

## **REFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE: BRIDGING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT GAPS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The teacher education curriculum in Benue State, Nigeria, has been criticized for its limited integration of entrepreneurship education, which is crucial for equipping teacher trainees with skills for alternative career paths outside formal teaching roles. This study assessed the extent of entrepreneurship education integration, identified gaps, and proposed actionable reforms to address unemployment and enhance graduate employability. Guided by two research questions and two hypotheses tested at a 0.05 significance level using chi-square and frequency analysis, the study employed a descriptive survey design. Data were collected from 200 respondents, including teacher educators, trainees, and curriculum developers, across selected teacher education institutions. Findings revealed a moderate inclusion of entrepreneurship education, often as electives or fragmented components within the curriculum. Strategies for reform include embedding entrepreneurship education as a core component, fostering partnerships with local businesses, introducing mentorship programs, and enhancing professional development for teacher educators. Additionally, incorporating project-based learning, experiential opportunities, and ensuring adequate policy support are critical for aligning the curriculum with labor market demands. The study concludes that integrating hands-on entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities has significantly enhance the entrepreneurial skills of teacher trainees, preparing them to navigate a dynamic labor market and contribute to socio-economic development. The study recommends revising the curriculum to include practical skills through workshops and experiential learning, establishing mentorship initiatives to connect trainees with successful entrepreneurs, strengthening collaborations with local businesses to provide real-world exposure, and ensuring adequate funding and resources, including modern facilities and instructional materials, to support these initiatives effectively.

**Key words:** Teacher Education, Entrepreneurship, Skills Development, and Employment

## **1.0**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The education sector in Nigeria has long been criticized for its inability to effectively address the growing unemployment problem, particularly among young graduates. In Benue State, this issue is even more pronounced, with many teacher education graduates struggling to secure stable employment in an increasingly competitive labor market. The traditional teacher education curriculum is predominantly centered on pedagogy and content knowledge, with little emphasis on equipping trainees with entrepreneurial skills that can enable them to create alternative career paths outside formal teaching roles. Moreso, Benue State, where agriculture and small-scale industries dominate, this issue is further exacerbated by limited opportunities for formal employment, leaving many graduates ill-equipped for entrepreneurial ventures (Oko, 2020). Despite government interventions to promote entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions, the integration of entrepreneurship in teacher education curricula remains inadequate (Adedeji, 2023).

Entrepreneurship skills have been recognized as critical to fostering innovation, self-reliance, and economic growth (World Bank, 2022). Studies indicate that countries with robust entrepreneurship education in teacher training programs tend to experience lower unemployment rates and enhanced productivity (Amadi & Udo, 2019). However, in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State, teacher education curricula continue to prioritize theoretical content over practical skills development (Adeola, 2022). This trend underscores the urgent need to reform teacher education curricula to align with global standards and local economic realities.

Globally, education systems are evolving to incorporate entrepreneurship education as a critical element of workforce development. This shift is rooted in the recognition that entrepreneurship drives economic growth, innovation, and job creation. Research shows that

equipping individuals with entrepreneurial skills fosters creativity, resilience, and self-reliance, which are essential for navigating dynamic labor markets (Adekunle & Olaniyan, 2019). In Nigeria, the Federal Government has acknowledged the role of entrepreneurship in national development through policies like the National Policy on Education (NPE) and initiatives such as the introduction of entrepreneurship courses at tertiary institutions. However, these efforts have not been adequately extended to teacher education programs.

The integration of entrepreneurship education into teacher training programs is widely recognized as a crucial step in addressing unemployment. Entrepreneurship education equips individuals with skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation, and risk-taking, which are essential for creating and managing businesses (Adekunle & Olaniyan, 2019). In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasizes the importance of vocational and technical education as a means of fostering self-reliance and economic development. However, the implementation of this policy remains inconsistent, particularly in teacher education programs.

