

Why Positive Attitudes Do Not Translate into Self-Employment Intent: Evidence from Undergraduates in Bayelsa State

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: October 2026	Entrepreneurship education is frequently justified on the assumption that favourable attitudes toward entrepreneurship will culminate in entrepreneurial intention and, eventually, self-employment. Yet evidence from Bayelsa State suggests a striking conversion gap. This study examines why positive perceptions of entrepreneurship among undergraduates that do not automatically translate into self-employment intent. The study used a descriptive cross-sectional design. Among the 110 students represented in Table 2, 59% reported a good perception/attitude toward entrepreneurship, but only 7% selected self/business as their preferred post-graduation career; 55% preferred government employment and 38% preferred companies. Moreover, 52% reported no entrepreneurial vision. Table 1 indicates that civil servants constituted the largest parental-occupation category (37%), followed by artisans (28%), self-employed/business parents (24%) and industry employees (11%). intention is filtered through subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, risk appraisal, family occupational scripts and the availability of credible role models. The paper contributes a context-sensitive explanation of the attitude–intention gap and proposes a conversion model in which entrepreneurship education must be coupled with practical efficacy-building, family/community legitimisation, risk-management capability, financing pathways and proximal entrepreneurial role models.
Keywords: Entrepreneurial Attitude Entrepreneurial Intention Self-Employment Entrepreneurship Education Bayelsa State	

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) is widely treated as a proximal antecedent of venture creation because starting a business is normally deliberate, planned and temporally extended rather than purely spontaneous (Bird, 1988; Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Kolvereid, 1996; Liñán & Chen, 2009). Within the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), however, intention is not produced by attitude alone: subjective norms and perceived behavioural control also shape intention, while contextual conditions determine whether intention can be enacted (Ajzen, 1991; Autio et al., 2001; Kautonen et al., 2015; Vamvaka et al., 2020; Mahmoud & Garba, 2019). This distinction is especially important in settings where students may endorse entrepreneurship rhetorically while simultaneously preparing for salaried employment.

The Nigerian higher-education environment provides a particularly revealing setting for this problem. Entrepreneurship education was introduced to help move graduates beyond dependence on scarce formal-sector employment, yet empirical findings on its effects are mixed. Meta-analytic and systematic evidence shows that entrepreneurship education can improve entrepreneurial outcomes, but effects vary with programme design, pedagogy, context and the outcome measured (Bae et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2017; Oosterbeek et al., 2010; Walter & Dohse, 2012; Fayolle et al., 2006). The Nigerian evidence likewise indicates that attitudes can matter, but the broader social environment may either enable or constrain the translation of attitudes into intention (Mahmoud & Garba, 2019; Muraina & Bawalla, 2019; Shittu & Dosunmu, 2014; Ojapinwa et al., 2018; Ajani & Oyekola, 2019).

This paper therefore asks a narrower and more consequential question: why does a positive entrepreneurial orientation fail to convert into self-employment intent among undergraduates in Bayelsa State?

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Entrepreneurial Attitude Is Necessary but Not Sufficient

Attitude toward entrepreneurship refers to the degree to which an individual evaluates entrepreneurial behaviour favourably or unfavourably. In TPB, favourable attitude contributes to intention, but intention is jointly shaped by subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009; Kautonen et al., 2015; Vamvaka et al., 2020). Consequently, a student can believe that entrepreneurship is desirable while still concluding that it is socially risky, financially inaccessible or inconsistent with family expectations.

This distinction helps explain why the Bayelsa finding should not be interpreted as evidence that entrepreneurship education has failed simply because self-employment preference is low. The result instead suggests incomplete conversion. Nigerian evidence is especially instructive: Mahmoud and Garba (2019) found attitude to be the only significant TPB predictor of entrepreneurial intention in their sample, while Muraina and Bawalla (2019) found that subjective norms were not significantly related to EI. These

results demonstrate that the relative weight of TPB components is context dependent. International evidence similarly shows that attitude can be multidimensional, while perceived self-efficacy/controllability can operate through distinct pathways (Vamvaka et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021; Shi et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020; Kautonen et al., 2015).

Accordingly, the present study distinguishes three levels: (a) positive perception—recognising entrepreneurship as valuable; (b) entrepreneurial intention—forming a personal commitment to pursue self-employment; and (c) implementation readiness—having the confidence, resources and situational support to act. This distinction is consistent with evidence that intention is closer to behaviour than general attitudes but is still vulnerable to contextual constraints (Bird, 1988; Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Kautonen et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2021).

