

EXAMINING THE SOCIOLOGICAL INFLUENCE OF INFORMAL SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS AND THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM ON GRADUATE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS IN NORTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of sociocultural norms, family entrepreneurial background, religious and ethical beliefs, hidden curriculum exposure, and peer and social network influence on graduate entrepreneurial intentions among 378 final-year undergraduates from public universities across the Northwest states of Nigeria, using a quantitative cross-sectional survey. A validated instrument with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .79 was used for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank-order correlations, and multiple linear regression. Results indicated that all five predictor variables significantly and positively predicted graduate entrepreneurial intentions. Peer and social network influence ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and sociocultural norms ($\beta = .27, p < .001$) were the strongest predictors. The regression model explained 62% of the variance in graduate entrepreneurial intentions ($R^2 = .62$, adjusted $R^2 = .61$, $F(5, 372) = 121.47, p < .001$). The study concludes that entrepreneurial intention formation among Northwest Nigerian graduates is deeply embedded in sociological processes operating both outside and within the university, and recommends culturally embedded entrepreneurship education reforms and community-based entrepreneurship ecosystems.

Keywords: *Graduate entrepreneurial intentions, sociocultural factors, hidden curriculum, social learning theory, entrepreneurship education, family entrepreneurial background*

Introduction

Graduate entrepreneurship has emerged as a central pillar of national economic development strategy across sub-Saharan Africa, driven by the acute mismatch between the supply of university

graduates and the absorptive capacity of formal labour markets (Nabi, Linan, Fayolle, Krueger, & Walmsley, 2017; Fayolle & Linan, 2022). In Nigeria, this mismatch is particularly acute: the country produces over one million graduates annually, yet its formal employment sector can

absorb only a fraction of new entrants (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). The Northwest geopolitical zone, comprising the states of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, and Kaduna, presents a concentrated version of this national challenge, being a zone characterised by high youth unemployment, low industrialisation, agrarian economic dependency, and limited entrepreneurial ecosystem development (Aliyu & Isah, 2020).

Entrepreneurial intention, the subjective conviction that one will establish a new venture in the future, is widely recognised as the most proximal antecedent of entrepreneurial behaviour (Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015; Shirokova, Osiyevskyy, & Bogatyreva, 2016). However, entrepreneurial intention is not formed in a social vacuum; it is shaped by a constellation of individual, social, institutional, and cultural forces that researchers have only partially mapped in Africa (Abubakar & Mitra, 2021; Olugbola, 2022). Among these forces, two categories remain theoretically underdeveloped: informal sociocultural factors, including community norms, family background, religious beliefs, and social network influences, and the hidden curriculum of universities, the tacit values, dispositions, and social orientations transmitted through institutional culture, assessment practices, and interpersonal relationships rather than formal curricula (Tadesse & Magruder, 2023; Kentli, 2021).

The hidden curriculum concept, originally theorised by Jackson (1968) in the context of primary schooling, has been extended to higher education to describe how universities implicitly socialise students into particular orientations toward work, risk, authority, and innovation (Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker, & Gair, 2021; Sambell & McDowell, 2020). In the framework of entrepreneurship, Linan, Nabi, and Krueger (2021) argue that universities transmit hidden

messages about the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship through the values modelled by faculty, the design of assessment systems, and the informal culture of student life. Yet, empirical investigation of the hidden curriculum as a predictor of graduate entrepreneurial intentions remains sparse, particularly in West African university settings.

The theoretical architecture of this study is grounded in Bandura's (2021) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Lortie and Castogiovanni's (2015) revisitation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). SCT posits that individuals develop behavioural intentions through observational learning, vicarious reinforcement, and self-efficacy beliefs cultivated within social environments. TPB holds that intentions are shaped by attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Together, these frameworks provide a robust lens for theorising how sociocultural environments and institutional experiences interact to shape graduate entrepreneurial intentions. By anchoring the investigation of informal sociocultural factors and the hidden curriculum within these complementary theoretical traditions, this study advances a sociologically enriched model of entrepreneurial intention formation that goes beyond predominantly psychological or economic explanations.