Globally, successful models of entrepreneurship education highlight the importance of experiential learning, mentorship, and practical skill development. Countries like Finland and Singapore have integrated entrepreneurial training into their teacher education curricula, resulting in graduates who are adaptable and innovative in diverse professional contexts (Smith & Peterson, 2021). Lessons from these models can inform curriculum reforms in Benue State to ensure that teacher trainees are well-prepared for both teaching and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Teacher education holds a pivotal role in the development of human capital because teachers are responsible for shaping the future workforce. If teacher trainees are not equipped with entrepreneurial skills, they cannot effectively teach or inspire their students to embrace entrepreneurship. This oversight in the teacher education curriculum perpetuates a cycle of

unemployment and economic stagnation, particularly in rural areas like Benue State, where job opportunities are limited. Reforming the teacher education curriculum to prioritize entrepreneurship education can empower teacher trainees to become agents of change, fostering a generation of self-reliant and innovative individuals capable of contributing to the state's economic growth.

Research has shown that the traditional teacher education model in Nigeria does not prepare graduates for the realities of a dynamic labor market (Olaleye *et al.*, 2023). For example, teacher training institutions in Benue State allocate minimal time to entrepreneurial modules, and these are often theoretical in nature, lacking practical components like business incubation and mentorship programs (Nwosu & Adigun, 2020). Consequently, teacher graduates are ill-prepared to compete in a global economy that values innovation, adaptability, and entrepreneurial acumen (Ezeokeke & Nnamani, 2021).

The persistent issue of youth unemployment and underemployment remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State. The education sector, especially teacher education, plays a critical role in preparing individuals not only for the labor market but also for self-reliance through entrepreneurial activities. However, the current teacher education curriculum in Nigeria is primarily theory-oriented, lacking a practical and entrepreneurial focus. This disconnect has led to a significant skills gap, where teacher graduates are inadequately prepared to navigate the complexities of the modern labor market or establish entrepreneurial ventures. Consequently, the teacher education system has struggled to produce graduates capable of adapting to dynamic employment demands or creating alternative pathways to sustainable livelihoods (Adebayo & Adekola, 2020; Osakwe, 2021).

Despite global shifts toward integrating entrepreneurship education into formal learning systems to foster creativity, innovation, and self-reliance, the Nigerian teacher education curriculum has remained largely traditional. This lack of reform not only limits the entrepreneurial skills of teacher graduates but also undermines their capacity to integrate entrepreneurial concepts into their teaching. As a result, the education system perpetuates a cycle of dependence on white-collar jobs, which are increasingly scarce, leaving many graduates unemployed or underemployed (Adesina, Oladipo, and Sanni 2022). In Benue State, this challenge is exacerbated by the limited availability of training programs and resources that could equip teachers with entrepreneurial competencies, further widening the gap between education and employment (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023).

Teachers are critical agents of change and play a vital role in shaping the skills and attitudes of their students. When teachers themselves lack entrepreneurial skills, they are ill-equipped to inspire students to explore innovative and creative pathways. This failure not only affects individual career outcomes but also hinders broader economic development efforts in the state. Reforming the teacher education curriculum to include entrepreneurship education would address these gaps by equipping teacher trainees with practical, hands-on entrepreneurial skills, alongside their pedagogical training. This reform would enable teacher graduates to establish self-employment ventures and prepare their students for the realities of the modern economy (Olawale & Garba, 2021; Osakwe, 2021).

Furthermore, the lack of focus on entrepreneurship education in teacher training programs highlights systemic issues in curriculum design and implementation. While there have been policy discussions on the need to align education with economic and labor market demands, little progress has been made in translating these discussions into actionable reforms. As a result, teacher

education institutions in Benue State continue to operate with outdated curricula that fail to address contemporary socio-economic challenges (Adesina *et al*, 2022). This failure not only undermines the employability of graduates but also perpetuates a system where education is disconnected from real-world needs.