2.2 Parental Occupation and Family Career Scripts

Families influence entrepreneurial intention through social learning, occupational exposure, resource access and normative approval. Children whose parents operate businesses may acquire tacit knowledge, entrepreneurial vocabulary, networks and a more familiar image of self-employment; conversely, children socialised in salaried occupations may learn to treat stable employment as the default career script (Shittu & Dosunmu, 2014; Zellweger et al., 2011; Criaco et al., 2017; Altinay et al., 2012; Laspita et al., 2012). The relationship is not deterministic: entrepreneurial parents can also transmit caution, whereas non-entrepreneurial parents can support entrepreneurship when they perceive it as viable and respectable.

The Bayelsa Table 1 distribution is therefore theoretically important. Civil servants account for 59 of the 160 observations (37%), artisans 45 (28%), self-employed/business parents 39 (24%) and industry 17 (11%). The predominance of civil-servant parents creates a plausible social environment in which the security and status of formal employment may be reproduced across generations. Yet the table alone cannot establish that parental occupation caused the students' career preferences. It identifies a salient contextual composition that should be tested in future individual-level models. This cautious interpretation is consistent with the literature, which treats parental influence as a social mechanism rather than a deterministic occupational inheritance process (Shittu & Dosunmu, 2014; Criaco et al., 2017; Zellweger et al., 2011; Altinay et al., 2012; Laspita et al., 2012).

2.3 Public-Sector Preference and the Social Legitimacy of Paid Employment

In Nigeria, the preference for public-sector employment cannot be reduced to irrationality. Salaried employment can represent predictable income, social status, institutional identity and a culturally recognised pathway to adult security. Ajani and Oyekola (2019) document reasons for public-sector job preference in Nigeria, while studies of Nigerian graduates describe a persistent white-collar orientation and the limitations of an education system historically aligned with formal employment (Elechi, 2013; Undiyaundeye & Otu, 2018; Ali & Adegbe, 2019; Muraina & Bawalla, 2019).

The Bayelsa results strongly reflect this social-choice problem: 55% of the 110 students in Table 2 selected government employment, compared with 38% for companies and only 7% for self/business. Thus, the relevant question is not whether students like entrepreneurship, but whether entrepreneurship outranks the perceived benefits of salaried work. In TPB terms, public-sector preference can operate through subjective norms and perceived behavioural control: family members may approve of government employment, while students may perceive entrepreneurship as less predictable or less feasible (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Ajani & Oyekola, 2019; Mahmoud & Garba, 2019; Muraina & Bawalla, 2019).

2.4 Risk Perception as a Conversion Barrier

Entrepreneurship entails uncertainty concerning income, capital, market demand, social reputation and personal career consequences. Risk propensity concerns willingness to accept uncertainty, whereas perceived risk concerns the individual's appraisal of possible adverse outcomes. These constructs should not be conflated: a student may have a positive attitude but perceive the downside of entrepreneurship as too large to justify action (Barbosa et al., 2007; Kautonen et al., 2015; Ojapinwa et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021; Aliedan et al., 2021). Recent pre-2022 evidence supports the relevance of risk. Ojapinwa et al. (2018), studying Nigerian university students, linked risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurship skills development to self-employment intention. Zhang et al. (2021) found perceived risk to have negative implications for perceived behavioural control, while Aliedan et al. (2021) showed that students' entrepreneurial intentions are shaped partly by risk perception and contextual conditions. Thus, entrepreneurship education that increases desirability without increasing students' ability to assess, price and manage risk may leave the intention pathway incomplete (Oosterbeek et al., 2010; Nabi et al., 2017; Walter & Dohse, 2012; Zhang et al., 2021; Aliedan et al., 2021).

2.5 Entrepreneurial Role Models and Proximal Social Proof

Role models make entrepreneurship cognitively and socially concrete. Observing an entrepreneur who resembles the learner can strengthen self-efficacy, demonstrate feasible pathways and reduce psychological distance from business ownership (Bandura, 1986; Nowiński & Haddoud, 2019; Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021; Liu et al., 2019; Fellnhöfer & Mueller, 2018). Role models may also influence subjective norms by signalling that entrepreneurship is a legitimate and valued career.

