

Evaluation of Entrepreneurial Instincts among Preschool Leavers in Akwa Ibom State

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62154/ajmbr.2025.019.01019>

Abstract

Youth unemployment in Nigeria constitutes a considerable burden to resolve, even though enterprise development has been advocated; what remains critical is the depth of spread of entrepreneurial instinct across the population. This study assessed entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers, identified their background characteristics, and ascertained the children's profiles of entrepreneurial instinct. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. A multistage sampling procedure was adopted to select Senior secondary schools for data collection. A mixed-method research approach to item generation led to 12-item construct measures. The KMO and Bartlett's test affirmed the tenability of the measurement construct. Descriptive and inferential statistics were deployed, and results were obtained as follows. Most respondents (96%) were 16, and 93% were 17. Most were female (51%), whereas male was 48%. The study showed that most of the parents of the students were business owners, and some were civil servants. However, the result on the level of entrepreneurial instinct among the respondents revealed that 44.6% of the respondents had very low entrepreneurial instinct, 29.2% showed a high level of entrepreneurial instinct, 19.0% showed a virtually excellent level of entrepreneurial instinct, and 7.35% revealed that the respondents had an inferior level of entrepreneurial instinct. This implies that only 19% of the respondents are typically endowed with an entrepreneurial instinct, meaning they are creative, self-confident, can take initiative, have good vision, and are risk-takers. The secondary school curriculum must incorporate entrepreneurial education to foster innovation.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Instincts, Preschool leavers, Entrepreneurship, Adolescent, Talent, Business, Innovation, Creativity, Akwa Ibom State.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a catalyst for innovation, employment generation, and economic growth, particularly in emerging economies (World Economic Forum, 2020; OECD, 2021). Entrepreneurship is the innate ability to start a small, thriving business. Entrepreneurship is about learning the skills needed to assume the risk of establishing a business (Nebro, 2021). The mindset allows you to take smart risks, thrive in ambiguity, and bounce back from failure. However, using our innate talents and psychology

comes from discovery and practice, which implies that 'instinct' is universal and does not care where you come from. Adeyeye (2020) opined that entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability of an individual or group to search for investment opportunities and establish and run a business successfully. Depending on the type of business, assistants, support staff or family members are involved, and some adolescents are usually preschool leavers. This constitutes students with a few years of graduation from the secondary school system, and looking forward to maturing into an independent socioeconomic stage.

Focusing on pre-school leavers is crucial for several reasons. First, interventions at the preschool stage can allow for systematic intentional development of entrepreneurial mindsets before formal graduation into the labour market from the schooling systems with subtle, narrow creativity and risk-taking tendencies through rigid curricula (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). Second, early entrepreneurial nurturing has been shown to positively correlate with higher levels of innovation, adaptability, and self-efficacy in later life stages (Lans et al., 2019; Cope, 2020). Consequently, understanding and fostering entrepreneurial instincts at this nascent stage could significantly enhance the entrepreneurial talent pool, contribute to a more dynamic economy, and provide a sustainable solution to youth unemployment and underemployment in Akwa Ibom State.

Existing entrepreneurship programs and policies tend to prioritise youth and adult populations, missing the opportunity to embed entrepreneurial skills early on. Moreover, most Nigerian early childhood education research focuses predominantly on cognitive, social, and emotional development (Akinrinmade et al., 2022), overlooking entrepreneurial traits as essential competencies for long-term economic empowerment. Studies indicate that these traits can be seen and developed early in life, impacting the probability of becoming an entrepreneur later. In Akwa Ibom State, entrepreneurship has gained more attention to boost economic empowerment and lower unemployment. It is essential to recognise and encourage entrepreneurial characteristics at a young age to support the state's goal of economic development and produce independent people.

Ajibade (2016) asserted some of the usefulness of entrepreneurship education include provision of an avenue for job creation, improvement of individual competence and self-development, promotion of innovation research and development, enabling entrepreneurs create and embrace social change, ignition of the growth and development of less-developed regions and communities by setting up new businesses, strengthening economic growth, promotion of problem identification and solving, critical thinking and innovation, providing learners with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings, entrepreneurship education develops self-reliance ability, and creation of wealth.

Addressing this gap is timely and essential. By evaluating entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers, this study seeks to provide empirical insights that can inform early childhood education practices, guide policy interventions, and contribute to the broader discourse on entrepreneurship as a lifelong developmental process. Ultimately, the early

cultivation of entrepreneurial instincts promises to produce a generation of innovative, resilient, and economically active citizens capable of driving sustained socio-economic transformation in Akwa Ibom State and beyond.