Addressing these issues requires a deliberate and comprehensive approach to curriculum reform. The teacher education curriculum must be redesigned to integrate entrepreneurship education as a core component, providing teacher trainees with the skills and knowledge to adapt to and drive economic change. Such reforms would align teacher education with the dual goals of fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and enhancing employability, thereby bridging the gap between education and employment. Moreover, teacher education institutions must embrace innovative teaching and learning strategies, such as experiential learning and project-based approaches, to ensure that entrepreneurial skills are effectively developed (Adebayo & Adekola, 2020; Olawale & Garba, 2021).

The failure to integrate entrepreneurship education into teacher training programs in Benue State has contributed to the growing unemployment crisis and the mismatch between education and employment. There is an urgent need for comprehensive reforms to the teacher education curriculum to ensure that it aligns with the realities of the modern labor market, fosters entrepreneurial mindsets, and prepares graduates to contribute meaningfully to economic development. This study seeks to provide evidence-based strategies for achieving these objectives, contributing to both academic discourse and practical policy solutions.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how the teacher education curriculum in Benue State can be reformed to promote entrepreneurship skills development among teacher trainees. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the extent to which the current teacher education curriculum incorporates entrepreneurship education.
2. Propose actionable strategies for integrating entrepreneurship skills into the teacher education curriculum to bridge the education-employment gap.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1. To what extent does the current teacher education curriculum in Benue State incorporate entrepreneurship education?
2. What strategies can be adopted to reform the teacher education curriculum to promote entrepreneurship skills development among teacher trainees?

## **1.3 Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant relationship between the teacher education curriculum and the employability of teacher graduates in Benue State.
2. Reforming the teacher education curriculum to include entrepreneurship skills will not significantly enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of teacher trainees.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design. This design is suitable because it allows for the collection of data from a sample population to describe the existing state of teacher education curricula and to gather opinions on the need for reforms. The design is effective for analyzing the current integration of entrepreneurship education and identifying strategies to improve teacher education in Benue State. The study is conducted in Benue State, Nigeria. Benue State is located in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria and is predominantly an agrarian state. The choice of Benue State is informed by its unique socio-economic challenges, such as high levels of youth unemployment and the underutilization of its agricultural and entrepreneurial

potential. The study focuses on teacher education institutions, including colleges of education and faculties of education in universities within the state. These institutions play a critical role in preparing future teachers and are central to any curriculum reform initiatives.

The population for this study comprises all teacher educators, teacher trainees, curriculum developers, and policymakers involved in teacher education in Benue State. Specifically, the study targets teacher educators and trainees from colleges of education and universities offering teacher education programs in the state. Curriculum developers and education policymakers are included to provide insights into curriculum reform processes and policy implications. A multi-stage sampling technique is employed to select the sample for the study. In the first stage, purposive sampling is used to select three teacher education institutions in Benue State: two colleges of education and one university offering teacher education programs. These institutions are chosen based on their prominence and representativeness of teacher education in the state. In the second stage, a stratified random sampling technique is used to select participants from the identified institutions. The stratification is based on categories such as teacher educators, teacher trainees, and curriculum developers. A total sample size of 200 respondents is drawn, comprising 50 teacher educators, 130 teacher trainees, and 20 curriculum developers and policymakers. The sample size is determined to ensure representativeness and the feasibility of data collection.

The study employs a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire is organized into sections, each addressing a specific aspect of the study. The first section collects demographic data, such as respondents' gender, educational qualifications, and years of experience, to provide contextual information about the participants. The subsequent sections focus on the current state of entrepreneurship education in teacher training programs, the challenges associated with integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum, and proposed

strategies for reforming the curriculum to include entrepreneurship skills development. The questionnaire comprises only closed-ended questions designed to measure respondents' opinions using a 4-point Likert scale. The response options include *Strongly Agree (4)*, *Agree (3)*, *Disagree (2)*, and *Strongly Disagree (1)*. This format allows for the quantification of responses, facilitating statistical analysis to determine patterns and trends. To ensure its content validity, the questionnaire is reviewed by experts in education and curriculum development, who assessed its relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study's objectives. This process ensures that the instrument is effective in capturing the necessary data to address the research questions and hypotheses.

