OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION AND ICT SKILLS AS PREDICTORS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS AMONG BUSINESS EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATES IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

Blessing Nzubechukwu Achugamonye
nzubeachu@gmail.com
Department of Business Education
Faculty of Technology and Vocational Education
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State
&
Chika Madu Ile
cm.ile@unizik.edu.ng
Department of Business Education
Faculty of Technology and Vocational Education
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State

Abstract
This study examined the predictive role of opportunity recognition skills and information and communication technology (ICT) skills on entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates in public universities in South-East Nigeria. Three hypotheses tested at the 0.05 level of significance guided the study. A predictive correlational research design was adopted for the study, and the population comprised 326 final-year business education undergraduates in public universities in the zone. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire validated by experts in Business Education and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.90 for opportunity recognition skills, 0.86 for ICT skills, and 0.92 for entrepreneurial intentions. Data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression and multiple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that opportunity recognition skills significantly predicted entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = .547$, $p < .05$), while ICT skills also significantly predicted entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = .486$, $p < .05$). Jointly, the predictors significantly explained variations in entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. The study concluded that opportunity recognition and ICT competencies were important determinants of entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. The study recommended that business education programmes should emphasize opportunity-based learning and ICT-driven entrepreneurial training in order to strengthen students' entrepreneurial intentions and promote graduate self-reliance.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Intentions, Opportunity recognition skills, ICT skills, Business Education Undergraduates.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been widely acknowledged as a major driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment generation across both developed and developing economies. In developing countries such as Nigeria, entrepreneurship is particularly critical in addressing rising unemployment, stimulating self-reliance and promoting sustainable economic development. Despite various government policies and programmes aimed at supporting entrepreneurship and small and medium-scale enterprises, graduate unemployment continues to pose a serious challenge, especially among young people. In response to this challenge, entrepreneurship education has been integrated into tertiary education curricula in Nigeria as a strategic intervention to equip students with the knowledge, skills and mindset required for business creation and self-employment. Entrepreneurship education is designed to foster creativity, innovation and opportunity identification among learners, thereby preparing them for active participation in economic development (Ladokun, Onimole & Olowu, 2022). However, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in translating learning into actual entrepreneurial intention remains a subject of concern, particularly among university graduates.

Business education undergraduates are uniquely positioned to develop entrepreneurial intentions, as their academic programmes provide a foundation in business principles, practices and procedures. Through coursework, internships and extracurricular activities, business education undergraduates acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that foster entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour. As a result, they are more likely to develop intentions to start their own businesses, innovate within existing organizations, or pursue other entrepreneurial endeavours, thereby contributing to economic growth, innovation, and job creation. The emergence of entrepreneurial intentions is of utmost importance as the process represents the first phase in creating a business. In general terms, intention is a mental state that represents a commitment to perform an action or achieve a goal. It is a state of mind that can turn actions into actual behaviours (Mahama, Issaka & Iddrisu, 2023). In entrepreneurship, intentions are key drivers of business creation. Entrepreneurial intention represents an individual's commitment to start a business. It can influence the emergence of entrepreneurial behaviour in the future. Individuals with entrepreneurial intentions believe that they can successfully start new businesses.

Entrepreneurial intention involves a deliberate and planned effort to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities, overcome obstacles, and take calculated risks to achieve entrepreneurial goals. Entrepreneurial intention is defined as the conscious state of the mind that precedes action and directs attention toward entrepreneurial behaviours such as starting a new business and becoming an entrepreneur (Moriano, Gorgievski, Laguna, Stephan & Zarafshani, 2012). It shows the extent of passion towards some future targeted behaviours. It is a critical factor in the entrepreneurial process, as it determines whether an individual will take the first step towards becoming an entrepreneur (Ogwunte, 2023). Understanding the factors that shape entrepreneurial intention among students is therefore essential for strengthening entrepreneurship education outcomes. Recent entrepreneurship research emphasized that entrepreneurial intention is not only influenced by general exposure to entrepreneurship education but also by specific entrepreneurial skills that shape opportunity perception and venture feasibility. In particular, opportunity recognition skills and information and communication technology (ICT) skills have been identified as critical competencies for modern entrepreneurship.

Opportunity recognition refers to the ability of individuals to identify, evaluate, and exploit viable business opportunities within their environment. It involves scanning the

environment, detecting unmet needs, and transforming ideas into potential business ventures (Ohlert, Laibach, Harms & Boring, 2025). When individuals are able to recognize business opportunities, they are more likely to develop entrepreneurial intentions, as they begin to see the potential for starting and running their own businesses (Fei & Shuangyan, 2024).

