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GRADUATE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF GENDER, SCHOOL TYPE, AND PRIOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

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Short Research Article

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of gender, school type, and entrepreneurship experience on Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores among National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) graduate members in North-Central Nigeria. A survey research design with a quantitative approach was employed, utilizing primary data collected through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire. The sample consisted of 536 NYSC members serving in Niger, Nasarawa, and Kwara States, drawn from a total population of 5,635 Batch 'B' 2024 Stream II members. The study determined the sample size using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample estimation table and employed stratified and systematic random sampling techniques for selection. A total of 453 completed questionnaires were retrieved and analysed using a t-test. The findings indicate no significant difference in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores between male and female corps members. Similarly, no significant difference was found between corps members with prior self-employment experience and those without such experience. However, a significant difference was observed in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores between university and polytechnic graduates. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening equitable entrepreneurial opportunities through an enhanced Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) initiative by the NYSC to ensure equal support for both male and female graduates. Additionally, universities and polytechnics should integrate comprehensive entrepreneurship programs into their curricula to develop entrepreneurial competencies early. Furthermore, the government, entrepreneurship agencies, and private sector stakeholders should collaborate to offer targeted training, funding, and mentorship tailored to the diverse needs of graduates from different educational backgrounds, fostering inclusive participation in entrepreneurship.

Keywords— Gender Difference, School Type Difference, Prior Self-employment Experience Difference, Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention score, NYSC.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a key driver of economic growth and development (Dote-Pardo et al., 2025), contributing significantly to innovation, job creation, and economic diversification, particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria (Adewumi & Adeyemi, 2018). In a country where unemployment, especially among graduates, remains a pressing challenge (Orji, 2024), entrepreneurship presents a sustainable avenue for economic empowerment, self-sufficiency, and poverty reduction (Okezie, 2018). By fostering an entrepreneurial culture, individuals can create businesses that not only generate income but also contribute to national productivity and competitiveness in the global market. Furthermore, entrepreneurship encourages the development of new products, services, and industries, ultimately enhancing economic resilience and reducing dependence on traditional employment sectors. Given these benefits, governments, policymakers, and educational institutions must prioritize entrepreneurship development through supportive policies, access to funding, and entrepreneurial education to maximize its impact on national economic progress.

As economies continue to evolve in response to market dynamics and technological advancements, entrepreneurial intention among graduates has become a central theme in research and policy discussions (Al-Fattal, 2024). However, gender disparities remain prevalent in entrepreneurship worldwide. Studies indicate that women are underrepresented in entrepreneurial ventures, leading to missed economic opportunities and a lack of diversity in innovation (Brieger & Gielnik, 2021). This gender imbalance is particularly relevant in countries where, despite ongoing efforts to promote gender equality, entrepreneurship remains male-dominated (Zakaria, Akhir, & Rani, 2024).

Educational institution type refers to the classification of institutions based on their educational focus, structure, and level of instruction (UNESCO, 2012). Beyond gender, the type of educational institution a graduate attends may significantly shape their entrepreneurial intentions. Educational institutions serve as crucial incubators for entrepreneurial talent, equipping students with the necessary skills and mindset to navigate the business landscape. While higher education is generally regarded as a catalyst for entrepreneurial aspirations, its influence varies depending on the institution type. Research by Zhang, Li, Liu, and Ruan (2020), Otache, Oluwade, and Idoko (2020), and Wang, Sun, and Wu (2021) underscores the role of higher education in developing the knowledge, competencies, and attitudes essential for entrepreneurial success.