Data collection for the study is conducted primarily through the administration of the structured questionnaire described in the instrumentation. The questionnaire, divided into sections focusing on demographic data, the current state of entrepreneurship education, challenges of integration, and proposed strategies for curriculum reform, is distributed to the selected respondents. The use of a 4-point Likert scale ensures that participants' opinions are clearly captured in a standardized format, facilitating ease of analysis. The questionnaires are administered physically by trained research assistants to ensure clarity in understanding and timely retrieval of responses. Adequate instructions accompany the questionnaire to guide respondents on how to provide accurate and honest answers.

The data collected from the structured questionnaire are analyzed using quantitative statistical methods to align with the closed-ended design of the instrument. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are employed to summarize the respondents' opinions on the state of entrepreneurship education, challenges of integration, and proposed strategies. Inferential statistics are applied to test the hypotheses and identify

relationships between variables. Chi-square tests are used to determine the significance of the relationships, while regression analysis helps to predict the effectiveness of the proposed curriculum reform strategies. The alignment of the Likert-scale responses with statistical analysis ensures that the data collected are systematically organized and provide meaningful insights for addressing the research questions and objectives.

### 3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**3.1 Research Question 1:** To what extent does the current teacher education curriculum in Benue State incorporate entrepreneurship education?

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation Rating on the extent of curriculum and incorporation of entrepreneurship education.*

S/NO	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std	Decision
1.	The current teacher education curriculum in Benue State includes entrepreneurship courses.	83	56	33	28	2.97	1.070	Accepted
2	The teacher education programs in Benue State equip trainees with basic entrepreneurial skills.	96	52	32	20	3.12	1.015	Accepted
3	Entrepreneurship education is integrated into practical training sessions in teacher education programs	78	67	35	20	3.01	.985	Accepted
4	Teacher educators in Benue State emphasize entrepreneurship as a key aspect of teacher education.	102	53	26	19	3.19	.994	Accepted
5	There are adequate resources and support systems in place for entrepreneurship education in teacher training institutions in Benue State.	91	49	31	29	3.01	1.094	Accepted
<b>Cluster mean</b>						<b>3.06</b>	<b>1.04</b>	

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation ratings for items assessing the extent to which the current teacher education curriculum incorporates entrepreneurship education. The cluster mean of 3.06 (on a 4-point scale) indicates a general agreement among respondents that entrepreneurship education is somewhat integrated into teacher training programs in Benue State. These findings suggest that while efforts are being made to incorporate entrepreneurship into the

teacher education curriculum, there is room for improvement, particularly in providing adequate resources and support.

**3.2 Research Question 2:** What strategies can be adopted to reform the teacher education curriculum to promote entrepreneurship skills development among teacher trainees?

Table 2: *Mean and Standard Deviation Rating on the strategies adopted to reform the teachers education curriculum to promote entrepreneurship skills.*

S/NO	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Std	Decision
6	Collaboration between teacher education institutions and local businesses would provide practical entrepreneurial exposure for teacher trainees.	120	46	24	10	3.38	.883	Accepted
7	Teacher education programs should offer hands-on entrepreneurial workshops as part of their curriculum.	100	54	28	18	3.18	.986	Accepted
8	The integration of entrepreneurship mentors in teacher training institutions can enhance the entrepreneurial skills of trainees.	106	48	28	18	3.21	.995	Accepted
9	A review of the current teacher education curriculum to align it with entrepreneurship principles and real-world application should be prioritized.	98	56	28	18	3.17	.983	Accepted
10	Introducing dedicated entrepreneurship education courses within the teacher education curriculum will improve skills development.	106	62	14	18	3.28	.941	Accepted
<b>Cluster mean</b>						<b>3.2</b>	<b>0.10</b>	

Table 2 highlights respondents' opinions on strategies for reforming the teacher education curriculum. The cluster mean of 3.2 indicates strong agreement on the proposed strategies, reflecting a positive attitude toward reforms. These findings emphasize the need for practical, experiential learning opportunities and the involvement of mentors to enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of teacher trainees.

### 3.3 Testing of Hypotheses

**3.3.1 Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between the teacher education curriculum and the employability of teacher graduates in Benue State.