Empirically, existing studies in Nigeria have examined the role of formal entrepreneurship education (Olokundun, Moses, Iyiola, Ibidunni, Ogbari, Fred, and Amahian, 2018), access to finance (Nwosu & Okonkwo, 2022), and individual personality traits (Ilori & Adekunle, 2021) in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. Far fewer studies have investigated the sociological dimensions of this process, and virtually none has systematically examined the combined influence of informal sociocultural factors and the hidden curriculum among

graduates in the Northwest zone. This study fills that gap by providing the first region-specific and multi-predictor quantitative analysis of these sociological antecedents of graduate entrepreneurial intentions in Northwest Nigeria. The significance of this study is threefold. First, it contributes new empirical evidence to the nascent but growing literature on the sociology of entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, it provides regionally specific data that can inform the design of culturally responsive entrepreneurship education policies in Nigerian higher education institutions. Third, it offers a theoretically integrated framework that bridges sociological and psychological explanations of entrepreneurial intention, addressing a recognised gap in entrepreneurship education literature (Linan & Fayolle, 2015).

Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the levels of sociocultural norms, family entrepreneurial background, religious and ethical beliefs, hidden curriculum exposure, and peer and social network influence among final-year undergraduates in Northwest Nigerian universities.
2. To examine the graduate entrepreneurial intention levels of final-year undergraduates across the Northwest States of Nigeria.
3. To determine the strength and direction of the relationship among informal sociocultural factors, hidden curriculum exposure, and graduate entrepreneurial intentions.
4. To assess the relative and combined predictive influence of informal sociocultural factors and hidden curriculum exposure on graduate

entrepreneurial intentions in Northwest Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived levels of sociocultural norms, family entrepreneurial background, religious and ethical beliefs, hidden curriculum exposure, peer and social network influence, and graduate entrepreneurial intentions among final-year undergraduates in Northwest Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship among informal sociocultural factors, hidden curriculum exposure, and graduate entrepreneurial intentions?
3. To what extent do informal sociocultural factors and hidden curriculum exposure jointly and individually predict graduate entrepreneurial intentions among Northwest Nigerian undergraduates?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between sociocultural norms and graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant relationship between family entrepreneurial background and graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

H₀₃: There is no statistically significant relationship between religious and ethical beliefs and graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

H₀₄: There is no statistically significant relationship between hidden curriculum exposure and graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

H₀₅: There is no statistically significant relationship between peer and social network influence and graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

H₀₆: Informal sociocultural factors and hidden curriculum exposure do not jointly and significantly predict graduate entrepreneurial intentions.

Methodology

This section presents the methodological framework adopted for the study. It outlines the research design, the target population and sampling procedure, the instrument used for data collection, and the analytical techniques employed. The approach was selected to ensure systematic, replicable measurement of the study variables and to enable valid testing of the stated hypotheses.

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. A quantitative approach was used because the study's objectives required the systematic numerical measurement of sociocultural variables, hidden curriculum exposure, and entrepreneurial intentions, as well as the testing of directional hypotheses and regression models (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A cross-sectional design was appropriate given the study's aim to capture a contemporaneous snapshot of final-year undergraduates' perceptions and intentions at a single point in time (Bryman, 2016). This design is consistent with established methodological precedents in the entrepreneurial intentions literature (Iakovleva, Kolvereid, & Stephan, 2021; Shirokova et al., 2016).

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all final-year undergraduate students enrolled in the public universities established across the Northwest

geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Final-year students were purposively targeted because they are at the most consequential career decision-making juncture of their undergraduate experience, making their entrepreneurial intentions particularly relevant and reliable indicators of post-graduation behaviour (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2022). A multi-stage stratified random sampling technique was employed. A university was identified as a stratum. Within each stratum, three academic faculties representing science, social sciences, and humanities were randomly selected. From the student registers of each selected faculty, systematic random sampling was used to identify individual respondents. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed (84 per institution), and 378 usable responses were returned, yielding an effective response rate of 90.0%.