Prior self-employment experience represents an individual's previous engagement in creating and managing business ventures, serving as a crucial factor in shaping their entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and future business aspirations (Nguyen, 2021). Through direct involvement in entrepreneurial activities, individuals gain firsthand exposure to both the challenges and rewards of business ownership, which can significantly influence their attitude towards entrepreneurship and strengthen their perceived behavioural control, ultimately impacting their decision to pursue self-employment again (Malebana, 2023). This experience also plays a vital role in the development of tacit knowledge and practical skills, enabling individuals to recognize new opportunities, assess potential business risks, and make informed strategic decisions (Lindh & Thorgren, 2016). As a result, prior self-employment experience not only enhances entrepreneurial competencies but also increases the likelihood of future business creation, fostering resilience and adaptability in dynamic economic environments.

Graduate entrepreneurial intention is increasingly acknowledged as a crucial driver of economic empowerment and innovation in African economies . However, despite strides in reducing gender disparities in some regions, significant gaps in entrepreneurial participation persist (Ndofirepi, Dzansi, & Rambe, 2018). Women continue to exhibit lower levels of entrepreneurial intention compared to men, resulting in untapped economic opportunities, diminished innovation, and limited business diversity (Brieger & Gielnik, 2021; Zakaria, Akhir, & Rani, 2024). While previous studies have explored demographic influences on entrepreneurial intention (Avenge & Agwa, 2019), the extent to which gender and institutional differences shape these intentions remains insufficiently examined (Issa & Tesfaye, 2020). This gap underscores the need for further investigation into gender dynamics in entrepreneurship, particularly in North-Central Nigeria, where socio-cultural and institutional factors play a significant role in career decision-making.

Beyond gender, institutional factors such as the type of educational institution whether university or polytechnic—are critical in fostering entrepreneurial aspirations among graduates (Oktaviani & Meidiyustiani, 2025). However, the growing unemployment crisis among graduates in developing economies raises concerns about whether these institutions adequately prepare students for entrepreneurship (Issa & Tesfaye, 2020). Adepoju (2024) highlights that Nigeria produces over 600,000 graduates annually, yet many struggle to secure employment, exacerbating the issue of youth unemployment. This persistent challenge emphasizes the importance of examining how different educational institutions influence graduates' entrepreneurial intentions.

Research on the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and the type of higher education institution in emerging economies remains in its early stages or is largely underexplored (Issa & Tesfaye, 2020). Many studies either use institution type as a population scope (Oktaviani & Meidiyustiani, 2025; Zakaria, Akhir, & Rani, 2024; Ndofirepi & Rambe, 2018), treat it as a control variable (Deng & Wang, 2023), or analyze it as a continuous variable (Lubem & Richard, 2019) to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Notably, Issa and Tesfaye (2020) conducted the only known study treating institution type as a categorical independent variable to assess variations in entrepreneurial intention scores. However, their study focused on students rather than graduates, differing from the approach adopted in this research.

Entrepreneurial intention studies have increasingly examined demographic factors such as age, education, and gender, yet there remains a limited understanding of the extent to which these variables influence entrepreneurial intention scores across different groups (Issa & Tesfaye, 2020). This knowledge gap necessitates a more detailed analysis of how gender and institutional differences shape entrepreneurial aspirations among graduates. For example, Lubem and Richard (2019) used multiple linear regression to analyze the effects of age, gender, and education on the entrepreneurial intentions of business owners in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Their findings indicated that all three factors significantly influenced entrepreneurial intention. However, their study focused on a cause-and-effect relationship and treated age and gender as continuous variables rather than categorical ones.

Furthermore, many previous studies overlooked key methodological considerations such as normality testing, collinearity diagnostics, and instrument validity before conducting independent sample t-tests. Only a few studies assessed the reliability of their research instruments (see Oktaviani & Meidiyustiani, 2025; Zakaria, Akhir, & Rani, 2024; Ndofirepi & Rambe, 2018; Deng & Wang, 2023; & Lubem & Richard, 2019). To address these gaps, this study will examine variations in entrepreneurial intention scores among graduates in North-Central Nigeria, emphasizing the influence of gender and higher education institution type (university versus polytechnic) using independent sample t-tests. Additionally, this research will incorporate normality testing, collinearity diagnostics, validity assessments, and instrument reliability checks to ensure robust and credible findings.