In addition, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills play a vital role in contemporary entrepreneurship due to the increasing digitalization of business processes. ICT skills involve the ability and knowledge required to effectively use digital tools, software, and communication technologies to access information, manage business operations, and reach customers. According to Laudon and Laudon (2021), ICT skills enable entrepreneurs to leverage technology to enhance productivity, efficiency, and innovation, ultimately gaining a competitive edge in the market, making it a critical determinant of entrepreneurial readiness in the digital economy.

Opportunity recognition enhances entrepreneurial intention by helping individuals perceive feasible business opportunities, while ICT competence strengthens their ability to evaluate, structure, and implement those opportunities in a technology-driven business environment. Together, these skills may significantly shape students' entrepreneurial intentions, especially in a digital and opportunity-rich economy. Theoretically, these skills align with the Entrepreneurial Event Theory, which posits that entrepreneurial intention emerges when individuals perceive both desirability and feasibility of starting a business. In this regard, opportunity recognition enhances perceived desirability by enabling individuals to identify attractive business opportunities, while ICT skills strengthen perceived feasibility by improving their ability to operationalize and implement those opportunities in a technology-driven environment.

Despite the recognized importance of these skills, empirical studies have largely examined entrepreneurial competencies in aggregate, with limited attention given to how opportunity recognition and ICT skills jointly influence entrepreneurial intentions, particularly among business education undergraduates in South-East Nigeria. This created a clear empirical gap that this study addressed. Most existing studies have focused on general entrepreneurial skills without isolating these two increasingly relevant competencies in the context of digital and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. Therefore, this study examined opportunity recognition and ICT skills as predictors of entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates in public universities in South-East Nigeria. The study is expected to provide empirical evidence that will inform curriculum development and improve entrepreneurship education practices aimed at enhancing students' entrepreneurial readiness.

Statement of the Problem

Although previous studies have established that entrepreneurial skills influence entrepreneurial intentions, most of these studies have either been conducted in developed countries or have examined entrepreneurial skills in a broad and undifferentiated manner (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000). This creates a gap in understanding how specific entrepreneurial skills such as opportunity recognition and information and communication technology (ICT) skills jointly predict entrepreneurial intentions, particularly within the context of South-East Nigeria. Furthermore, existing studies tend to generalize findings across broad student populations with limited focus on business education undergraduates, who are specifically trained for entrepreneurial and vocational outcomes (Akinkuolie, Onimole and Olowu, 2022). This creates both a contextual and empirical gap, especially in South-East Nigeria,

where evidence remains limited regarding how opportunity recognition and ICT skills influence entrepreneurial intentions among this critical group of students.

Given these gaps, the problem of this study, therefore, is the lack of comprehensive empirical evidence on how opportunity recognition and ICT skills predict entrepreneurial intentions among Business Education undergraduates in universities in South-East Nigeria. Addressing this gap is essential for improving entrepreneurship education, strengthening skill-based curriculum design, and enhancing entrepreneurial outcomes among graduates. This study therefore seeks to examine opportunity recognition and ICT skills as predictors of entrepreneurial intentions among Business Education undergraduates in South-East Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the predictive role of opportunity recognition skills and information and communication technology (ICT) skills on entrepreneurial intentions among Business Education undergraduates in universities in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined whether:

1. Opportunity recognition skills significantly predict entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates.
2. ICT skills significantly predict entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates.
3. Opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills of business education undergraduates jointly and positively predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1: Business education undergraduates' opportunity recognition skills do not significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

2: Business education undergraduates' ICT skills do not significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

3: Business education undergraduates' opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills do not jointly and significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

Methods

The study adopted a predictive correlational research design. It was conducted in South-East Nigeria using 352 final-year business education undergraduates of the 2024/2025 academic session from public universities in South-East Nigeria offering business education programmes. Final-year students were selected because they have been fully exposed to the curriculum and are in a better position to demonstrate psychological attributes. A census sampling technique was adopted because the population size was manageable; therefore, all 352 students were included in the study to ensure comprehensive coverage. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire adopted from existing validated scales. The opportunity recognition skills scale was adopted from the studies of Tang, Kacmar and Busenitz (2012) and Özgen and Baron (2007). Items on opportunity recognition were contextualized for Business Education undergraduates to assess their ability to identify and evaluate potential entrepreneurial opportunities from their learning experiences and surroundings. The ICT skills scale was adapted from the Students' Digital Competence Scale (SDiCoS) developed and validated by Tzafilkou, Perifanou and Economides (2022), and the individual entrepreneurial intent construct by

Thompson (2009) was adapted to measure entrepreneurial intention. The instrument consisted of 31 items divided into two main sections: A and B. Section A contained 22 items on opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills, while Section B contained 9 items on entrepreneurial intent. This was used to examine opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills as predictors of entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. The items were measured on a 4-point scale.