According to Egrinya, Ann, Lavender and Peter (2022), given the labour market dynamics in Africa, it is a reality that many individuals will always opt for business over white-collar jobs. However, the government has recently encouraged entrepreneurship by inculcating primary and tertiary education courses. This would have a positive impact on the young ones and the economy at large. Abimbola (2019) observed that countries like America grow economically because of their spirit of entrepreneurship. Four million new businesses are created every year in America. Latest jobs and employment opportunities are created yearly in America. In Nigeria, if youths have this business perception in secondary schools, they will start thinking progressively, which will go a long way in addressing the problem of poverty and unemployment, which has been a significant problem for decades. Entrepreneurship education focuses on developing skills or attributes that enable the realisation of opportunity, whereas management education is focused on developing skills or attributes that enable the realisation of opportunity. It seeks to provide students with the necessary knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in various settings (Nwagidi, 2020).

Problem Statement

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a crucial driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria (World Economic Forum, 2020; OECD, 2021). In response to persistent unemployment challenges, considerable efforts have been directed toward promoting entrepreneurship education at the secondary and tertiary levels (Okafor and Chinyelu, 2022; Abubakar et al., 2023). However, there remains a significant and largely unaddressed gap in research concerning the entrepreneurial instincts during the foundational stages of human capital development, specifically after the school system's long transitional learning phases among preschool leavers. In Nigeria, youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge, and unemployment and economic underdevelopment remain pressing issues (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In Akwa Ibom State, the socio-economic status among the youths is not different; despite the situation in the geographical settings, entrepreneurship has been promoted as a viable pathway to socio-economic empowerment to cultivate innovative, resilient, and economically active citizens. Nevertheless, empirical studies evaluating entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers in this context are virtually non-existent, making it challenging to design evidence-based early interventions. However, while substantial research efforts have been devoted to entrepreneurship education and development among secondary and tertiary-level students (Okafor & Chinyelu, 2022; Abubakar et al., 2023), limited attention has been given to the earlier stages of human development where entrepreneurial instincts may first emerge. Empirical research on entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers is noticeably lacking. However,

numerous studies have researched entrepreneurial development among adults and youth in Nigeria, especially at the secondary and tertiary educational levels. In addition, research on preschool education in Nigeria prioritises reading, numeracy, and cognitive development above entrepreneurial traits, including initiative, creativity, problem-solving, and risk-taking. This leaves a significant knowledge gap about how early social and educational settings support entrepreneurial instincts from an early age. However, addressing this gap is essential to inform policies and interventions that could cultivate entrepreneurial skills from the foundational stages of education in Akwa-Ibom State and beyond. Therefore, this study evaluated the status of entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers, analysed the socioeconomic profile of entrepreneurial instinct, assessed the incidence index of the entrepreneurial instinct, and ascertained the underlying dimensions of the entrepreneurial instinct among the preschool leavers in Akwa Ibom State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in Entrepreneurial Instinct Theory, introduced by McMullen (2010), which posits that entrepreneurial action is often the result of intuitive, rapid, and affect-driven decision-making rather than rational calculation alone. According to this theory, individuals act entrepreneurially not because they meticulously process information but because they instinctively recognise and act on opportunities. Applying this theory to preschool leavers suggests that entrepreneurial traits, such as curiosity, initiative, creativity, and problem-solving, pre-existed from their early life. Thus, the degree of its prevalence might have been altered for cognitive maturity in the course of schooling. Entrepreneurial Instinct Theory guides this study to focus on spontaneous, natural behaviours in young children that signal entrepreneurial potential and how these instincts, if nurtured, can contribute to long-term economic participation.

Formation of Entrepreneurial Instincts in Early Childhood

Entrepreneurial instincts such as opportunity recognition, creativity, risk-taking, and autonomous action manifest intuitively, even among young children. Wambugu (2021) demonstrates that preschool children often display entrepreneurial tendencies during unstructured play, creating trade-like exchanges, demonstrating leadership, or innovating solutions during games. Similarly, O'Connor and Lopes (2023) argue that entrepreneurial instincts can be understood as early behavioural markers that develop organically when children are exposed to environments that reward exploration and autonomy. Yet, mainstream early childhood education models, particularly in Nigeria and similar settings (Akinrinmade et al., 2022), remain predominantly focused on rote learning, literacy, and numeracy, thereby suppressing the emergence of entrepreneurial instincts. Critically, while some scholars celebrate spontaneous entrepreneurial traits in young children (Morselli and Ajello, 2022), others, like Hamilton and Hameed (2022), caution that instincts alone are

insufficient without structured reinforcement. This underscores the necessity of intentionally designing early childhood educational interventions that support, rather than stifle, entrepreneurial instinct development.

