include; molecular and moral behaviour, overt and covert behaviour, and voluntary and involuntary behaviour. Molecular behaviour is a type of behaviour that is exhibited unexpectedly without prior thinking, while moral behaviour is preceded by thinking. Likewise, overt behaviour is a type of behaviour that is visible. It is exhibited openly and can be seen, while covert behaviour is not visible as no one can see it. Voluntary behaviour depends on human wants which is exhibited based on one's volition, while involuntary behaviour occurs naturally without having to think first.

All human being have their distinct behaviour that they exhibit as they deal with life situations. EB is therefore conceptualized as a process based on the effort-performance-outcome model of entrepreneurial expectancies. However, EB is the outcome of enterprising individuals' intentions and their subsequent actions (Kautonen et al., 2015). The intention-behaviour transition involves a series of developmental processes involving preparedness/readiness of an individual, exhibited in terms of EB (Newman et al., 2019). Indeed, much of what we consider "entrepreneurial action" is intentionally planned behaviour (Akinwale et al., 2024). However, sometimes intentions do not translate into actual start-up activities, creating the so-called "intention-behaviour" gap in entrepreneurship (Kautonen et al., 2015). Hence, this paper proposed that EM moderates the entrepreneurship intention-behaviour relationship among fresh graduates in Nigeria.

2.2.2 Determinants of Entrepreneurial Intention

Understanding how intention takes place is therefore very important towards understanding how behaviour is developed for entrepreneurship, since intention is a significant predictor of planned behaviour towards new business start-up (Loan et al., 2021). TPB appropriately provides theoretical basis about the development of EI (Ajzen, 2020). New business is generally created with planning and is less likely to be unexpected and out to plan. Hence, entrepreneurship is considered in perspective of TPB as a planned behaviour which is predicted by EI (Loan et al., 2021).

The Ajzen's TPB model (1991) uses three determinants to explain the cause of intention. According to the theory, the determinants of intentions are: attitude, SN and PBC. Moreover, some researcher efforts have equally focused on the issue of EE for determining EI (Duval-Couetil et al., 2016). Since the TPB lends itself to modification through the incorporation of factors considered to be relevant in the determination of EI (Krueger, 2017), this study proposes to integrate EE into the traditional Ajzen's theory as a determinant of EI while proposing that motivation will moderate the relationship between EI and EB. The four determinants of EI, adopted for this research, are discussed as follows:

i. Attitude

Personal attitude has been described as the attitude one holds towards a behaviour. That is, the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Ajzen (2020) posit that people develop attitudes based on the beliefs that they will bear the consequences of performing the behaviour. Such consequences include both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards as financial rewards, independence/autonomy, personal rewards and family security, all of which do influence the intention to start a business (Gieure et al., 2024).

Negative outcome expectancies such as perceiving risk associated with entrepreneurial activities impact unfavorably the intention to start personal business. Depending on how favorable individuals evaluate behaviours, their subsequent intentions will be formed. However, it is believed that people who have positive attitude towards entrepreneurship are more likely to be self-employed.

ii. Subjective Norms

SN relates to social pressure mounted by important others such as family, friends, and other individuals who would approve or disapprove of one's behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). Liñán and Fayolle (2015) posit that one's SN are to a large extent, a function of salient normative beliefs; and in general, tend to contribute more weakly on intention depending on the individuals' propensity to conform and personality characteristics.

In context of entrepreneurship, SN refer to the perception of what a person's "reference group" such as family, friends or significant others would think about performing EB, or whether they approve or disapprove of the entrepreneurial decision. The SN that exist for a given behaviour reflect the perceptions that person has about how positively or negatively others view the behaviour in question.

iii. Perceived Behavioural Control

PBC refers to the relative ease or difficulty of performing a behaviour. It refers to a situation when an individual perceives that performing a behaviour will be easy or difficulty. Not only does one's attitude towards PBC refers to past experiences, but it also refers to anticipated obstacles and other factors impeding the performance of the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals who believes that they have high level of control over their behaviour will develop subsequent intentions to perform the behaviour. PBC does not only affect one's intentions but also directly affects one's behaviour as well.