The instrument was validated by three experts: two in the Faculty of Technology and Vocational Education and one in the Educational Foundation from the Faculty of Education, all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Their input ensured clarity, relevance and adequacy of the items, and necessary corrections were incorporated. Reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha based on a pilot study involving 30 final-year business education students from Delta State University, Abraka, who were not part of the sample used for the present study. The reliability yielded an overall coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency. Data was collected using both online (Google Forms) and physical administration of the questionnaire. Out of 352 copies of the questionnaire administered, 327 were successfully retrieved, representing 93% return rate. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using regression analysis. Simple linear regression was used to test the hypotheses on individual predictors while multiple regression was used to test joint prediction using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 and SPSS PROCESS Macro version 4. A null hypothesis was rejected when the **p-value was equal to or less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$)**, indicating statistical significance. Conversely, when the **p-value was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$)**, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Results

Research Question 1: Business education undergraduates' opportunity recognition skills do not significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 1: ***Simple linear regression analysis for the predictive role of opportunity recognition skills on entrepreneurial intentions***

Model	SS	Df	MS	F	B	SE	t	Sig.
Regression	17.556	1	17.556	131.820	.547	.048	11.481	.001
Residual	43.284	325	.133					
Total	60.840	326						

Data in Table 1 show that opportunity recognition skills significantly and positively predict entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. The regression model is statistically significant (F (1, 325) = 131.82, p = .001), indicating that opportunity recognition skills make a meaningful contribution to explaining variations in students' entrepreneurial intentions. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. Opportunity recognition skills demonstrate a strong positive predictive effect on entrepreneurial intentions (B = 0.547, SE = 0.048, t = 11.48, p = .001). This finding suggests that increases in students' ability to identify, evaluate, and exploit business opportunities are associated with corresponding increases in their entrepreneurial intentions. The large t-value further indicates that the predictive relationship is robust and statistically reliable.

Research Question 2: Business education undergraduates' ICT skills do not significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 2: ***Simple linear regression analysis for the predictive role of information communication technology skills on entrepreneurial intentions***

Model	SS	Df	MS	F	B	SE	t	Sig.
Regression	14.985	1	14.985	106.204	.486	.047	10.306	.001
Residual	45.855	325	.141					
Total	60.840	326						

Table 2 indicates that information and communication technology (ICT) skills significantly and positively predict entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. The regression model is statistically significant (F (1, 325) = 106.20, p = .001), demonstrating that ICT skills make a meaningful contribution to explaining variations in students' entrepreneurial intentions. Thus, the null hypothesis is not supported. ICT skills exhibit a strong positive predictive effect on entrepreneurial intentions (B = 0.486, SE = 0.047, t = 10.31, p = .001). This result suggests that higher levels of ICT competence, such as the ability to use digital tools, online platforms, and information systems effectively, are associated with increased entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates. The magnitude of the t-value further indicates that this predictive relationship is robust and statistically reliable.

3: Business education undergraduates' opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills do not jointly and significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 3: ***Multiple linear regression analysis for the joint predictive role of opportunity recognition and ICT skills on entrepreneurial intentions***

Predictor Variables	B	SE	B	T	P
Constant	1.482	.168	—	8.796	<.001
Opportunity Recognition Skills	.378	.063	.371	6.037	<.001
ICT Skills	.243	.060	.248	4.029	<.001

R = .568, R^2 = .323, Adjusted R^2 = .318, F (2, 324) = 77.118, p < .001, Durbin–Watson = 1.930

Note. ***B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. Dependent variable = entrepreneurial intentions.***

Table 3 shows a multiple linear regression analysis conducted to determine whether business education undergraduates' opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills jointly and significantly predict their entrepreneurial intentions**.** The regression model shows that the combined predictors accounted for a meaningful proportion of variation in entrepreneurial intentions. Specifically, the model is statistically significant, indicating that opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills jointly influence entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. The model yields a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of .57 and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of .323 (Adjusted R^2 = .318), suggesting that approximately 32.3% of the variance in entrepreneurial intentions is explained by the joint contribution of opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills within the model. The overall model is statistically significant, F (2, 324) = 77.118, p < .001, indicating a good fit and confirming that the predictors jointly have a significant effect on entrepreneurial intentions. Examination of the individual predictors showed that opportunity recognition skills (β = .371, t = 6.037, p < .001) and ICT skills (β = .248, t = 4.029, p < .001) each made significant positive contributions to entrepreneurial intentions. However, opportunity recognition skills emerged as the stronger

predictor based on its higher standardized beta coefficient. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H03) is not supported**.**

