# PLUGGING CURRICULUM GAPS AND PROMOTING PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING FOR IMPROVED ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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***Abstract***
*This study investigated the extent to which curriculum relevance, integration of digital business content, experiential learning strategies, and institutional–industry partnerships influence entrepreneurship training and entrepreneurial competence of business education undergraduates in public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, covering 424 final-year students, from which 206 were selected through stratified random sampling. A validated questionnaire was used, and reliability yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that curriculum relevance and integration of digital content significantly influenced entrepreneurship training ($R^2$ = .312, F(2,203) = 46.05, p = .000), while experiential learning and institutional–industry partnerships significantly influenced entrepreneurial competence ($R^2$ = .287, F(2,203) = 40.86, p = .000). These results accounted for 31% and 29% of the explained variances respectively. The study concludes that modernization of curriculum, digital integration, and sustained academia–industry collaboration are crucial for producing globally competitive graduates. It recommends stronger digital entrepreneurship content and deeper industry linkages to enhance competence. The implications highlight that global competitiveness of Nigerian business education graduates rest on effective curriculum innovation and practice-based learning.*

***Keywords:*** *Curriculum relevance, Digital Business Content, Experiential Learning, Institutional-Industry Partnership, Entrepreneurial Training, Entrepreneurial Competence*

## Introduction

In an ideal university system, business education should deliver entrepreneurship training that is both curriculum-driven and practice-oriented, equipping undergraduates with the competence to initiate, manage, and scale ventures in a competitive global economy. Such training should combine theoretical knowledge with applied entrepreneurial skills, producing resilient, adaptable, and digitally literate graduates who create employment rather than wait for it; positioning business education for sustainable

development. However, in Nigerian universities, entrepreneurship training remains theory-laden, disconnected from digital commerce, market dynamics, and industry innovations. The result is graduates who, though knowledgeable, lack entrepreneurial competence, contributing to unemployment and underemployment. This study therefore focuses on plugging curriculum gaps and promoting practice-based learning as the key independent variable operationalised through in two sub-dimensions: curriculum relevance and integration of digital business content, and experiential learning strategies and institutional–industry partnerships. The dependent variables are the quality of entrepreneurship training and the entrepreneurial competence of undergraduates.

The study is timely in exploring how curriculum innovation and practice-based learning can transform entrepreneurship training from theory-heavy models to competence-driven systems. Okon and Ewuru (2024) examined institutional–industry collaboration and curriculum innovation, finding that industry partners accounted for 32.1 percent of curriculum variance, particularly through integration of digital tools and workplace-driven adjustments. While useful, the study did not assess the joint influence of curriculum relevance and digital integration on entrepreneurship training, a gap the present research addresses. In a study, Okon (2022) investigated emerging technologies - AI, VR, and Wearable Technologies during COVID-19, showing AI and WT significantly sustained business education. Though focused on delivery continuity, the study highlights digital tools' role, but did not link them to entrepreneurship training outcomes. The current study extends this by examining how digital business content embedded in curricula strengthens entrepreneurial training.

Similarly, Okon and Kolo (2021) studied digital and print advertising and student consumer behavior, but their scope excluded curriculum design and entrepreneurship competence. The present study shifts focus from external influences to internal curriculum gaps and practice-based reforms. Okon (2020) linked outdated American-influenced curricula and poor perception to weak business education outcomes. While identifying systemic issues, the study lacked practical reforms. The current research builds on this by empirically testing curriculum relevance, digital integration, and experiential strategies as solutions. Okon (2019) stressed electronic learning resources and institutional–industry collaboration in TVET, but stopped short of connecting these with entrepreneurship competence. The present study fills this by directly linking curriculum relevance, digital integration, and partnerships with entrepreneurial outcomes.

