Title: A Contextual Understanding of Youth of Entrepreneurship Education Outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa.

Abstract

Prompted by growing emphasis, particularly in Africa where poverty and conflict have been associated with high youth unemployment, to use entrepreneurship education to influence young people’s post-study intentions, this paper articulates the effect of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention amongst students and graduates from two higher education institutions affected by the on-going conflict in northern Nigeria. By relying on systematic analysis following semi-structured interviews, the findings showed that newly acquired knowledge and skills in use of market intelligence, business plan writing and record-keeping were not only linked with entrepreneurial intentions, but it also emerged that the volatile context of the business environment influenced strategic decisions related to new business growth and survival. Future research and policy implications were considered based on the findings.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Intention, New Venture Creation, Conflict, African Youths, Sub-Saharan African
1.0 Summary of entrepreneurship education research and challenges

Several decades of research interest in entrepreneurship education (henceforward EE) has evolved in remarkably diverse forms. Much of this interest is centred around EE development (Fayolle, 2018; Bae, Qian, Miao & Fiet, 2014; Bèchard & Gregoire, 2005; Kuratko, 2005; Klandt, 2004; Katz, 2003), the characteristics and challenges (Hameed & Irfan, 2019; Kuratko & Morris, 2018; Greene, Katz & Johannisson, 2004), and the way EE is taught in schools (Fox, Pittaway & Uzuegbunam, 2018; Neck & Corbett, 2018; Pittaway & Thorpe, McMullen & Dimov, 2013; 2012; Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). Some have approached research in EE from a viewpoint that considers its influence on different entrepreneurial outcomes including entrepreneurial intentions (e.g., Maresch, Harms, Kailer, & Wimmer-Wurm, 2016; Elert, Andersson, & Wennberg, 2015; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Laspita, Breugst, Heblich, & Patzelt, 2012; Jones & Matlay, 2011; Oosterbeek, van Praag, & Ijsselstein, 2010, Pittaway & Cope 2007) and entrepreneurial behaviour (e.g., Nyello, Kalufya, Rengua, Nsolezi & Ngirwa 2015; O’Connor, 2013; Valliere & Peterson, 2009; Udefuna, Akalafu & Asogwa, 2013; Ediagbonya, 2013; Ahmed & Saidu, 2014; Bird, Schjoedt & Liu, 2012).

Whereas prior studies have categorised entrepreneurial behaviour into four main dimensions namely: planning, establishing legitimacy, resources and market behaviour (Gartner & Carter, 2003). Factors, such as, thinking about a business idea, skills in writing a business plan, using market intelligence and forecasting, and managing business relationships, which are developed from exposure to EE, are also important entrepreneurial attributes in the firm-creation process. The antecedents to these attributes are opportunity recognition and exploitation, which are critical to the early-stage phenomena of the entrepreneurial process (Shane & Venkataramam, 2000; Gartner, 1988). The knowledge and skills that come from education, training, and experience, which are human capital components that have been associated with EE, are
important social dimensions to the entrepreneurial process of opportunity recognition and exploitation. Although the relationship between various human capital components and the social process of opportunity recognition and exploitation is scarce in the entrepreneurship literature, there is however a growing number of scholars that have examined how a variety of entrepreneurial outcomes, such as, becoming a nascent entrepreneur, new venture creation, and new venture performance and survival can be predicted from a human capital perspective. In his study of nascent entrepreneurs’ human capital influence on the merits of the opportunities they pursued, Dimov (2010, p.1123) found that industry experience had a “direct positive effect” on the emergence of new ventures.

Prior to that, Katz & Gartner (1988) viewed human capital as a ‘resource for entrepreneurs’, which involves skills acquired from previous educational and work experience. As resources, formal and informal education (e.g., university education work experience) and networking have been employed as the concepts of human and social capital used to establish the extent to which the accumulation of tacit and explicit knowledge as well as the cognitive skills used by nascent entrepreneurs were useful in opportunity recognition and exploitation in a way not immediately obvious to others (Davidsson and Honig, 2003). Similarly, by integrating results of previous studies of human capital research in entrepreneurship, Unger, Rauch, Frese & Rosenbusch (2011) linked certain human capital attributes, particularly knowledge and skills, to entrepreneurial success. Equally, a number of studies with EE focus (e.g., Anosike, 2019; Martin, McNally & Kay, 2013; Mosey & Wright, 2007; Bosma, van Praag, Thurik, & de Wit, 2004) have shown that education (whether formal, informal or non-formal), skills, training and experience were investments that positively influenced the ability of entrepreneurs to make better business decisions in different situations and business contexts. This positive influence is true for both nascent and established entrepreneurs, as well as in conflict situations where
the uncertainty and volatility of the business environment makes the acquisition of the resources (e.g., knowledge, capital) for market entry far less predictable and difficult (Honig, 2001).