Nowiński and Haddoud (2019) show that combinations of positive entrepreneurial attitudes, self-efficacy and role-model exposure are particularly conducive to high entrepreneurial intention. Abbasianchavari and Moritz (2021) similarly conclude from a broad review that role-model effects depend on who the model is, when exposure occurs and the social context. Liu et al. (2019) further show that the distance between students and role models matters. Teacher-entrepreneurs can also function as credible models when they possess relevant experience and communicate effectively (San-Martín et al., 2021). These findings imply that a generic success story delivered in a classroom is unlikely to substitute for sustained, proximal exposure to credible entrepreneurs.

2.6 Entrepreneurship Education and the Attitude–Intention Gap

The education literature cautions against treating course exposure as equivalent to entrepreneurial transformation. Bae et al. (2014) found a statistically significant but small relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention. Nabi et al.

(2017) noted that much of the literature measures short-term subjective outcomes and under-specifies pedagogy. Oosterbeek et al. (2010) found no positive programme effect on entrepreneurial skills and a negative effect on entrepreneurial intention in one quasi-experimental setting. Walter and Dohse (2012), in contrast, found active pedagogies to be more consistently related to entrepreneurial attitudes and self-employment intentions than reflective modes. Fayolle et al. (2006) likewise argue for impact assessment that distinguishes educational inputs from meaningful entrepreneurial outcomes.

The Bayelsa data fit this mixed-evidence pattern. Students can complete entrepreneurship education and report favourable perceptions without selecting self-employment as their preferred career. The likely implication is not that attitudes are irrelevant, but that education must strengthen the other components of the conversion process—subjective legitimacy, perceived feasibility, risk-management capability, resources and implementation confidence (Ajzen, 1991; Kautonen et al., 2015; Vamvaka et al., 2020; Bae et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2017).

2.7 Integrated Conversion Framework

The study proposes an Attitude-to-Intent Conversion Framework. Positive entrepreneurial attitude is positioned as the entry condition. Conversion is then conditioned by four filters: (1) family occupational script and parental approval; (2) cultural preference for public-sector employment; (3) perceived entrepreneurial risk relative to perceived feasibility; and (4) exposure to credible, proximal role models. Perceived behavioural control/self-efficacy is the immediate psychological bridge linking these contextual filters to intention. The framework is consistent with TPB while incorporating social-learning and family-background perspectives (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1986; Shapero & Sokol, 1982; Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009).

Conceptually, the framework predicts that positive attitudes will yield high entrepreneurial intention only when students also perceive entrepreneurship as socially legitimate, personally feasible and sufficiently controllable. If public-sector employment is more socially rewarded, parents predominantly model salaried careers, perceived risk is high and entrepreneurial role models are distant or absent, positive attitudes can remain largely evaluative rather than intentional (Ajani & Oyekola, 2019; Shittu & Dosunmu, 2014; Nowiński & Haddoud, 2019; Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area:

Bayelsa State is the sixth state in Nigeria; located in the core Niger Delta, Southern Nigeria with Yenagoa as the Capital. The state was created in 1996 from Rivers State with only eight local Government; bordered by Delta State in the North; Rivers State to the East and the Atlantic Ocean to the West and South and majorly dominated by a vast network of Rivers, Creeks and Mangrove forest. Demographically, it is dominated by the Ijaw ethnic group with languages as Izon; Ogbia; Nembe and Epie-Atissa. The state has a total area of 10,773 square kilometers (4158 sq m) and an estimated population of 3,700,000. The state is a home to several higher educations including the Federal University, Otuoke, Federal University of Agriculture, Bassambiri; Niger Delta University, Amassoma and Yenagoa; Bayelsa Medical University, Yenagoa; University of Africa, Toru-Orua; Federal polytechnic; Ekowe; Isaac Adaka Boro College of Education, Sagbama; Bayelsa State Polytechnic, Aleibiri; College of Health Technology, Otuogidi, College of Nursing and Midwifery, Tombia; College of Arts and Science, Elebele and Hensard University, Toru-Urua as the only private University; each offering entrepreneurship course while spooling out graduates on yearly basics. The present article is a secondary analytical reworking of the cross-sectional survey reported in the supplied manuscript. The original study used a descriptive cross-sectional design, with a reported population of 330 and a sample of 181, and analysed 160 returned questionnaires.

3.2 Research Design and population of study:

The study utilized descriptive cross-sectional survey research design, with a study population of 330 and sample size of 181.

3.3 Sampling techniques:

The sample size was determined using Taro Yammane 1967 formula for the sample selection.

The calculation is stated below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq 1.}$$

Where: n = sample size required, N = population size, e = level of significance, 1= is a constant

The calculation yielded one hundred and eighty one (181) as sample size.