Cope (2020) finds that individuals who exhibited higher degrees of creativity, risk tolerance, and initiative during childhood were significantly more likely to become entrepreneurs or innovators in adulthood. Moreover, Weimann et al. (2023) argue that early entrepreneurial behaviours correlate with resilience and adaptability, which are vital for navigating dynamic, high-risk economic environments. However, Hamilton and Hameed (2022) highlight that early instincts often atrophy over time without systemic support and ongoing development opportunities. In regions like Akwa Ibom State, where unemployment rates remain high and economic diversification is urgent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), nurturing entrepreneurial instincts from the preschool stage could serve as a sustainable strategy for future economic empowerment. Nonetheless, critical analysis suggests fostering instincts must be matched with continuous educational, financial, and policy support throughout the individual's development lifecycle.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State, between latitudes 4°33' and 5°33' North and longitudes 7°25' and 8°25' East. Akwa Ibom State has a total land mass estimated at 7,245,935 square kilometres. The state comprises 31 LGAS, with Uyo as the State capital. Akwa Ibom has a total population figure of 3,920,208, with 2,044,510 males and 1,875,698 females and a population density of 587 people per km² (FRN, Gazette 2007). Following the inauguration of the free education policy, enrolment of pupils in public primary schools increased from 761,422 to 931,337 between September 2008 and January 2012. The population of this study included all the students graduating from public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. According to Hassan (2019), he identified sixteen (16) ways to entrepreneurship education in Nigeria.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for this study. In the first stage, stratified random sampling was used to select one Local government Area from each of the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom state: Uyo, Onna and Essien-Udim. In the second stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select one school from the three LGAS. In the third stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select three intact classes from the SS3 and other levels in the senior school classes to capture students of different courses of interest. In the Uyo senatorial district, Uyo high school was selected in Uyo with 143 students (urban area), in Eket senatorial district, a community secondary commercial school in Ikot Akpan Eshiet, Onna (rural area) with 100 respondents was used, and in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, Government Secondary school Nto-Nsek, Essien-dim (Peri-urban area) with 100 students was used. Therefore, the sample size was 343 respondents, allowing students from urban, peri-urban and rural areas to express their dispositions in this study. Primary data were generated with a validated structured questionnaire distributed across these locations. Various analytical techniques were used to analyse the data

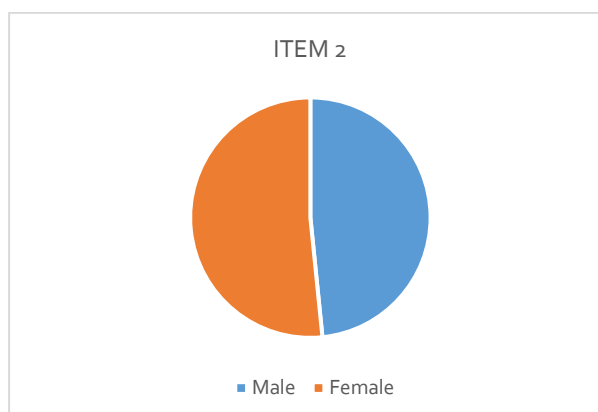
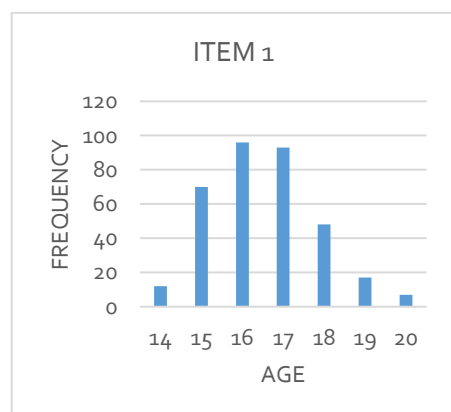
obtained through a structured questionnaire. Objectives were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentages, composite index analysis, affirmative incidence index, ranking and factor analysis to provide comprehensive data.