In the context of entrepreneurial behaviour, PBC can also be called entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Santos & Liguori, 2019). However, Newman et al. (2023) argued that entrepreneurial self-efficacy greatly influences EB. Individuals with positive PBC are likely to persist when problems arise, and actively seek out challenges and by extension, challenging opportunities.

iv. Entrepreneurial Education

EE is an all-encompassing education and training activities that try to develop an individual's EI or some factors that affect his/her intention, such as desirability, feasibility, and knowledge of the entrepreneurial activity. Since Harvard Business School opened its first education program in 1945, EE has been spreading over the few decades at a fairly rapid pace, attracting intensive research interest among entrepreneurship scholars (Onjewu *et al.*, 2021; Kavita, 2020).

However, a distinction has been made between formal education and EE in relation to their effects on the formation of intention and behaviour. Research evidence show that unlike EE,

formal education does not impact positively on the formation of intention and behaviour. EE could be instrumental in the acquisition of the skill set needed for the creation and management of enterprises (Aladejebi, 2018), which supports the position that early exposure to EE would be particularly effective in promoting EI that will translate to EB. Hence, EE is one of the major determinants of EI included in this paper.

v. Entrepreneurial Motivation

Motivation is a generic term for all internal factors that combine intellectual and physical energy, initiate and organize individual activities, and direct or channel behaviour (Fosic *et al.*, 2017). Although motivation is truly based on individual, it involves a combination of factors or motives, which are believed to be typical of people with an entrepreneurial urge (Aloulou, 2018). Students and even graduates who have higher motivation are more likely to be ready to engage in their own entrepreneurial ventures than those who have low motivation to engage in activities or tasks that have a high degree of individual responsibility or outcomes.

While the formation of EI is important for EB to occur, EM is necessary to convert the intention into behaviour that exploits entrepreneurial opportunities. EI remains a mere behavioural dispositions until attempts are made to convert such EI into EB (Ajzen, 2005). Effort expended in starting a new entrepreneurial venture and the readiness to keep that venture going has a link with an entrepreneur's motivation (Gieure *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, Motivation can be aptly considered as the linking thread between EI and EB.

2.3 Theoretical Review

In order to provide a sound theoretical foundation for this research, the following theories were reviewed because of their relevance to the current study: TPB, Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Expectancy Theory.

2.3.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

One of the most widely researched intention models is the TPB. The theory originated by Ajzen (1991). The TPB was derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Ajzen's TPB consists of three factors, which include attitude toward proposed behaviour, SN and PBC or feasibility of the proposed behaviour. It equally states that behavioural intentions are formed by one's attitude toward that behaviour and one's SN (influence by parents, role models, peers and the likes). According to the theory, entrepreneurship, which is planned behaviour, can be predicted by the intention.

Given the widespread use of the TPB for studying intentions in general, and more specifically, its support in past research on students and EI, the researcher chose to use it as a major theoretical foundation for this study. The study briefly reviewed the theory and present hypotheses regarding the determinants that can influence graduates' intentions towards developing EB. Figure 1 summarizes the basic relationships in the TPB as they apply to EI towards an EB.

2.3.2 Human Capital Theory

The theoretical framework of this study is adapted, in part, from studies relating to HCT. The theory, as propounded by Becker (1964), is a term that describes hierarchy of skills and knowledge. Human capital can be described as an intellectual capital's central element which formed an organisation's individuals' competence that include capabilities, knowledge, expertise, skills and experience (Vidotto *et al.*, 2017). HCT, as used in the past, is one of the most used theories in relation to entrepreneurial readiness and ability. The theory postulated that entrepreneurs, with higher level of resources like EE, will produce superior output (EB). It assumes that education is a determinant of the marginal productivity of labour which

determines earnings. Therefore if prospective entrepreneurs can be trained with the necessary required skills, it is expected that they will engage in EB of a superior nature.

However, the HCT is considered appropriate for this research, to support the inclusion of EE as one of the determinants of EI that may translate to EB, since it builds the skills and competences required for EB.

2.3.3 Expectancy Theory

The expectancy theory of motivation was first developed by Victor Vroom (1964) of Yale School of Management. It attempts to explain what keeps employees working. Its underlying principle is that employees perform in work situations because they expect to receive a direct reward from such efforts (Vroom, 1964). According to the theory, performance is tied to reward expectation called expectancy, the degree of expected reward which is called instrumentality, and the degree to which the reward is desired which is called valence. Hence, the dimensions of expectancy theory include; expectancy, Instrumentality and Valence.