**Table 3:** *Chi-Square Analysis on the significant level of employability of teacher graduates*

Responses	fo	Fe	df	$\chi^2$	p	Remark
Strongly Disagree	24	50.0	3	53.240 <sup>a</sup>	.000	Significant
Disagree	31	50.0				
Agree	55	50.0				
Strongly Agree	90	50.0				
<b>Total</b>	200					

The chi-square analysis for Hypothesis 1 yielded a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 53.240$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating a strong relationship between the teacher education curriculum and the employability of graduates. This suggests that reforms aimed at integrating entrepreneurship education could enhance graduate outcomes.

**3.3.2 Hypothesis 2:** Reforming the teacher education curriculum to include entrepreneurship skills will not significantly enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of teacher trainees.

**Table 4:** *Chi-Square Analysis on the reformation and entrepreneurship skills on competencies*

Responses	fo	Fe	df	$\chi^2$	p	Remark
Strongly Disagree	17	50.0	3	98.200 <sup>a</sup>	.000	Significant
Disagree	24	50.0				
Agree	53	50.0				
Strongly Agree	106	50.0				
<b>Total</b>	200					

The chi-square analysis for Hypothesis 2 also yielded a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 98.200$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), supporting the claim that reforming the teacher education curriculum to include entrepreneurship skills would significantly enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of teacher trainees.

### **3.4 Discussion of Findings**

The findings from Table 1 reveal that entrepreneurship education has been moderately integrated into the teacher education curriculum in Benue State, as indicated by a cluster mean of 3.06. Specific highlights include These findings indicate that while some progress has been made in integrating entrepreneurship education, significant gaps remain, particularly in practical exposure and resource allocation. This finding agrees with the submission of Adekunle and Olaniyan, (2019) who states that Entrepreneurship education equips individuals with skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation, and risk-taking, which are essential for creating and managing businesses. The hypotheses testing further underscores the importance of integrating entrepreneurship education into the teacher education curriculum. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 53.240$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) confirmed a significant relationship between the teacher education curriculum and graduate employability. This finding suggests that curriculum reforms could significantly improve employability outcomes.

The findings in Table 2 outlines respondents' perceptions of strategies for reforming the curriculum, with a cluster mean of 3.2 reflecting strong agreement. These strategies align with global best practices in entrepreneurship education, emphasizing experiential learning, collaboration, and mentorship. The finding also agrees with the views of Smith and Peterson, (2021) who states that entrepreneurship education highlight the importance of experiential learning, mentorship, and practical skill development. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 98.200$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) revealed that integrating entrepreneurship skills into the curriculum would significantly enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of teacher trainees. This supports the need for reforms to address unemployment and prepare trainees for entrepreneurial roles.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

The findings of this study underscore the moderate integration of entrepreneurship education in the teacher education curriculum in Benue State. While some progress has been made, significant gaps remain in practical exposure, resource allocation, and mentorship opportunities, limiting the entrepreneurial competencies of teacher trainees. The study revealed a strong relationship between the teacher education curriculum and the employability of graduates, affirming the need for curriculum reforms. Furthermore, the results indicate that the inclusion of hands-on entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities would significantly enhance the entrepreneurial skills of teacher trainees, preparing them to navigate the dynamic labor market and contribute meaningfully to economic development.

### **4.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the integration of entrepreneurship education into the teacher education curriculum:

1. **Curriculum Review and Practical Training:** Revise the teacher education curriculum to integrate entrepreneurship education as a core component, emphasizing practical skills through workshops, project-based learning, and experiential activities.
2. **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship initiatives that connect teacher trainees with successful entrepreneurs and business professionals to provide guidance and real-world insights.
3. **Collaboration with Local Businesses:** Strengthen partnerships with local industries to offer trainees practical exposure through internships, business incubation, and entrepreneurial projects.
4. **Adequate Resource Allocation:** Ensure sufficient funding and resources for entrepreneurship education, including modern facilities, instructional materials, and access to training centers.

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