Research Objectives

i. To determine the difference in graduate entrepreneurial intention scores between male and female NYSC graduates in North Central Nigeria.

ii. To assess the difference in graduate entrepreneurial intention scores between university and polytechnic NYSC graduates in North Central Nigeria.

ii. To evaluate the difference in graduate entrepreneurial intention scores between prior self-employment experience and no prior self-employment experience NYSC graduates in North Central Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention is a complex construct that plays a crucial role in understanding the transition from entrepreneurial aspirations to actual business creation. Ajzen (1991) defines it as an individual's cognitive state regarding future entrepreneurial behavior, emphasizing its basis in attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. Similarly, Ndofirepi, Dzansi, and Rambe (2018) describe it as a mental state of readiness to engage in entrepreneurship, highlighting its preparatory nature. Batz, Romero, and Montes (2024) expand this view by positioning entrepreneurial intention as the foundational step toward business creation, linking it to practical outcomes. Youn and Hyun (2019) reinforce this perspective by identifying it as the starting point of business ventures, while Lee, Kang, and Kim (2022) argue that entrepreneurial intention is essential for new venture formation. Collectively, these perspectives establish entrepreneurial intention as both a psychological predisposition and a critical precursor to entrepreneurial action.

Despite the strengths of these definitions, they exhibit certain limitations. Ajzen’s (1991) perspective primarily focuses on cognitive factors but does not fully account for external influences such as socio-economic conditions. Similarly, while Ndofirepi et al. (2018) and Batz et al. (2024) highlight readiness and foundational aspects, they do not acknowledge the evolving nature of entrepreneurial intention, which can change over time due to experience and environmental factors. Furthermore, Youn and Hyun (2019) and Lee et al. (2022) frame entrepreneurial intention narrowly as a precursor to start-ups, overlooking alternative forms of entrepreneurship such as intrapreneurship and social entrepreneurship.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a broader and more integrative definition of entrepreneurial intention. It is conceptualized as an individual's cognitive and emotional readiness, shaped by personal attitudes, perceived abilities, and contextual factors, to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This includes not only starting new businesses but also pursuing innovative ventures within existing organizations and addressing social challenges through entrepreneurial means. This definition acknowledges the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial intention, recognizing that it evolves over time and is influenced by changing environmental conditions, making it relevant across various entrepreneurial contexts.

Gender and Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention is a conscious and deliberate process that significantly influences an individual's decision to start a business (Tomy & Pardede, 2020). It acts as a bridge between entrepreneurial ideas and actual behaviour, making it a crucial precursor to entrepreneurial action. Among the various factors influencing entrepreneurial intention, gender has been identified as a key determinant. Zakaria, Akhir, and Rani (2024) assert that gender differences in entrepreneurial intention stem from societal, cultural, and psychological influences, which shape individuals' perceptions and motivations toward entrepreneurship.

Research consistently highlights that gender plays a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial behavior and intention. Variations in personality traits, risk tolerance, and access to resources contribute to differences in how men and women approach entrepreneurship (Ndofirepi, Dzansi, & Rambe, 2018; Issa & Tesfaye, 2020). Studies indicate that men generally exhibit higher entrepreneurial intentions than women, a trend influenced by external factors such as financial accessibility, mentorship opportunities, and social networks, which tend to favor men (Tomy & Pardede, 2020; Issa & Tesfaye, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of considering gender disparities when examining entrepreneurial intention, as they highlight structural barriers and support mechanisms that can shape entrepreneurial outcomes.