Research Instrument

A structured self-report questionnaire was developed and validated for this study. The instrument comprised six sections corresponding to the five predictor variables comprising: Sociocultural Norms (SCN); Family Entrepreneurial Background (FEB); Religious and Ethical Beliefs (REB); Hidden Curriculum Exposure (HCE); and Peer and Social Network Influence (PSN), alongside the outcome variable of Graduate Entrepreneurial Intentions (GEI). Each subscale contained six items rated on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 5 (Strongly Agree). Item generation was guided by established constructs from the entrepreneurial intentions literature, including the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ; Linan & Fayolle, 2022), the Theory of Planned Behaviour scales (Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015), and the Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education scale (adapted from Kentli, 2021).

Content validity was established through expert review by a panel of five academics specialising in entrepreneurship education,

sociology of education, and educational measurement. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed item-by-item and at the scale level, with all items achieving $CVI \geq .80$, meeting the threshold recommended by Polit and Beck (2021). A pilot study was conducted with 45 final-year undergraduates from one institution not included in the main sample. Internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of $\alpha = .83$ (SCN), $.79$ (FEB), $.86$ (REB), $.81$ (HCE), $.88$ (PSN), and $.84$ (GEI). All values comfortably exceeded the widely accepted minimum threshold of $.70$ (Taber, 2018), confirming acceptable to good internal consistency across all subscales. Construct validity was further assessed through exploratory factor analysis, which confirmed the unidimensionality of each subscale and the discriminant validity of the six-factor structure.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis, were

computed for all variables. Normality of distributions was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test and inspection of skewness and kurtosis values. Given that subscale scores did not satisfy strict parametric normality assumptions (Shapiro-Wilk $p < .05$ for most subscales), non-parametric bivariate analysis was conducted using Spearman's rank-order correlation to test hypotheses H01 through H05. Multiple linear regression (ordinary least squares) was subsequently employed to address RQ3 and hypothesis H06, with GEI as the dependent variable, and SCN, FEB, REB, HCE, and PSN as simultaneous predictors. Prior to regression, assumptions of multi-collinearity (variance inflation factor < 10 ; tolerance $> .20$), homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test), independence of residuals (Durbin-Watson statistic), and linearity were verified and met. The significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$ for all inferential tests.

Results

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Sample ($N = 378$)

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	198	52.4
	Female	180	47.6
State of Origin	Sokoto	89	23.5
	Kano	76	20.1
	Zamfara	69	18.3
	Katsina	71	18.8
	Kaduna	73	19.3
Discipline	Sciences	142	37.6
	Social Sciences	119	31.5
	Humanities	117	30.9
Total		378	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the sample ($N = 378$). The sample was approximately evenly distributed by gender (52.4% male; 47.6% female). Respondents were distributed across the five states, with Sokoto contributing the largest sub-sample (23.5%) and Zamfara the smallest (18.3%). Disciplinary

representation was reasonably balanced, with sciences (37.6%), social sciences (31.5%), and humanities (30.9%) all represented.

Research question one: What are the perceived levels of sociocultural norms, family entrepreneurial background, religious and ethical beliefs, hidden curriculum exposure, peer and social network influence, and graduate entrepreneurial intentions among final-year undergraduates in Northwest Nigeria?

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables ($N = 378$)

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Sociocultural Norms (SCN)	3.61	0.72	-0.31	-0.14
Family Entrepreneurial Background (FEB)	3.48	0.81	-0.27	-0.09
Religious & Ethical Beliefs (REB)	3.74	0.68	-0.42	0.18
Hidden Curriculum Exposure (HCE)	3.29	0.76	-0.18	-0.22
Peer & Social Network Influence (PSN)	3.55	0.74	-0.36	0.11
Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI)	3.43	0.79	-0.24	-0.06

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all study variables. Among the predictor variables, Religious and Ethical Beliefs recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.68$), indicating strong perceived influence of religious and ethical frameworks on respondents' orientations.

Sociocultural Norms ($M = 3.61$) and Peer and Social Network Influence ($M = 3.55$) also recorded moderately high means, while Hidden Curriculum Exposure yielded the lowest predictor mean ($M = 3.29$), suggesting that tacit institutional entrepreneurial socialisation is perceived as less salient than community-based sociocultural influences. Graduate Entrepreneurial Intentions recorded a mean of $M = 3.43$ ($SD = 0.79$), indicating moderate overall entrepreneurial intention levels. Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within the acceptable range for moderate non-normality (-1.0 to $+1.0$), though the Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed statistically significant departures from strict normality, justifying the use of non-parametric bivariate tests.