The model underlying the expectancy theory expresses that motivation is equal to the product of expectancy, instrumentality and valence. It was argued that, if any of these factors is zero, the employee will be unmotivated (Nizhebetskiy, 2019). However, the theory is suitable and strongly supports the current research in the area of the moderating effect of EM.

2.4 Empirical Review

The Studies of Lortie and Castogiovanni, (2015), and Usman and Yennita, (2019) have focused on the relationship between attitude and EB. They considered whether there is a direct influence of attitude on behaviour or if the relationship is mediated by EI. Equally in Fenech *et al.*, (2019) study, attitude was found to have a significant effect on intention and behaviour. On the contrary, the study of Ozaralli and Rivenburgh (2016) opposes the positive relationship between attitude, intention and behaviour. Hence, their findings are in contrast with the TPB by Ajzen (1991).

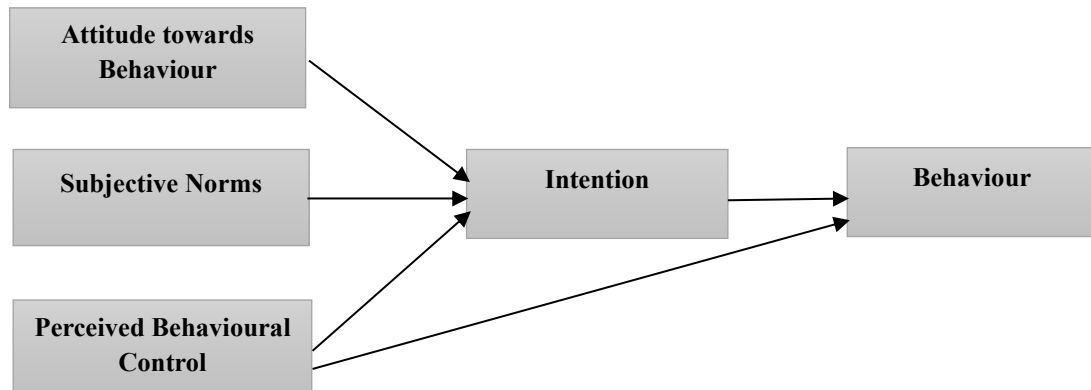
Similarly, Al-Swidi *et al.* (2014) carried out a study to investigate the applicability of TPB with special emphasis on measuring the direct and moderating effects of SN on attitude, PBC and buying intention in context of buying organic food. Results of the study showed that SN significantly influence the relationship between attitudes and buying intention, as well as between perceived behaviour control and buying intention, while SN significantly influence attitude toward buying intention.

Likewise, in the study of Manning (2011), the hierarchical linear modeling results indicated that, increase in social motivation is associated with a direct effect of descriptive norms and an inverse effect of injunctive norms (suppressor effect) on behaviour. The study equally found that SN only directly influenced behaviours where rejection was made salient. Altogether the results indicate that SN will have non deliberative effects on behaviours as social motivations increase. While the study of Kautonen *et al.* (2013), conducted to predict EB by extending the TPB, contributes to the occupational choice literature on entrepreneurship by applying the TPB to predict EB. The study found that attitude, PBC and SN were significant predictors of EI and PBC are significant predictors of subsequent behaviour.

However, studies on EI-behaviour gap have been in short supply. Though some researchers have pointed out the possibility of moderating effect of motivation in the transition from intention to action/behaviour (Alam *et al.*, 2019). This paper attempted to fill this identified gap.

2.5 Proposed Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is developed based on Ajzen's (1991) TPB model as contained in the works of Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) and Usman and Yennita (2019), Shown in Figure1.



Source: Ajzen (1991); Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015); Usman and Yennita (2019).

Figure 1: Theory of planned behaviour model

The researcher considers modification of the model necessary, as it was found to have some limitations which limit its application. The research of Van Gelderen *et al.* (2008), and that of Linan and Chen (2009) have shown that attitude, SN and PBC could only account for 30 to 45% of the changes in EI. This is a major weakness, hence the inclusion of more explanatory variables to boost the explanatory power of the model as suggested by Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) and supported by Roy *et al.*, (2017). The TPB has also been critiqued for assuming a linear relationship between intention and behaviour (Alam *et al.*, 2019) thus, overlooking the role of factors such as EM, that could moderate the relationship.

However, the role of EE in the formation of EI is considered to have been played down in the traditional TPB (Bako *et al.*, 2017). Hence, the inclusion of EE as one of the predictors, since it has been found to impact EIs positively in some studies (Adekiya & Ibrahim, 2016; Utami *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, to take care of these limitations and in keeping with the need of modern time, the study include the two variables (EE & EM) as a form of modification to the theory. This is to suit the context of this research.