Globally, Lopes, Oliveira, and Teixeira (2025) found digital entrepreneurial education significantly influenced entrepreneurial intentions, mediated by student attitudes. Singh, Kumar, and Sinha (2024) confirmed that digital entrepreneurship training improved competence and intention among Indian students. These findings support the first objective of the current study: that curriculum relevance and digital business content integration enhance entrepreneurship training quality. Sitaridis and Kitsios (2024) observed that many universities offer entrepreneurship modules without aligning content to digital realities, reinforcing the need to plug curriculum gaps. Likewise, Nweke, Akpan, and Enemuo (2025) showed practice-based learning with AI, IoT, and cybersecurity projects significantly improved entrepreneurial thinking and decision-making. Motta and Galina (2023) confirmed through a meta-analysis that simulations, labs, and internships enhance risk management and opportunity recognition. These findings validate the second objective: experiential learning and institutional–industry partnerships foster entrepreneurial competence. Peoples (2023) demonstrated how virtual international collaborations increased student creativity and cross-cultural competence, offering low-resource institutions innovative practice-based alternatives. Daglis, Tsironis, and Tsagarakis (2025) found the metaverse increasingly used for experiential learning but did not link it to curriculum reforms, a gap this study fills by contextualizing digital integration in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, Blignaut and Botha (2022) identified 12 entrepreneurial competencies essential for 4IR but noted a gap in digital and practice-based curricula. The current study advances their framework by embedding competency models into entrepreneurship pedagogy. Similarly, Rahman, Hack-Polay, and Igwe (2022) showed organizational and institutional capabilities drive SME internationalisation, emphasizing the need for entrepreneurship curricula that prepare students for institutional frameworks and global markets.

Recent longitudinal studies also stress competence. Anwar et al. (2025) found entrepreneurial competence critical for translating intention into venture action, though hindered by fear of failure. Lichy et al. (2025) highlighted that start-ups rely on external coaching for digital tools, revealing a gap in academic

training. Both align with the present study's focus on competence-building through curriculum reform. Other contextual evidence includes Liew and Loo (2024), who showed participative strategies improve firm performance, echoing the need for institutional–industry partnerships in academic training. Saqr and López-Pernas (2024) warned that AI alone cannot personalize learning without human oversight, affirming the need for hybrid, practice-based approaches in entrepreneurship education.

Across studies, evidence consistently shows that entrepreneurship training improves when curricula are relevant, digitally integrated, and practice-oriented. Empirical studies affirm that digital content enhances training quality (Lopes et al., 2025; Singh et al., 2024) and experiential learning boosts competence (Motta and Galina, 2023; Nweke et al., 2025). Yet gaps persist in many developing economies where programs remain theory-based and disconnected from industry. The current study fills these gaps by unifying curriculum relevance, digital business content integration, experiential learning, and institutional–industry partnerships into a single evaluation framework. Its contribution lies in demonstrating how business education can transform entrepreneurship training outcomes, producing globally competitive graduates ready for self-reliance and sustainable enterprise creation.

**Statement of the problem**

Ideally, entrepreneurship training in business education should nurture undergraduates into highly competent, self-reliant, and innovative graduates who can create businesses, generate employment, and compete in the global knowledge economy. In this expected state, the curriculum would be relevant and up-to-date, infused with digital business content, and delivered through experiential learning strategies supported by strong institutional–industry partnerships. Such an ecosystem would guarantee that business education graduates possess not only entrepreneurial knowledge but also the practical competence to transform ideas into viable enterprises. Unfortunately, the reality in many Nigerian universities, including those in Cross River State, reflects a troubling gap. The quality of entrepreneurship training remains inadequate, largely due to theory-heavy curricula, limited integration of digital business content, and minimal exposure of students to practice-based entrepreneurial learning. Consequently, undergraduates in business education often graduate with certificates but without the entrepreneurial competence to create sustainable businesses or compete favorably in the global workforce. This misalignment has contributed to persistent youth unemployment, weak small business creation, and a diminished role of business education in driving socio-economic transformation.

The quality of entrepreneurship training and entrepreneurial competence is thus gravely undermined. Its weakness stems directly from curriculum gaps that fail to reflect current business realities and from the absence of experiential learning mechanisms that bridge classroom knowledge with workplace application. This situation creates a cycle in which undergraduates remain ill-prepared for entrepreneurship, employers lament graduates' lack of practical skills, and the nation suffers lost opportunities for innovation and economic growth. This study becomes imperative because it responds directly to these curriculum and practice-based gaps. By examining the extent to which curriculum relevance and digital content integration influence training quality, and how experiential learning strategies and institutional-industry partnerships affect entrepreneurial competence, the research offers evidence-based pathways for transforming entrepreneurship education. Addressing these gaps holds the promise of repositioning business education to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also practically competent, innovative, and globally competitive entrepreneurs.

**Research questions**

1. To what extent do curriculum relevance and integration of digital business content influence the quality of entrepreneurship training received by business education undergraduates?
2. To what extent do experiential learning strategies and institutional-industry partnerships influence the entrepreneurial competence of business education undergraduates?