Discussions

The findings of the study revealed that opportunity recognition skills significantly and positively predicted entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates in public universities in South-East Nigeria. This implies that undergraduates who possess the ability to identify, evaluate, and exploit viable business opportunities are more likely to develop strong intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities after graduation. This finding suggests that opportunity recognition skills constitute a critical cognitive capability that shapes students' entrepreneurial orientation and career aspirations, making entrepreneurship a more realistic and attractive career choice. The result is consistent with Ledi et al. (2022), who reported a significant positive effect of opportunity recognition on entrepreneurial intention among university students in Ghana. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2020) found that opportunity recognition significantly influenced entrepreneurial intention among Indian university students, while Wiramihardja et al. (2022) also confirmed its relevance in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes among Malaysian students.

The findings further revealed that information and communication technology (ICT) skills significantly and positively predicted entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates. This indicates that students who are proficient in the use of digital tools, online platforms, and technology-enabled business applications are more likely to perceive entrepreneurship as a feasible and attractive career option. ICT enhances students' confidence in their ability to operate in modern digital business environments and reduces perceived barriers associated with business start-up and management. This finding aligns with Akinkuolie et al. (2024), who reported a significant positive influence of ICT skills on entrepreneurial intention among business education undergraduates in South-West Nigeria. It also supports Sreejith and Sreejith (2023), who found that ICT skills enhance entrepreneurial intention through entrepreneurial self-efficacy, as well as Nnaji and Okoro (2024), who established that ICT-related competencies significantly influence entrepreneurial intention among students in North-East Nigeria.

The findings further revealed that opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills jointly and significantly predicted entrepreneurial intentions among business education undergraduates in public universities in South-East Nigeria. Among the individual predictors, opportunity recognition emerged as the most significant contributor. This implies that when students possess both the ability to identify viable business opportunities and the technological competence to exploit such opportunities, their entrepreneurial intentions are significantly strengthened. This suggests that students with the ability to identify business opportunities are prone to excel in business ventures. This finding aligns with Ledi et al. (2022) and Sayoji et al. (2023) who highlighted the importance of possessing opportunity recognition skills as important determinant of entrepreneurial intent. Likewise, Akinkuolie et al. (2024) and Koe et al. (2022) showed that ICT skills enhance entrepreneurial readiness in digital contexts. The result indicates that entrepreneurial intention formation is best explained through the interaction of cognitive opportunity identification and digital capability.

The findings can be interpreted within the framework of the Entrepreneurial Event Model, which emphasizes that entrepreneurial intentions are shaped by perceived feasibility and desirability. In this case, opportunity recognition enhances perceived desirability by making

entrepreneurship appear attractive and rewarding, while ICT skills strengthen perceived feasibility by increasing confidence in venture execution in a technology-driven economy. The combined effect of these competencies suggest a synergistic relationship that enhances entrepreneurial intention more than either variable could achieve independently.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that opportunity recognition skills and information and communication technology (ICT) skills significantly and positively influence entrepreneurial intentions among Business Education undergraduates in public universities in South-East Nigeria. Opportunity recognition skills emerged as a key cognitive predictor of entrepreneurial intentions, indicating that students who are able to identify and evaluate viable business opportunities are more likely to develop strong intentions toward entrepreneurial engagement. Similarly, ICT skills were found to be significant predictors, suggesting that digital competence enhances students' confidence and readiness to engage in entrepreneurship within a technology-driven business environment. Furthermore, the joint influence of opportunity recognition skills and ICT skills demonstrates that entrepreneurial intentions are more strongly formed when students possess both the cognitive ability to identify opportunities and the technological capability to exploit them.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study imply that business education programmes in universities should place greater emphasis on developing students' opportunity recognition and ICT skills through practical and technology-driven learning experiences. Strengthening these competencies will enhance students' ability to identify business opportunities, utilize digital tools effectively, and develop stronger entrepreneurial intentions. The findings also suggest that entrepreneurship education should be more experiential and digitally oriented to prepare undergraduates for entrepreneurial engagement and self-reliance in the modern economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Universities and business education departments should adopt practical teaching approaches that enhance students' opportunity recognition skills through market surveys, business simulations, and opportunity-based learning activities.
2. Business education curricula should integrate more ICT-driven entrepreneurial training to equip students with relevant digital competencies needed for modern business operations and entrepreneurial engagement.

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