The study adopted purposive and simple random sampling techniques for data collection. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the First/second year regular; final year regular undergraduate's students; graduates and among instructors or lecturer taking entrepreneurship course in their various institutions. About 74 first/second-year and 36 final-year undergraduate students in higher institutions; 50 graduates and 15 lecturers from the entrepreneurship education programs; all within Bayelsa State. Akingbade (2019) revealed that fresh graduates usually demonstrate the tendency in the direction of starting a business which make it essential for their inclusions. Though, purposive sampling is underpinned with its limitations (Albert et al., 2025); however, in the context of this study; it uses is subject to willingness and availability. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select available and willing participants at various institutions and places.

4. Results Presentation

Table 1. Parental occupation distribution reproduced from the supplied fieldwork table.

Parental occupation	Frequency	Percent
Self-employed/business	39	24%
Civil servant	59	37%
Artisan	45	28%
Industry/company	17	11%
Total	160	100%

The largest parental-occupation category is civil service (37%), followed by artisan work (28%), self-employment/business (24%) and industry employment (11%). This composition is theoretically consequential because parental occupation can influence the occupational scripts available to students and the social legitimacy attached to alternative careers. However, the descriptive table does not permit a test of whether students with civil-servant parents are more likely than other students to prefer government employment (Shittu & Dosunmu, 2014; Zellweger et al., 2011; Criaco et al., 2017; Altinay et al., 2012; Laspita et al., 2012).

Table 2. The Attitude–Career Preference Mismatch

Indicator (n=110)	Frequency	Percent
Good entrepreneurship perception/attitude	65	59%
Fair	32	29%
Undecided	13	12%
Government career	60	55%
Company career	42	38%
Self/business career	8	7%
Has entrepreneurial vision	46	42%
No entrepreneurial vision	57	52%
Undecided vision	7	6%

Source: Researcher, 2026.

The central empirical finding is the conversion gap. Although 59% of students reported a good perception/attitude toward entrepreneurship, only 7% selected self/business as their preferred career. The largest group preferred government employment (55%), followed by company employment (38%). The vision item deepens the paradox: only 42% reported having an entrepreneurial vision, while 52% reported having none. Thus, positive evaluation of entrepreneurship is not equivalent to personal career commitment.

The result is compatible with the broader literature showing that entrepreneurship education and attitude can be positively associated with entrepreneurial outcomes but that effects are often modest and context dependent (Bae et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2017; Walter & Dohse, 2012; Oosterbeek et al., 2010; Mahmoud & Garba, 2019). It also accords with TPB, where favourable attitude must coexist with supportive subjective norms and sufficient perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009; Kautonen et al., 2015; Vamvaka et al., 2020).

5. Discussion

The evidence suggests that the Bayelsa problem is not simply an absence of entrepreneurial appreciation. Rather, entrepreneurship competes with a stronger career default. A student can regard entrepreneurship as desirable in the abstract but still choose government or company employment because those pathways offer greater perceived legitimacy, predictability and social approval. In TPB terms, attitude is favourable while subjective norms and perceived behavioural control may remain insufficient for entrepreneurial commitment (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009; Kautonen et al., 2015; Vamvaka et al., 2020). The 59% good-perception result therefore needs to be interpreted alongside the 55% government-career preference and 52% absence of entrepreneurial vision. These figures indicate an evaluation–commitment divide. Similar concerns appear in entrepreneurship-education research, where short-term gains in attitudes or knowledge do not always produce durable entrepreneurial outcomes (Bae et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2017; Oosterbeek et al., 2010; Fayolle et al., 2006; Walter & Dohse, 2012). The educational challenge is thus to move from “entrepreneurship is good” to “I can and will pursue a viable entrepreneurial pathway.”

Parental Occupation as a Hidden Career Signal

The 37% share of civil-servant parents offers a plausible explanation for why government employment remains attractive. Parents do not merely provide financial resources; they also provide examples of normal working life. A civil-service household may repeatedly communicate the benefits of stability, formal credentials and predictable employment, whereas an entrepreneurial household may normalise uncertainty, customer acquisition and reinvestment. Evidence on intergenerational entrepreneurship supports the idea that family experience shapes attitudes and intentions through role modelling, exposure and resources, although effects can be heterogeneous (Shittu & Dosunmu, 2014; Zellweger et al., 2011; Criaco et al., 2017; Altinay et al., 2012; Laspita et al., 2012). The policy implication is not to discourage public-sector careers or to label civil-servant families as anti-entrepreneurial. Rather, entrepreneurship programmes should engage families as part of the normative environment. Parent-facing enterprise days, family business conversations, alumni entrepreneurship showcases and evidence on venture survival can make entrepreneurship more understandable and legitimate without portraying salaried work as inferior. This approach follows the broader logic that subjective norms and social influence affect entrepreneurial intention (Ajzen, 1991; Muraina & Bawalla, 2019; Mahmoud & Garba, 2019; Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021; San-Martín et al., 2021).