Ensuring the quality and safety of medical supplies during transportation is paramount in healthcare supply chain management. Drones equipped with advanced technology can monitor and track supplies, providing real-time information to warehouse management systems (WMS) (Garfield, Moore, &

Adams, 2019). This capability enhances tracking precision, reduces errors, and improves overall supply chain efficiency. Furthermore, the use of drones can minimize risks associated with traditional delivery methods, such as road accidents and theft. These quality and safety benefits make drones a valuable asset in maintaining the integrity of medical supplies and improving patient safety (Garfield, et al., 2019; Rosser et al., 2018; Rao et al., (2024)). The cost-effectiveness and sustainability of healthcare supply chain operations are crucial considerations for healthcare organizations. Garcia (2013) suggests that drones can contribute to cost savings by reducing labour expenses, improving resource utilization, and optimizing inventory management. Additionally, the use of drones can minimize carbon emissions and environmental impact compared to traditional transportation methods. This information highlights the potential economic and environmental benefits of incorporating drones into healthcare supply chain management (Garcia, 2013; Scott, & Andritsos, 2023; Rao et al., (2024)). By leveraging this technology, healthcare organizations can enhance their ability to provide timely and effective healthcare services, particularly in remote and underserved areas.

III. METHODS

The study adopted a cross-sectional and survey research design using a quantitative approach. The target population comprised 5,635 National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members from the 2024 Batch B Stream II serving in Niger (1,543), Nasarawa (2,250), and Kwara (1,842) States, as they were recent graduates at a pivotal career stage. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, resulting in 357 respondents; however, this number was increased by 50% to 536 to account for possible non-responses, representing 9.5% of the total population. A combination of stratified and systematic random sampling techniques was employed to ensure proportional representation from each state. Stratified sampling divided the population into subgroups based on their state of service, while systematic sampling selected individuals at regular intervals within each stratum. Data collection took place during the NYSC orientation program at the camp venues in the three states, facilitating access to participants and encouraging high response rates.

The study utilized a structured questionnaire as the primary research instrument. This tool is widely recognized for its cost-effectiveness and ability to minimize bias while enhancing efficiency, especially in large-scale surveys. A five-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from "Strongly Agree" (5) to "Strongly Disagree" (1), which ensured ease of response and improved data comparability while reducing respondent fatigue. The dependent variable, Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention, was measured using ten items adapted from Sharmila and Ishwar (2021) and Mawoli (2013), ensuring both relevance and validity.

For data analysis, the study applied Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) in SPSS AMOS to determine factor loadings, which were used to validate the research instrument. Additionally, SPSS version 27 was utilized to perform t-test analyses, appropriate for comparing the means of two independent groups. According to Tony (2020), for an independent variable to demonstrate a significant difference in scores based on gender or school type, the t-statistic value under the assumption of equal variances must exceed 1.96, and the p-value should be less than 0.05. This analytical approach ensured a robust examination of the relationships among the study variables.

IV. RESULTS

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Table 4.1 displays the results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value of 0.917 signifies strong sampling adequacy, indicating that the dataset is appropriate for factor analysis and that the sample size is sufficiently large to approximate a normal distribution, a key requirement for a t-test. Bartlett's test yielded an approximate chi-square value of 2506.001 with 45 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000, demonstrating that the data significantly differ from an identity matrix.

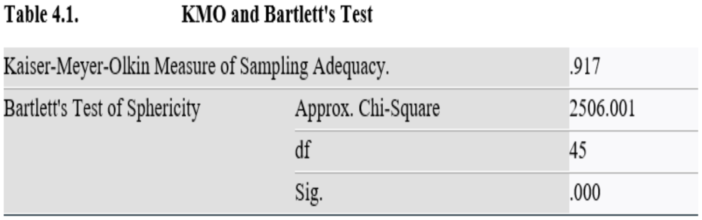

Table 4.1. **KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.917
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2506.001
	df	45
	Sig.	.000

Normality Test

Table 4.2 presents the results of the normality test, displaying the skewness and kurtosis values for gender, school attended, and entrepreneurship experience. The skewness value for Gender is 0.022, with a kurtosis of -2.008, while School Attended has a skewness of 1.056 and a kurtosis of -0.888. The skewness for Entrepreneurship Experience is -1.763, with a kurtosis of 1.113. According to Hair et al. (2010), skewness values between -2 and +2 and kurtosis values between -7 and +7 indicate that data is normally distributed. While the skewness and kurtosis values for School Attended and Entrepreneurship Experience fall within this range, the kurtosis value for Gender (-2.008) slightly exceeds the threshold, suggesting a potential deviation from normality. However, given that the overall distribution remains within acceptable limits, the data is considered appropriate for parametric analysis.