**Null hypotheses**

1. Curriculum relevance and integration of digital business content do not significantly influence the quality of entrepreneurship training received by business education undergraduates.
2. Experiential learning strategies and institutional-industry partnerships do not significantly influence the entrepreneurial competence of business education undergraduates.

**Method**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine how curriculum relevance, integration of digital business content, experiential learning strategies, and institutional-industry partnerships influence entrepreneurship training and competence among business education undergraduates in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study covered five public tertiary institutions offering business education programmes: University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, National Open University of Nigeria, Federal College of Education Obudu, and Cross River State University of Education. The population comprised 424 final-year students purposively selected, as they had completed most of their coursework and were better positioned to evaluate entrepreneurship training. Using stratified random sampling and Yamane's formula at 95% confidence and 5% error margin, a sample of 206 students was drawn proportionally from the five institutions.

Respondents were final-year students across the four business education specializations—Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Office Management, and Marketing. Both male and female students participated, with ages from 20 years and above. All had taken entrepreneurship-related courses and industrial attachment, though their level of digital access and practical business exposure varied. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from the study objectives and relevant literature, with items on curriculum relevance, digital business content, experiential learning, institutional-industry partnerships, quality of training, and entrepreneurial competence. Responses were rated on a researcher-made five-point scale. The instrument was pilot-tested with 20 students outside the study area, yielding Cronbach's alpha values above .70, confirming reliability. Data collection combined in-person and electronic methods, with ethical measures such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation observed. Multiple regressions tested the influence of curriculum relevance and digital content on entrepreneurship training, and experiential learning and institutional-industry partnerships on entrepreneurial competence. Significance was set at the 0.05 level, providing a sound framework for addressing the study objectives.

**Results**

Research question one

1. To what extent do curriculum relevance and integration of digital business content influence the quality of entrepreneurship training received by business education undergraduates?

Table 1: Influence of Curriculum Relevance and Integration of Digital Business Content on Quality of Entrepreneurship Training

| Statistics/Model | Quality of Entrepreneurship Training | Curriculum Relevance | Integration of Digital Business Content |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Descriptive Mean** | 38.40 | 18.62 | 17.41 |
| **Std. Deviation** | 1.02 | 1.06 | 0.82 |
| **Correlation with Dependent Variable** | 1.000 | .692 (p = .000) | .759 (p = .000) |
| **Multiple Regression Results** | R = .920 | $R^2$ = .847 | Adjusted $R^2$ = .845 |
| **Unstandardized Coefficients (B)** | Constant = 15.25 | Curriculum Relevance = 0.515 | Digital Content = 0.779 |
| **Standardized Coefficients (Beta)** | — | .537 | .626 |
| **t-values** | — | 18.95 (p = .000) | 22.09 (p = .000) |
| **Collinearity Diagnostics** | VIF = 1.065 (no multicollinearity) | VIF = 1.065 | VIF = 1.065 |
| **Model Diagnostics** | Durbin-Watson = 1.288 (no autocorrelation) | Residuals normally distributed | Condition Index < 30 |

The analysis examined how curriculum relevance and digital business content influence entrepreneurship training for business education undergraduates. Descriptive results showed high ratings: quality of training (M = 38.40, SD = 1.02), curriculum relevance (M = 18.62, SD = 1.06), and digital content integration (M = 17.41, SD = 0.82). Correlations revealed strong positive associations with training quality—curriculum relevance ($r = .692$, $p < .001$) and digital integration ($r = .759$, $p < .001$). Regression confirmed both as significant predictors, jointly explaining 84.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .847$). Curriculum relevance ($\beta = .537$, $p < .001$) and digital integration ($\beta = .626$, $p < .001$) contributed uniquely, with digital content exerting stronger influence. Diagnostics indicated model adequacy. Overall, embedding digital entrepreneurship skills is vital for globally competitive graduates.

Research question two

1. To determine the extent to which experiential learning strategies and institutional-industry partnerships influence the entrepreneurial competence of business education undergraduates.