Results

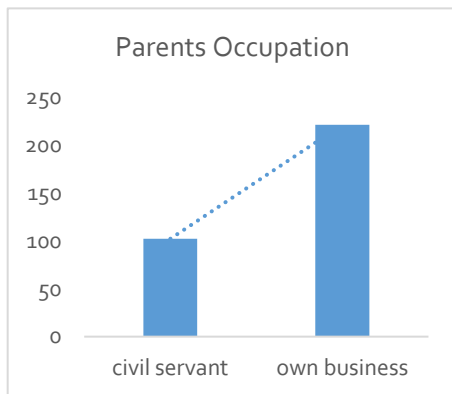
The results from the analysis are presented based on the following:

Socioeconomic Profile Analyses of the Entrepreneurial Instinct among Preschool Leavers

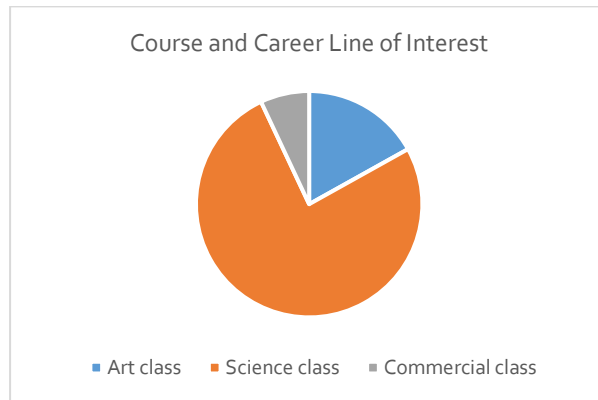
Table 1, item 1 shows that most respondents (96%) are 16 years old, and 93% are 17 years old. This suggests that most respondents are relatively young and interested in education. Item 2 revealed that most respondents were females (51.6%), whereas the percentage of males was about 48.4%. Item 3 showed that most (33.8%) respondents indicated that their parents owned businesses. Also, the level of civil servants as an occupation category is appreciably high, constituting about 29.1%. Item 4 shows that the majority of the respondents were Ibibio, which constituted 55.4%, Annang showed an appreciably high number of respondents, about 32.7 %, Oron was about 2.9%, Igbo was about 4.4%, Efik was about 3.2 %, and Yoruba was about 1.5%. Item 5 reveals that the majority (76.1%) of the students are in the science class, the art class had an appreciable proportion of about 16.9%, and the commercial class had about 7%. The charts below describe all the socioeconomic variables from items 1-5.



ITEM 3



ITEM 5



ITEM 4

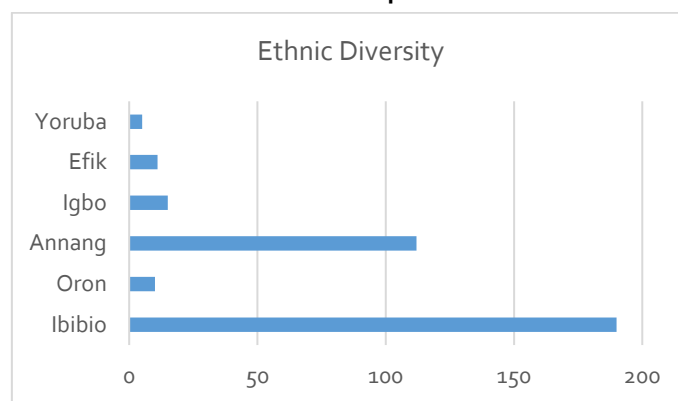


Table 1: Distribution of the Preschool leavers Based on Demographic characteristics

Item	Socioeconomic Variables	Frequency	Entrepreneurial Instinct Mean Index	F	Sig.
1	Age			2.137	0.049 ^{sig}
	14.00	12	0.5795 ^{ab}		
	15.00	70	0.6338 ^{ab}		
	16.00	96	0.5694 ^{ab}		
	17.00	93	0.5692 ^{ab}		
	18.00	48	0.5237 ^a		
	19.00	17	0.5682 ^{ab}		
	20.00	7	0.7013 ^b		
2	Sex			0.005	0.946 ^{Nsig}
	Male	166	0.5783 ^a		
	Female	177	0.5797 ^a		
3	Parents Occupation			1.142	0.320 ^{Nsig}
	civil servant	102	0.5577 ^a		
	own business	221	0.5853 ^a		
	Retired	20	0.6193 ^a		
4	Ethnic Diversity			1.224	0.297 ^{Nsig}
	Ibibio	190	0.5947 ^a		
	Oron	10	0.5091 ^a		
	Annang	112	0.5572 ^a		
	Igbo	15	0.6379 ^a		
	Efik	11	0.5372 ^a		
	Yoruba	5	0.5273 ^a		
5	Course and Career Line of Interest			1.553	0.213 ^{Nsig}
	Art class	58	0.5725 ^a		
	Science class	261	0.5743 ^a		
	Commercial class	24	0.6468 ^a		