Research question two: What is the relationship among informal sociocultural factors, hidden curriculum exposure, and graduate entrepreneurial intentions?

Table 3 Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Matrix for Study Variables ($N = 378$)

Variable	SCN	FEB	REB	HCE	PSN	GEI
1. Sociocultural Norms (SCN)	—					
2. Family Entrepreneurial Background (FEB)	.48***	—				
3. Religious & Ethical Beliefs (REB)	.39***	.43***	—			
4. Hidden Curriculum Exposure (HCE)	.31***	.27***	.29***	—		
5. Peer & Social Network Influence (PSN)	.52***	.46***	.38***	.34***	—	
6. Graduate Entrepreneurial Intention (GEI)	.61***	.57***	.49***	.44***	.63***	—

Table 3 presents the Spearman rank-order correlation matrix for all study variables. All five predictor variables were significantly and positively correlated with GEI at $p < .001$, providing support for the rejection of null hypotheses H01 through H05. The strongest bivariate associations with GEI were observed for Peer and Social Network Influence ($r_s = .63$) and Sociocultural Norms ($r_s = .61$), followed by Family Entrepreneurial Background ($r_s = .57$), Religious and Ethical Beliefs ($r_s = .49$), and Hidden Curriculum Exposure ($r_s = .44$). Among the predictor variables, the strongest inter-predictor correlation was between PSN and SCN ($r_s = .52$), and the weakest was between HCE and FEB ($r_s = .27$), indicating acceptable discriminant validity with no multicollinearity concerns at the bivariate level.

Multiple Linear Regression: Predictors of Graduate Entrepreneurial Intentions (RQ3)

1. To what extent do informal sociocultural factors and hidden curriculum exposure jointly and individually predict graduate entrepreneurial intentions among Northwest Nigerian undergraduates?

Table 4 Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Graduate Entrepreneurial Intentions

Predictor	B	SE B	B	t	p
Constant	0.61	0.18	—	3.39	.001
Sociocultural Norms (SCN)	0.29	0.07	.27	4.14	< .001
Family Entrepreneurial Background (FEB)	0.24	0.06	.24	4.00	< .001
Religious & Ethical Beliefs (REB)	0.19	0.07	.18	2.71	.007
Hidden Curriculum Exposure (HCE)	0.17	0.07	.16	2.43	.016
Peer & Social Network Influence (PSN)	0.31	0.07	.29	4.43	< .001
R² = .62; Adjusted R² = .61; F(5, 372) = 121.47, p < .001					

Table 4 presents the results of the simultaneous multiple linear regression model predicting GEI from the five independent variables. Prior to interpretation, regression assumptions were verified: VIF values ranged from 1.18 to 1.74 (all < 10), confirming the absence of multicollinearity; the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.93, indicating independence of residuals; the Breusch-Pagan test was non-significant ($p = .21$), confirming homoscedasticity; and residual plots confirmed approximate linearity. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F(5, 372) = 121.47, p < .001$) which explained 62% of the variance in GEI ($R^2 = .62$, adjusted $R^2 = .61$), providing strong support for the rejection of H06. All five predictors made statistically significant independent contributions to the model. Peer and Social Network Influence was the strongest individual predictor ($\beta = .29, p < .001$), followed by Sociocultural Norms ($\beta = .27, p < .001$), Family Entrepreneurial

Background ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), Religious and Ethical Beliefs ($\beta = .18, p = .007$), and Hidden Curriculum Exposure ($\beta = .16, p = .016$). All null hypotheses H01 through H06 were therefore rejected.

Discussion

This study set out to examine the sociological influence of both the informal sociocultural factors and hidden curriculum on graduate entrepreneurial intentions in Northwest Nigeria. The findings are theoretically significant, empirically robust, and practically consequential across three substantive themes.

The finding that peer and social network influence emerged as the strongest individual predictor of graduate entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = .29$) is consistent with Social Cognitive Theory's (Bandura, 2021) emphasis on vicarious learning and social modelling as primary mechanisms of behavioural intention formation.