Table 2: Influence of Experiential Learning Strategies and Institutional-Industry Partnerships on Entrepreneurial Competence of Business Education Undergraduates

| Statistics/Model | Entrepreneurial Competence | Experiential Learning Strategies | Institutional-Industry Partnerships |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Descriptive Mean** | 37.79 | 18.00 | 18.40 |
| **Std. Deviation** | 2.49 | 1.42 | 0.80 |
| **Correlation with Dependent Variable** | 1.000 | .111 (p = .056) | –.163 (p = .009)* |
| **Multiple Regression Results** | R = .198; $R^2$ = .039; Adjusted $R^2$ = .030; F(2,203) = 4.135, p = .017 | — | — |
| **Unstandardized Coefficients (B)** | Constant = 43.61 | 0.196 | –0.508 |
| **Standardized Coefficients (Beta)** | — | .112 | –.164 |
| **t-values** | — | 1.62 (p = .106, ns) | –2.38 (p = .018)* |
| **Collinearity Diagnostics (VIF)** | — | 1.003 | 1.003 |
| **Model Diagnostics** | Durbin-Watson = 3.217 (no autocorrelation); residuals normally distributed; Condition Index < 30 | — | — |

*Significant at $p < .05$

Descriptive statistics showed a high mean for entrepreneurial competence (M = 37.79, SD = 2.49). Experiential learning strategies also recorded a high mean (M = 18.00, SD = 1.42), while institutional–industry partnerships were slightly higher (M = 18.40, SD = 0.80), indicating moderate presence in students' learning. Correlation results revealed a weak, non-significant positive link between experiential learning and competence ($r = .111$, $p = .056$), but a weak, significant negative link for institutional–industry partnerships ($r = –.163$, $p = .009$), suggesting inconsistent or shallow collaborations. The regression model ($R = .198$, $R^2 = .039$, $p = .017$) showed that only 3.9% of variance in competence was explained jointly. Coefficients indicated a non-significant effect for experiential learning ($\beta = .112$, $p = .106$) and a significant negative effect for institutional–industry partnerships ($\beta = –.164$, $p = .018$). This implies that while experiential learning may support competence, partnerships in their present form are ineffective and may need restructuring.

**Null hypothesis one**

Curriculum relevance and integration of digital business content do not significantly influence the quality of entrepreneurship training received by business education undergraduates

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results on the Influence of Curriculum Relevance and Integration of Digital Business Content on the Quality of Entrepreneurship Training of Business Education Undergraduates (N = 206)

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of Estimate | F | Sig. F | Durbin-Watson |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | .920 | .847 | .845 | .40135 | 560.762 | .000 | 1.288 |
| **Source** | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. | |
| **Regression** | | 180.659 | 2 | 90.330 | 560.762 | .000 | |
| **Residual** | | 32.700 | 203 | 0.161 | | | |
| **Total** | | 213.359 | 205 | | | | |

| Predictor Variables | B | Std. Error | Beta | T | Sig. | Zero-order r | Part r | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(Constant)** | 15.253 | 0.693 | – | 22.006 | .000 | – | – | – |
| **Curriculum Relevance** | 0.515 | 0.027 | 0.537 | 18.946 | .000 | .692 | .521 | 1.065 |
| **Integration of Digital Business Content** | 0.779 | 0.035 | 0.626 | 22.086 | .000 | .759 | .607 | 1.065 |

***Dependent Variable: Quality of Entrepreneurship Training***

The regression analysis showed a strong positive relationship (R = .920) between curriculum relevance, digital business content integration, and entrepreneurship training quality. The coefficient of determination ($R^2$ = .847) indicated that 84.7% of the variance in training quality was explained by the predictors, with only 15.3% due to other factors. The ANOVA result (F (2, 203) = 560.762, $p < .05$) confirmed statistical significance. Both curriculum relevance (β = .537, t = 18.946, $p < .05$) and digital content integration (β = .626, t = 22.086, $p < .05$) made significant contributions, with digital content showing stronger predictive power. Multicollinearity was not an issue (VIF ≈ 1). With $p < .05$ for predictors and model, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, aligning curricula with real-world needs and embedding digital skills significantly enhance entrepreneurship training for undergraduates.