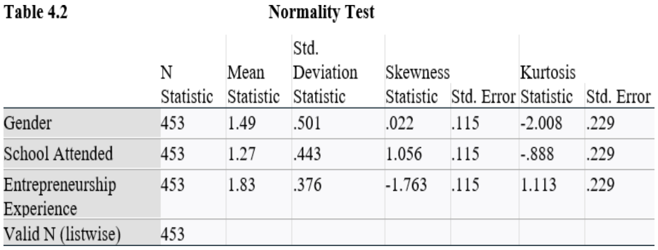

Table 4.2 **Normality Test**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Gender	453	1.49	.501	.022	.115	-2.008	.229
School Attended	453	1.27	.443	1.056	.115	-.888	.229
Entrepreneurship Experience	453	1.83	.376	-1.763	.115	1.113	.229
Valid N (listwise)	453						

Reliability and Convergent Validity Test

Table 4.3 presents the findings from the reliability and convergent validity tests conducted in this study. The factor loadings for the variables range from 0.559 to 0.822, demonstrating that each item makes a meaningful contribution to its respective construct. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.50 for adequate convergent validity. The AVE for the Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI) variable is 0.513, surpassing this threshold and confirming good convergent validity. Additionally, the Composite Reliability (CR) value of 0.912 exceeds the recommended minimum of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha (CA) value of 0.911 further reinforces the reliability of the scale, as it surpasses the commonly accepted benchmark of 0.70. Collectively, these results establish that the GEI construct is both valid and reliable for assessing entrepreneurial intention in this study

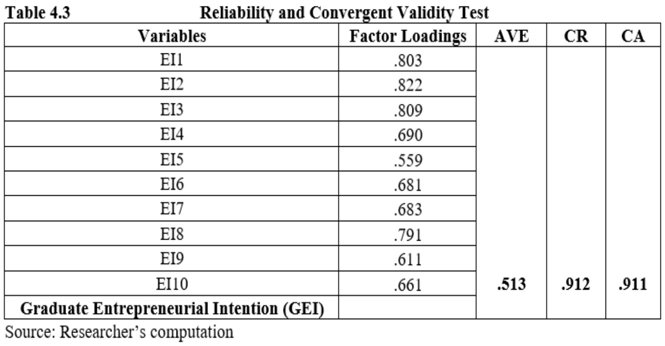

Table 4.3 **Reliability and Convergent Validity Test**

Variables	Factor Loadings	AVE	CR	CA
EI1	.803	**.513**	**.912**	**.911**
EI2	.822			
EI3	.809			
EI4	.690			
EI5	.559			
EI6	.681			
EI7	.683			
EI8	.791			
EI9	.611			
EI10	.661			
Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI)				

Source: Researcher's computation

Table 4.4 presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing different groups across three variables: gender, school type, and entrepreneurship experience.

For gender, the comparison between male (N = 229) and female (N = 224) participants shows a mean difference of -1.056, with a t-value of -1.586 and a p-value of 0.113. Since the p-value is greater than the 0.05 threshold, it indicates that the observed mean difference of -1.056 is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This supports the conclusion that there is no significant difference in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores between male and female graduates. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

In contrast, the comparison of school type between university (N = 332) and polytechnic (N = 121) participants reveals a statistically significant difference. The mean difference between the two groups is 1.825, with a t-value of 2.436 and a p-value of 0.015. As the p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05, the result indicates a significant difference between university and polytechnic students on the measured variable. This suggests that the type of school attended has a significant effect on Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, affirming the alternative hypothesis that a significant difference exists in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores between university and polytechnic graduates in North-Central Nigeria.