In the Northwest Nigerian context, where formal institutional entrepreneurship education is limited in scope and quality (Olokundun, Moses, Iyiola, Ibidunni, Ogbari, Fred, & Amaihian, 2022), peer networks appear to function as critical compensatory socialisation mechanisms, transmitting entrepreneurial knowledge, reducing perceived risk through shared information, and providing social validation for entrepreneurial career aspirations. This finding aligns with Nabi, Linan, Fayolle, Krueger, and Walmsley's (2017) international review of entrepreneurship education outcomes, which identified social learning environments as consistently stronger predictors of entrepreneurial intention than formal instructional content alone. Intervention strategies that leverage peer entrepreneurship clubs, alumni mentorship networks, and inter-university venture competitions are therefore likely to yield significant returns.

Sociocultural norms were the second strongest predictor of GEI ($\beta = .27$), confirming that subjective social norms constitute a primary determinant of entrepreneurial intentions (Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015). In the Northwest zone however, the interpretation of this finding requires cultural nuance. The region's predominantly Islamic cultural framework has historically valorised trade and commerce through the Quranic tradition of halal business, while simultaneously expressing reservations about interest-based financial instruments and speculative ventures (Aliyu & Isah, 2020). The positive direction of the SCN-GEI association suggests that, on balance, community-level cultural norms in Northwest Nigeria are currently supportive of entrepreneurial intentions, a finding that challenges earlier deficit narratives about the entrepreneurial inhibitory effects of Northern Nigerian cultural traditions (Abubakar & Mitra, 2021). This has important implications for entrepreneurship educators: rather than treating

local sociocultural norms as obstacles to overcome, programmes should strategically leverage these pro-entrepreneurial cultural resources.

The statistically significant positive association between hidden curriculum exposure and graduate entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = .16$, $r_s = .44$) provides the first empirical support in the Nigerian context for the theoretical argument that universities transmit tacit entrepreneurial socialisation alongside their formal curricula (Tadesse & Magruder, 2023; Linan, Nabi, & Krueger, 2021). However, the lower mean score for HCE ($M = 3.29$) relative to other predictor variables suggests that Northwest Nigerian universities are not yet optimally leveraging their hidden curriculum as a vehicle for entrepreneurial socialisation. The institutional cultures of many Nigerian universities, characterised by hierarchical authority structures, rote-learning assessment cultures, and limited exposure to entrepreneurial role models among academic staff, may be transmitting mixed or ambivalent tacit messages about entrepreneurship as a career pathway. University administrators and curriculum policymakers should therefore give deliberate attention to the design of institutional cultures that model risk-taking, reward innovative thinking, and celebrate entrepreneurial achievement.

Conclusion

This study has provided the first comprehensive, multi-predictor quantitative investigation of the sociological antecedents of graduate entrepreneurial intentions in Northwest Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that informal sociocultural factors and the hidden curriculum of universities together explain 62% of the variance in graduate entrepreneurial intentions, substantially exceeding the explanatory power of formal entrepreneurship education variables

reported in prior Nigerian studies. Peer and social network influence, sociocultural norms, and family entrepreneurial background are particularly powerful predictors that underscore in the context the primacy of social learning environments in entrepreneurial intention formation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Nigerian university administrators across the Northwest zone should deliberately redesign the hidden curriculum of their institutions to transmit pro-entrepreneurial tacit messages, including recruiting entrepreneurially experienced faculty, restructuring assessment to reward creative problem-solving, and establishing visible institutional celebrations of students' entrepreneurial achievements.
2. The National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) should design and fund structured peer entrepreneurship mentorship programmes that pair final-year undergraduates with successful graduate entrepreneurs from within their own sociocultural communities, leveraging the strong peer influence effect documented in this study.
3. State governments and the North West Development Commission should establish community-level entrepreneurship ecosystems, including Islamic-compliant, microfinance facilities, business development centres, and cooperative enterprise hubs, that align entrepreneurial support structures with prevailing sociocultural norms and religious ethical frameworks.

4. Entrepreneurship education curriculum designers should explicitly incorporate modules on leveraging family and community social capital for new venture creation, enabling graduates to translate their existing sociocultural networks into entrepreneurial resources.

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