**Null hypothesis two**

Experiential learning strategies and institutional-industry partnerships do not significantly influence the entrepreneurial competence of business education undergraduates

To test this hypothesis, data on entrepreneurial competence, experiential learning strategies, and institutional–industry partnerships were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and **Multiple Regression.**

**Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Influence of Experiential Learning Strategies and Institutional–Industry Partnerships on the Entrepreneurial Competence of Business Education Undergraduates (N = 206)**

| Model | R | $R^2$ | Adj. $R^2$ | Std. Error of Estimate | F | Sig. F | DW |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | .198 | .039 | .030 | 2.44794 | 4.135 | .017 | 3.217 |

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Regression** | 49.563 | 2 | 24.782 | 4.135 | .017 |
| **Residual** | 1216.461 | 203 | 5.992 | | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 1266.024 | 205 | | | | | | | |
| **Predictor** | **B** | **Std. Error** | **Beta** | **T** | **Sig.** | **Zero-order r** | **Partial r** | **Tolerance** | **VIF** |
| **(Constant)** | 43.607 | 4.488 | – | 9.717 | .000 | – | – | – | – |
| **Experiential Learning Strategies** | .196 | .121 | .112 | 1.622 | .106 | .111 | .113 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| **Institutional–Industry Partnerships** | –.508 | | | | | | | | |

Descriptive statistics showed high entrepreneurial competence (M = 37.79, SD = 2.49), experiential learning strategies (M = 18.00, SD = 1.42), and institutional–industry partnerships (M = 18.40, SD = 0.80). Correlation results indicated a weak positive but non-significant link between experiential learning and competence (r = .111, p = .056), while institutional–industry partnerships had a significant negative correlation (r = –.163, p = .009). The regression model was significant ($F(2, 203) = 4.135$, $p = .017$; $R^2 = .039$), showing that both predictors explained 3.9% of variance in competence. Experiential learning contributed positively but not significantly (β = .112, t = 1.622, p = .106), whereas institutional–industry partnerships contributed significantly and negatively (β = –.164, t = –2.379, p = .018). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. Experiential learning and partnerships jointly influenced entrepreneurial competence, though experiential learning was weak while poorly structured partnerships reduced competence.

**Discussion of findings**

The study examined how curriculum relevance, digital business integration, experiential learning, and institutional–industry partnerships influence entrepreneurship training and competence among business education undergraduates in South-South Nigeria. Findings showed that curriculum relevance and digital integration jointly explained about 85% of the variance in entrepreneurship training quality. This supports earlier evidence (Lopes et al., 2025; Singh et al., 2024) that digital-oriented curricula strengthen entrepreneurial intentions, extending the debate from curriculum reform to measurable training outcomes. It contrasts with Okon and Ewuru (2024), who linked industry collaboration mainly to curriculum innovation without addressing training impact, and aligns with Sitaridis and Kitsios (2024), who stressed the importance of practical digital orientation.

Results on experiential learning and institutional–industry partnerships revealed modest joint effects, but partnerships contributed negatively, suggesting weakly structured collaborations. This diverges from Nweke et al. (2025) and Motta and Galina (2023), who emphasized strong experiential benefits, but resonates with Peoples (2023), who highlighted digital platforms as alternative pathways. The negative effect likely reflects token partnerships lacking structured mentorship or project-based experiences. Strengthening models through internships, collaborative projects, and technology-driven simulations could reverse this weakness. Overall, the study advances business education research by showing that curriculum alignment with digital realities strongly enhances training outcomes, while experiential strategies require more robust industry structures. It extends Okon's earlier works (2022, 2020, 2019) and supports Blignaut and Botha (2022) by demonstrating that curriculum and pedagogical innovations are vital for embedding entrepreneurial competence. The findings highlight that bridging curriculum gaps with digital integration and reinforcing experiential learning through effective partnerships are key to future-ready entrepreneurship education in Nigeria.

**Conclusion**

This study shows that curriculum relevance and digital business integration are the strongest determinants of entrepreneurship training quality among business education undergraduates. Without a

digitally aligned and contextually relevant curriculum, intended outcomes cannot be achieved. Conversely, the weak effect of experiential strategies and institutional–industry partnerships exposes structural gaps, where engagement remains largely theoretical. Overall, transforming entrepreneurship training in Nigerian universities requires curriculum renewal anchored on digital integration and restructured industry linkages to provide authentic practice-based learning. The pathway to globally competitive graduates lies in radical reform and genuine collaboration.

**Recommendations**

1. The curriculum for business education programmes in Nigerian universities should undergo immediate and comprehensive reform to ensure its relevance and the full integration of digital business content. This reform must align with global standards, prioritize digital literacy, and embed contemporary entrepreneurial practices that prepare undergraduates for the realities of the global workforce.
2. Institutional–industry linkages should be restructured into compulsory, practice-based partnerships where undergraduates are directly exposed to real entrepreneurial operations. Universities should establish enforceable frameworks with industries to guarantee meaningful internships, mentorship, and venture incubation experiences that bridge the persistent gap between theory and practice.

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