Apart from human capital perspective, studies have highlighted the effect of EE on the ability of SME owner-managers to influence the social and economic impact that occurs at organisational and regional levels through job creation (e.g., Lindh & Thorgren, 2016; Schmidt & Molkentin, 2015; Harrington, 2015; Leitch, Hazlett & Pittaway, 2012; Tamásy, 2006; Fritsch & Mueller, 2004; Armington & Acs, 2002; Laukkanen, 2000). This impact can occur as a direct result of individual creativity and innovation, which arises from how entrepreneurs are taught and learn in a variety of contexts (Jones, Penaluna & Pittaway, 2014). Also, EE has been linked with the individual creativity and innovation within firms closely associated with the emerging subfield of corporate entrepreneurship (CE). Corporate entrepreneurship describes entrepreneurial behaviour within well-established organisations (Stopford & Baden-Fuller, 1994), whereby the emphasis is on whether today’s business students are sufficiently equipped with the right kind of learning, knowledge and skills to embrace the disruptive innovation happening in today’s world of business through exposure to EE in higher education institutions (Kuratko & Morris, 2018).

Fostering innovation and creativity is not an experience limited to business students in higher education institutions where EE has been shown to influence a wide range of entrepreneurial outcomes (Nabi, Liñán, Fayolle, Krueger, & Walmsley, 2017). There is emerging research (e.g., Gorlewicz & Jayaram, 2020; Hylton, Miskesell, Yoder, & LeBlanc, 2020; Roy, Schlosser, & Pasek, 2020) clustered around the usefulness of EE in modelling higher education curricula targeted at STEM students, particularly in engineering. In addition, there are many
cross-sectoral examples in innovation-driven countries - including the United States (e.g., Solomon, 2007; Katz 2003; Solomon, Duffy & Tarabishy, 2002), Scandinavian countries (e.g., Zaring, Gifford & McKelvey, 2019; Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006), and the United Kingdom (enterprise education is used alongside EE) where EE pedagogies have been used to educate students and small business owners (Jones & Iredale, 2010; Birdthistle, Hynes, Fleming, 2007; Raffo, Lovatt, Banks, O’Connor, 2000).

Despite these significant scholarly efforts, research in EE remains “fragmented” (Fox et al., 2018, p. 62). The field still suffers from a lack of “theoretical legitimacy” (Fayolle, Verzat & Wapshott, 2016, p. 2) and ‘conceptual clarity’, which are important benchmarks for a more focused understanding of the concept (Liguori, Winkler, Winkel, Marvel, Keels, van Gelderen & Noyes, 2018). This situation often renders EE concept nebulous. Thus, making it difficult to clearly define its boundary with other disciplines with which it overlaps. In fact, educators and practitioners often have trouble identifying the distinct contributions of EE as a concept to the broader domains of entrepreneurship, management and education and precisely what areas of research and practice to focus on (Neck & Corbett, 2018). This has implications for a host of other concerns including whether the emphasis should be on how EE is taught in schools, how EE outcomes should be measured, or both (Morris & Liguori, 2016).

To compound matters, the social and economic roles of EE for individuals and society as well for higher education institutions are yet to be ironed out. Coupled with this is the related issue of how EE should be systematised as an instructional tool in schools and higher education institutions, the content and how this content is to be delivered as well as how to structure EE interventions to align with the needs of individual learners (Béchard & Grégoire, 2005). Perhaps, as a sequel to Wilson (2008), these issues prompted the European Commission to
publish in 2013 a comprehensive study (available in 21 languages) on EE intended to serve as a good practice guide for educators across Europe\textsuperscript{1}. A comprehensive EE guide for educators and practitioners is necessary but insufficient in providing the scope and diversity of evidence needed to advance knowledge and understanding in this field. One of the main issues is concerned with the current repository of EE knowledge, which is typically heavily dominated by insights obtained mainly from developed economies. Indeed, seen from a broader viewpoint of the rigorous scientific debates that have spawned a vast EE literature, particularly in Europe and the United States, research into how EE influences different entrepreneurial outcomes from the perspective of developing economies by comparison pales in significance.