Regarding entrepreneurship experience, the comparison between individuals with prior self-employment experience (N = 77) and those without prior self-employment experience (N = 376) shows a mean difference of -0.0812, with a t-value of -0.091 and a p-value of 0.927. Since the p-value is much greater than 0.05, the result indicates that the difference in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores between these two groups is not statistically significant. This leads to the acceptance of the null hypothesis, suggesting that prior self-employment experience does not significantly influence Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention.

The assumption of equal variances was maintained in all comparisons, as indicated by the test design, and the significance was determined at a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference. This confidence interval ensures that the observed differences are not due to sampling error, providing a reliable estimate of the population parameters.

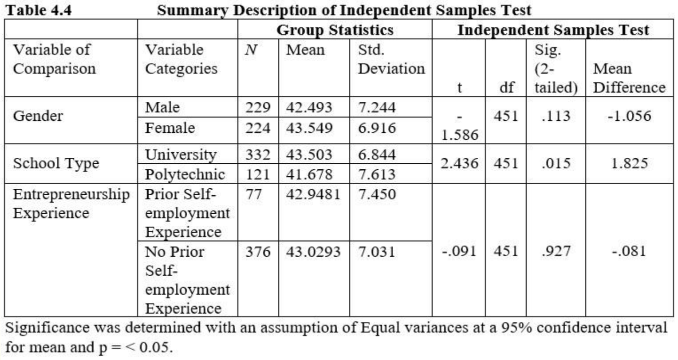

Table 4.4 **Summary Description of Independent Samples Test**

		Group Statistics			**Independent Samples Test**			
Variable of Comparison	Variable Categories	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Gender	Male	229	42.493	7.244	-1.586	451	.113	-1.056
	Female	224	43.549	6.916				
School Type	University	332	43.503	6.844	2.436	451	.015	1.825
	Polytechnic	121	41.678	7.613				
Entrepreneurship Experience	Prior Self-employment Experience	77	42.9481	7.450	-.091	451	.927	-.081
	No Prior Self-employment Experience	376	43.0293	7.031				

Significance was determined with an assumption of Equal variances at a 95% confidence interval for mean and p = < 0.05.

V. DISCUSSION

The first research hypothesis suggested that there is a significant difference in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI) scores between male and female graduates in North-Central Nigeria. However, the independent samples t-test results indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups, implying that gender does not play a decisive role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions among NYSC graduate members in the region. This suggests that both male and female graduates share similar entrepreneurial aspirations, possibly due to equitable exposure to entrepreneurship education, equal access to opportunities, or shared socio-economic challenges. Interestingly, this finding contrasts with previous research, such as the studies by Ndofirepi, Dzansi, and Rambe (2018); Brieger and Gielnik (2021); Zakaria, Akhir, and Rani (2024); Omotajo, Laosebikan, Ogunlusi, and Akinola (2024); and Deng and Wang (2023), which reported significant gender-based differences, often favoring males due to factors such as societal norms, resource accessibility, and higher risk tolerance. Conversely, this result aligns with Issa and Tesfaye (2020), who also found no significant difference in entrepreneurial intention between male and female graduates. The disparity in findings across studies may be attributed to contextual variations, including cultural influences, policy interventions, or educational reforms in North-Central Nigeria that may have contributed to narrowing gender differences in entrepreneurial intention. These results highlight the evolving dynamics of gender and entrepreneurship, suggesting that gender-neutral entrepreneurial policies and interventions may be yielding positive outcomes in the region.