A second interpretation is that government preference represents a rational response to institutional uncertainty. Students may perceive a public-sector job as a clearer route to income and status than starting an enterprise. Nigerian studies have documented the attraction of white-collar employment and the historical orientation of education toward formal jobs (Ajani & Oyekola, 2019; Elechi, 2013; Undiyaundeye & Otu, 2018; Ali & Adegbe, 2019; Muraina & Bawalla, 2019). Therefore, telling students to “be entrepreneurs” without altering the perceived comparative benefits of entrepreneurship is unlikely to be sufficient.

The solution is to make entrepreneurial careers institutionally legible. Students need to see concrete pathways from idea identification to market testing, registration, financing, mentoring, first sales and scaling. Active pedagogies and stronger university–industry links are particularly relevant because educational mode affects entrepreneurial attitudes and self-employment intentions (Walter & Dohse, 2012; Fayolle et al., 2006; Nabi et al., 2017; Bae et al., 2014; Oosterbeek et al., 2010).

The Bayelsa data do not directly measure risk, but risk is a theoretically credible conversion barrier. When students are uncertain about capital, demand, income stability and failure consequences, they may preserve a positive attitude while postponing action. Perceived risk can reduce perceived behavioural control, whereas risk-taking propensity and self-efficacy can support intention (Barbosa et al., 2007; Ojapinwa et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021; Aliedan et al., 2021; Kautonen et al., 2015).

This suggests a shift from generic motivational teaching to risk literacy. Students should learn scenario planning, minimum viable product testing, cash-flow management, customer validation, portfolio approaches to income and staged investment. Such interventions address feasibility rather than simply desirability. They also fit the source manuscript's observation that students identified finance and practical skills as persistent entrepreneurship challenges, while the wider education literature cautions against overly theoretical delivery (Nabi et al., 2017; Walter & Dohse, 2012; Oosterbeek et al., 2010; Fayolle et al., 2006; Bae et al., 2014).

6. Limitations and Future Research

The present paper didn't test mediation, moderation or causal pathways. Future research should employ validated scales such as the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire and TPB measures, supplemented by measures of risk perception, parental occupation/attitude and role-model exposure.

Secondly, a longitudinal Bayelsa cohort that measure students before entrepreneurship education, immediately after training, at graduation and 12–24 months later. This would distinguish attitude change, intention formation and actual venture behaviour.

7. Conclusion

The paper makes three contributions. Conceptually, it reframes the attitude–intention relationship as a conversion problem rather than a simple linear relationship. Empirically, it interprets the Bayelsa tables through established intention theories without overstating what the cross-sectional data can establish. Practically, it identifies intervention points beyond generic entrepreneurship courses: family-sensitive career guidance, public-sector career-norm reorientation, risk-management education, venture finance pathways and sustained exposure to proximal role models. The analysis is deliberately conservative because the supplied tables do not provide cross-tabulations linking parental occupation, risk or role-model exposure directly to individual entrepreneurial intention.

The evidence from Bayelsa State points to a conversion problem rather than a simple attitude problem. Positive entrepreneurship perception exists alongside a strong preference for salaried employment: 59% of students reported a good perception/attitude, yet only 7% preferred self/business, while 55% preferred government employment and 52% reported no entrepreneurial vision. The implication is that entrepreneurship education can change what students think about entrepreneurship without necessarily changing what they intend to do.

The most plausible explanation is a layered conversion process. Parental occupational scripts can normalise salaried careers; public-sector culture can make government employment appear safer and more legitimate; perceived risk can suppress perceived feasibility; and the absence of credible, proximal role models can leave entrepreneurship psychologically distant. These factors are theoretically consistent with TPB, social-learning theory and family-background research.

8. Recommendation

For Bayelsa and comparable Nigerian settings, the policy lesson is straightforward:

- Entrepreneurship education should move from attitude formation to intention conversion and, ultimately, implementation.
- Universities should combine active venture learning, family-sensitive norm change, risk-management capability, financing pathways and sustained exposure to credible entrepreneurs.

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