Note: pooled entrepreneurial Instant status mean index = 0.5790, N=343, Nsig = Not significant and Sig = Significant.

Component Assessment of the Entrepreneurial Instinct among Preschool Leavers

This subunit sought to analyse entrepreneurial instinct among the respondents and the incident population with the most likely positive behaviour on such attributes as expressed by the affirmative index. The result also revealed the relative order positioning of these

attributes' incidence among Akwa Ibom state preschool leavers. Findings on the affirmative index suggest the proportion or magnitude of the entrepreneurial instinct distributed across the sample and the pattern of the occurrence was categorized into grades a, b, c, and d and ranked accordingly. The array of eleven elements showed four major underlying patterns that were categorized based on the alphabetical superscript as interpreted as follows:

Superscript a: 1st– 2nd shows educationally induced motivation towards entrepreneurship.

Superscript b: 3rd- 5th shows the tendency to become self-employed

Superscript c: sixth- 10th shows the incidence of building a business and taking ownership

Superscript d: 11th shows interest in obtaining financial support from parents to establish a business for them.

Table 2: Pattern of Entrepreneurial Instinct Attributes of the Preschool Leavers

Item	How does the following describe what you have seen below	Not at all	Least of me	Less of me	More of me	Typical of me	All and RROP
1	I am very eager to create my own business	27.4	16.3	5.8	30.3	20.1	^c 0.504 ^{10th}
2	My goal in life is to become self-employed and not for government	24.8	9.6	10.8	30.3	24.5	^c 0.548 ^{7th}
3	I have got dreams to start a business one day	31.2	6.7	10.5	32.4	19.2	^c 0.516 ^{9th}
4	I am always looking for information on how to establish a business venture in future	17.5	9.3	7.9	38.8	26.5	^b 0.653 ^{5th}
5	I have serious thoughts about starting a business	22.7	12.2	10.2	35.9	19.0	^c 0.549 ^{6th}
6	Being self-employed is attractive to me	22.7	12.5	12.0	31.5	21.3	^c 0.528 ^{8th}
7	If I had the opportunity and resources, I would love to start a business	15.5	11.7	4.1	40.8	28.0	^b 0.688 ^{3rd}
8	Being self-employed will give me great satisfaction	16.0	10.5	7.9	38.8	26.8	^b 0.656 ^{4th}
9	I like subjects that makes me to think	9.9	3.8	5.2	41.7	39.4	^a 0.811 ^{2nd}
10	I like my teachers to try different methods of teaching	7.0	6.1	3.8	42.6	40.5	^a 0.831 ^{1st}
11	It is likely that I will ask my parents to start for me a business.	43.1	16.0	9.9	16.9	14.0	^d 0.309 ^{11th}

Note: All = affirmative Incidence index, RROP = Relative Rank order Position

Status of Entrepreneurial Instinct among the Respondents

This subunit estimates the status of entrepreneurial instinct among the respondents in the study area. It gave credence to the relative variation in the entrepreneurial instinct across the study population. The composite index derivation generated the proportional measure of entrepreneurial instinct based on the probabilistic value that ranged from 0.00 to 1.00,

which implies virtually negligible to excellent. From the result in Table 3, 44.6% of the respondents had a very low entrepreneurial instinct, 29.2% showed a high level of entrepreneurial instinct, 19.0% showed a virtually excellent level of entrepreneurial instinct, and 7.3% revealed that the respondents had an abysmal level of entrepreneurial instinct.