The second hypothesis posited that there is a significant difference in Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI) scores between university and polytechnic graduates in North-Central Nigeria. The independent samples t-test results (refer to Table 4.5) confirmed this hypothesis, revealing a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with university graduates scoring higher in entrepreneurial intention compared to their polytechnic counterparts. This suggests that the type of educational institution attended influences graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations, potentially due to differences in curriculum design, exposure to business concepts, and access to entrepreneurial support systems. This finding aligns with the studies of Issa and Tesfaye (2020) and Deng and Wang (2023), who also found variations in entrepreneurial intention based on school type. One possible explanation for this result is that university graduates, who typically undergo a broader, more theoretical education, may be more inclined towards entrepreneurship due to their exposure to diverse business models, strategic thinking, and entrepreneurial networks. In contrast, polytechnic graduates, who receive more technical and vocational training, may focus on skill acquisition and employment readiness rather than entrepreneurship. Furthermore, universities often provide more entrepreneurship-focused programs, startup incubators, and extracurricular activities that promote entrepreneurial mindsets, while polytechnics may prioritize hands-on, industry-specific skills without strong emphasis on business development. These educational differences could contribute to the observed variation in entrepreneurial intention, emphasizing the need for polytechnic institutions to integrate more entrepreneurship-driven curricula and support systems to foster entrepreneurial ambition among their graduates.

The third hypothesis proposed that graduates with prior self-employment experience would demonstrate significantly different Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention scores compared to their counterparts without such experience in North-Central Nigeria. However, the independent samples t-test results indicated no statistically significant difference between these two groups, suggesting that prior self-employment experience does not play a decisive role in shaping graduates' entrepreneurial intentions. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted, and the alternative hypothesis was rejected. This finding implies that other determinants, such as financial literacy, access to resources, or entrepreneurial education, may exert a more substantial influence on graduates’ willingness to pursue entrepreneurship than their previous self-employment experience. The result is consistent with the study by Issa and Tesfaye (2020), who also found no significant relationship between prior entrepreneurial experience and entrepreneurial intention. This alignment across different studies reinforces the argument that merely having past self-employment exposure may not be sufficient to cultivate strong entrepreneurial aspirations. Instead, a broader spectrum of motivational and environmental factors may need to be examined to understand what truly drives graduates toward entrepreneurship. However, this result contrasts with Nguyen (2021), who found a significant relationship between prior self-employment experience and entrepreneurial intention, highlighting the need for further research to explore contextual differences that may account for these variations.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that gender and prior entrepreneurship experience do not have a significant impact on Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI) scores among graduates in North-Central Nigeria. This indicates that both male and female graduates, as well as those with and without prior self-employment experience, perceive entrepreneurship opportunities similarly, suggesting that factors such as access to resources, education, and external motivation may play a more crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions than gender or prior business experience. However, the significant difference in GEI scores between university and polytechnic graduates underscores the influence of educational background on entrepreneurial aspirations, with university graduates exhibiting stronger entrepreneurial inclinations. This disparity highlights the need for a more balanced approach to entrepreneurship education, ensuring that polytechnic graduates receive similar exposure to business development, strategic thinking, and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Consequently, these findings emphasize the importance of developing tailored entrepreneurship programs and policies that cater to the distinct needs of both genders and graduates from different educational backgrounds, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and dynamic entrepreneurial landscape in North-Central Nigeria.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention in North-Central Nigeria. The NYSC should strengthen entrepreneurship programs like SAED by ensuring equal participation across genders and fostering collaborations with educational institutions and businesses for mentorship, funding, and practical exposure. Universities should expand entrepreneurship programs, networking opportunities, and extracurricular activities, while polytechnics should integrate entrepreneurship modules into vocational curricula to equip graduates with both technical and entrepreneurial skills. The government should implement inclusive policies that promote gender neutrality and address barriers such as access to funding, with targeted interventions for polytechnic graduates to enhance their entrepreneurial prospects. Additionally, entrepreneurship development agencies should collaborate with universities and polytechnics to create hands-on training programs, mentorship opportunities, and seed funding initiatives, while periodic entrepreneurship competitions can further stimulate interest and innovation among graduates.

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