Based on our knowledge, this modified framework is therefore unique to the research of EI and EB. Thus, the framework proposes that the determinants of EI (attitude, SN, PBC and EE) will influence EB among fresh graduates in Nigeria, directly as well as indirectly, through EI as a link. It is equally proposed that, the relationship between EI and EB will be better with the introduction of EM as a moderating variable.

This paper therefore proposes the following conceptual framework, a modification of Ajzen (1991) model through the introduction of EE as an added determinant and EM as a moderator between EI and behaviour.

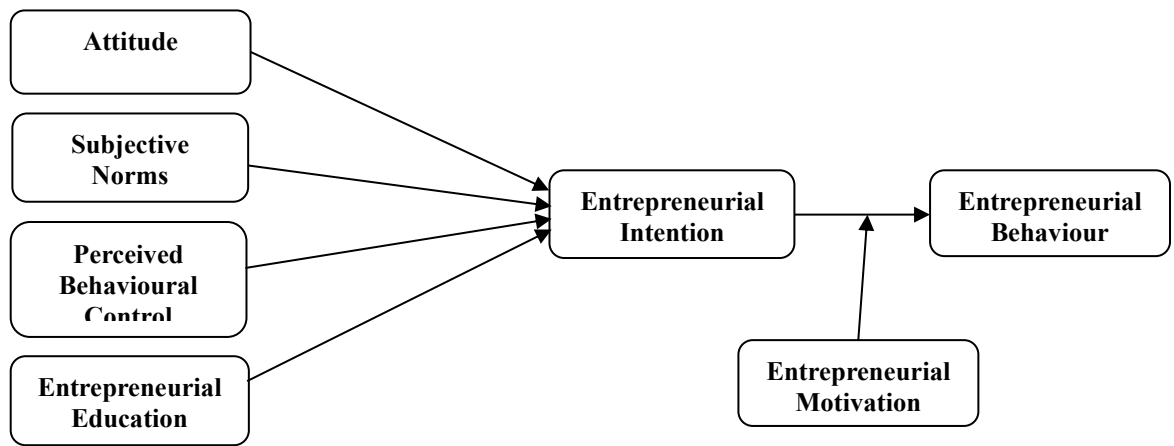


Figure 2: Proposed research framework of the study

Source: Adapted from Ajzen (1991); Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015); Usman and Yennita (2019).

3.0 Methodology

This paper adopts a critical review of relevant literature, carried out on the effect of EM on the EI-behaviour gap among fresh graduates in Nigeria. Literature were carefully selected and thoroughly studied on the basis of how relevant, current and the publishers' pedigree. Consequently, relevant works published by notable publishers like Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and Science Direct databases, were largely used. Variables included in this study were sourced from relevant theories and previous studies. Articles published between 2015 and 2025 were largely considered in the research. Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles written in English and focusing on entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial behaviour, and motivational factors. A total of 76 articles were initially identified, out of which 47 met the eligibility criteria after screening. The selected articles were critically analysed thematically to identify dominant theories, methodological trends, and gaps, which informed the development of the proposed conceptual model in this paper.

4.0 Result and Discussions

The critical review of extant literature reveals that very limited research have been conducted to explore the extension of Ajzen's TPB, particularly in the area of moderating the relationship between intention and behaviour, which posits to strengthen the EI outcomes in terms of EB (Venture Creation) with a focus on fresh graduates in Nigeria. More so, research shows that EE is a key determinant of EI, which have the potential to transform into EB, even most likely when EM influence the transformation process. Although the findings are conceptual based, a suitable model was developed for further empirical study in other to have empirical results that can give room for practical recommendations and generalisation.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Having carried out a critical review of relevant literature with a careful study of the previous related research findings, the researcher, in line with the objectives of the study, concludes that the determinants of EI (Attitude, SN, PBC and EE) have potential great influence on EB of fresh graduates in Nigeria and it is believed that this influence should be significantly moderated by EM. This projections will be clearly confirmed if an empirical study is conducted to test the model and further the research in the context of EI and EB gap. However, a workable model has been proposed for further research in order to ascertain its efficacy in assessing the

moderating effect of EM on the relationship between EI and EB, especially among young graduates in Nigeria.

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