Table 3: Level of Entrepreneurial Instinct among the Preschool Leavers

Entrepreneurial Instinct index	Entrepreneurial Instinct Index Range Interpretation	Frequency	Per cent
0.00 - 0.259	Virtually Negligible	25	7.3
0.26 - 0.559	Low	153	44.6
0.60 - 0.759	High	100	29.2
0.760 - 1.00	Virtually Excellent	65	19.0
Total		343	100.0

Underlying Dimensions of the Entrepreneurial Instinct among the Preschool Leavers in Akwa Ibom State

Table 4 presents the tenability and the appropriateness of the construct measurement of entrepreneurial instinct. The KMO result established the suitability of the construct variable scale item with high interrelation and sufficiency for data generation and factor analysis. The result ensured that sampling adequacy was sufficiently high to measure the expected interest. Table 4 revealed that items could explain the proportion of common variance shared among them. The KMO value of 0.831 indicates that it is appropriate for subsequent analytical procedures. Bartlett's test of sphericity p-value=0.000 revealed that the data have sufficient correlations and are appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 4: Result of the Tenability and Sustainability of the Instrument for the dimension of Entrepreneurial instincts

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.831
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	758.502
	Df	55
	Sig.	0.000

Consequent to the outcome of the KMO and Bartlett's test confirming the appropriateness of principal component analysis, the result of the factor analysis is shown in Table 5, given that the aim was to identify the minimum number of factors that would account for the dimensions of entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers. The criterion for reducing the significant underlying dimensions of factors based on the extracted common variance of the original items was based on the rule that the eigenvalue is greater than 1, resulting in three underlying dimensions of entrepreneurial instinct. The commonality extraction indexes indicate the extent to which each construct item contributed to the

interrelationship within the construct. None of the items had a relative less than 50 % explanation, except an item that showed approximately 0.4 if rounded to a single decimal place. Thus, only one had relatively low communality (< 0.4), which might not adequately explain the relationship in the data. However, its inclusion is justified by considering the item's importance in the study's context and the higher indexes of other items in the mix.

Table 5: The Underlying Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Instinct

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
	CEI	Underlying Dimensions		
		1	2	3
I have dreams to start a business one day	.504	0.683		
I am always looking for information on how to establish a business venture in future	.570	0.707		
I have serious thoughts about starting a business	.606	0.741		
If I had the opportunity and resources, I would love to start a business	.453	0.511		
It's likely that I will ask my parents to start for me a business.	.438	0.657		
Being self-employed is attractive to me	.559		0.712	
I am very eager to create my own business	.374		0.456	
My goal in life is to become self-employed and not for government	.623		0.786	
Being self-employed will give me great satisfaction	.527		0.686	
I like subjects that makes me to think	.685			0.822
I like my teachers to try different methods of teaching	.655			0.797
Diagnostic Statistics				
Eigen value		3.488	1.489	1.018
% of Variance		31.706	13.532	9.251
Cumulative %		31.706	45.238	54.489
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

Note: CEI=Commonality Extraction Index,

Discussion

The entrepreneurial instinct analytics component assessment revealed that most respondents would like tasks that make them think and produce practical outcomes. Different methods used by the teacher would also be an important tool in increasing the level of entrepreneurial instinct among the students. According to Ayodele (2013), there is great interest in entrepreneurial education from scholars as "a field of research as well as practical application worldwide as a means to achieve wealth creation and personal fulfilment' Entrepreneurship education should be placed among the core subjects in secondary school because the age of secondary school students enhances quick

assimilation of concepts (Abolade, 2010). Thus, few respondents are willing to start their business because they would not want to be spoon-fed by their parents. In the long run, spoon-feeding teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon, Clark (2023). As humans, we all have the innate ability to create, and that is why learning to see the world and interact with it, is the most valuable education we can give our young people. From the analysis, most pre-school leavers had low entrepreneurial instincts, meaning that only a few were willing to start a business. However, the current introduction of entrepreneurial programs in secondary schools' curriculum will boost the interest and motivation of young preschool leavers to start up one or two businesses. The results in Table 1 portray that Akwa Ibom state children start school early and graduate from secondary school; however, there are some late starters due to the free education policy in the state.

Concerning the sex of the respondents, the campaigns for female child education seem to be rewarding in our school system, even though the research could not access the trend in school enrolment since its creation in 1987. The techniques of contact class sampling in this study suggest that there is virtually equal school enrolment uptake by female children in the state. The result shows that more females were sampled in the class than male students. It has been observed that the parents' occupation positively or negatively influences the child. Thus, if the parents are in business, the child can develop an interest in the business, which changes their reasoning or orientation towards establishing a business. The pattern of results implies that most respondents had their parents own a business. Studies examining the impact of family background on entrepreneurship have explored the extent to which having a self-employed parent can affect entrepreneurial propensity. According to Forbes by Helman (2016), "No entrepreneur growing up in a family that runs a business is particularly relevant for children to start a business or join the same family business as an adult.

Regarding the ethnicity component, the composition of the results confirms the assertion that in Nigeria, there is evidence of high interaction and migration across the tribes because different ethnic groups possess various instincts. People from the southeast are believed to be more entrepreneurial than people from other regions. As a result, other ethnic nationalities in the study area were reflected, which suggests that Akwa Ibom state public schools are culturally inclusive as students hail from diverse ethnic groups. As expected of anybody within the sphere of educational pursuit, the career interest of an individual determines what he/she will become in the future. The course and career line of Interest of the Respondents, as shown on item 5, suggests more interest in a mathematically oriented future for the next generation of Akwa Ibom society. This should competitively unveil more creative and innovative human capital, which is more desired in entrepreneurship because they see science as a better place for career opportunities. The large drive for science classes does not imply that the students are gifted in the math-based course, but might be

of average capacity, which might be very useful for tailoring capacity building in entrepreneurship.

Regarding entrepreneurial instinct, it implies that only 19% of the respondents are typically endowed with an entrepreneurial instinct, which means they are creative, self-confident, can take initiative, have good vision, and are risk takers. The 29.2% with high entrepreneurial instinct suggest that the proportion of preschool lads had a strong propensity to acquire a virtually excellent entrepreneurial instinct exposure to a stimulating environment, thus implying that about 51.8% of students under the free scheme require serious entrepreneurial capacity development to be self-sustaining in a situation with no employment from either private or public institutions. Consequently, those with a low level of entrepreneurial instinct are not willing to start their own business, which means that they do not like to be involved in tasks that would require a long period to get results and are risk averse; moreover, they are not visionary. This is contrary to the findings of Efi and Akpan (2012) that people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria are not entrepreneurially friendly due, in part, to the presence of natural resources and oil companies in the region.

Conclusion

The findings from this study highlight the critical influence of parental occupation, particularly business ownership, on the development of entrepreneurial instincts among preschool leavers. Children whose parents are engaged in business activities displayed a significantly higher tendency toward entrepreneurial behaviour, reinforcing the importance of early exposure to entrepreneurial environments. The dominance of female participants further underscores the growing success of female child education initiatives, though it also points to the need for balanced gender-focused strategies in entrepreneurship education. Beyond the family environment, the broader socio-economic context, including increasing access to entrepreneurial grants, financing opportunities, and policy support, is helping to drive youth interest in entrepreneurship. As nations recognize entrepreneurship as a fundamental driver of job creation, poverty reduction, and economic growth, there is an urgent need to cultivate entrepreneurial instincts from the earliest stages of education systematically.

Based on these insights, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Introduce entrepreneurship education early: Policymakers should integrate entrepreneurship-oriented learning into primary and preschool curriculum, emphasizing creativity, initiative, problem-solving, and opportunity recognition.
- Develop experiential learning programs: Schools should implement hands-on, project-based activities that simulate entrepreneurial experiences, allowing children to develop instincts naturally.
- Enhance parental involvement: educational programs should encourage parents, particularly those in business, to mentor and model entrepreneurial behaviour for young learners.

- Provide specialized teacher training: Educators should be trained to recognize, nurture, and assess entrepreneurial instincts among young children, moving beyond traditional academic performance measures.
- Create inclusive programs for all genders: Initiatives should actively encourage equal participation of both male and female pupils to ensure balanced development of entrepreneurial potential.
- Strengthen policy support: Governments should enact policies that mandate and fund entrepreneurship education from early childhood through to tertiary levels, aligned with broader economic development goals.
- Facilitate partnerships with businesses: Schools should collaborate with local businesses and entrepreneurs to provide real-world exposure and mentorship opportunities for pupils.

By adopting these strategies, Nigeria and similar economies can systematically nurture a new generation of entrepreneurs whose early instincts are transformed into tangible economic contributions. Policymakers must recognise that entrepreneurial instincts can be cultivated from the preschool stage to maximise national human capital development. Embedding entrepreneurship education early in the learning process would align with global trends and prepare young Nigerians to become job creators rather than job seekers. Specific policy actions should include the development of a national framework for entrepreneurship education at all school levels, government-sponsored training programs for early childhood educators in entrepreneurial methods, and targeted funding for innovation programs within primary school. Prioritising these initiatives can lead to a more dynamic, self-reliant economy and contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

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