This view is also shared by others (e.g., Huang-Saad, Bodnar & Carberry, 2020; Gaddeors & Anderson, 2017; Nabi et al., 2017; Walter & Block, 2016; Leitch, Hazlett & Pittaway, 2012) who have argued that available evidence in EE research does not provide one with the sufficient intellectual space to understand how EE outcomes are borne out in other relevant contexts. Retrospectively, Fayolle (2018) echoed a similar concern by urging researchers to show how EE can be used to produce different set of entrepreneurial outcomes “in a wide range of contexts” (p.698). This does not to imply that existing studies have not produced a robust set of knowledge that linked EE to different entrepreneurial outcomes. However, EE research from developing country contexts, particularly learning environments in SSA affected by conflict, may hold rich boundary-spanning insights vital to increase knowledge and understanding of the effectiveness of EE. Taken together, what is clearly missing from existing body of research is lack of diversity of the evidence to advance theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of EE.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between EE and students' entrepreneurial intention within a conflict-torn context of northern Nigeria. Generally speaking, studies examining how EE affects different entrepreneurial outcomes either during conflict or in post-conflict environments are very rare, perhaps as a result of the environmental difficulty and hazards associated with obtaining data. Notwithstanding, conflict environments can present unique and powerful new experimental settings in which to advance research understanding about entrepreneurship in general (see Bruck, Naude, & Verwimp, 2011; 2013; Bruton, Ketchen & Ireland, 2013; Bruton, Ahlstrom & Obloj, 2008; Ireland, Reutzel & Webb, 2005), and entrepreneurial learning in particular (Bullough, Renko & Myatt, 2013). Apart from this, the focus on Africa’s conflict environment is timely in relation to this year’s theme: ‘Broadening our Sight’ - by using knowledge creation and dissemination as a way to address some of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. Youth unemployment and poverty are antecedents to conflict in Africa. Conflict has wider implications for the shifting demographics of Africa’s workforce population in terms of large cohort of unemployed and unproductive youths. So, the pressing challenge has to be how can EE act as accelerant to increase the productivity and self-employment prospects of Africa’s youth population, which is predicted to exceed the combined population of the global workforce by 2100 (International Monetary Fund, 2015).

Following a qualitative research inquiry, it was found that newly acquired knowledge and skills in analysis of market intelligence and use of business plan were not only linked with entrepreneurial intentions, particularly among male graduates, but their strategic use of market intelligence constituted the vital momentum for the growth and survival of new ventures in the region. Based on these findings, the paper makes two important contributions to EE research. Firstly, the study uses propositions and evidence to introduce new perspectives that broaden
knowledge and understanding of the role of context in the relationship between EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes. This is important given the absence of knowledge about the effects of teaching entrepreneurship courses in conflict-torn environments of SSA. Secondly, the findings support several distinct yet related entrepreneurial skills that must be present for entrepreneurial success in any type of business environment – although from the context of a conflict-torn SSA the use of these skills varies depending on market intelligence and the volatility of the business environment. Thus, by delineating the boundaries of how acquisition and use of these skills are directly linked with EE in the entrepreneurial process, this study builds on the emerging body of evidence (e.g., Rauch & Hulsink, 2015; Elert et al., 2014; Leitch, Hazlett & Pittaway, 2012; Nabi & Liñán, 2011) that highlights the importance of context in the relationships between EE and entrepreneurial outcomes.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: section two summarises research in EE and entrepreneurial outcomes. Within this an attempt is made for the first time to connect the intricate dots under which EE interacts with the contextual dynamics of learning environments torn apart by political conflict and entrepreneurial intentions from the perspective of SSA. Section four explains the inevitable methodological challenges encountered in the course of undertaking this study as well as justification of the methods employed. This is followed by section five, which presents a synthesis of the findings. The paper concludes with research and policy implications. But first, it is important to provide a brief contextual analysis that considers Africa’s complex demographic challenges vis-à-vis their implications for the productivity of the region’s workforce.
2.0 Contextual analysis

At 1.2 billion, young people aged 15-24 years old make up 16% of the global population. This will rise to more than 1.3 billion by 2030 – target year for attaining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). Of this population, about 251 million young people are currently in Africa. Of the nine countries that will make up a significant percentage of the global youth population by 2050, six are in Africa including Nigeria (currently the seventh most populous globally) predicted to rise to third place surpassed only by India and China\(^2\). The age structure of any society and the relative size of its youth cohort are crucial determinants in the size, growth and productivity of the labour force. This puts pressure on the economy in terms of job creation. As a result, governments are predictably nervous about exponential growth in the youth population. From an employment standpoint, they must find sustainable ways of providing education and training to empower young people through livelihood means. At the intersection of growth trends and related challenges in the global youth population is Africa’s demographic transition.

With a median age of less than 20 years compared to the global median age of about 29.6 years old (2015 figures), young people make up more than 65% of Africa’s population. By 2050, unlike in any other region, Africa’s youth population will have nearly doubled to about 456 million representing more than 40% of the region’s population. Growth in the youth population creates an opportunity for a demographic dividend through investment in human capital, thereby leading to higher productivity. Incremental growth in the productivity of Africa’s labour force provides opportunities for savings, investments, and sustained rapid organisational and economic growth (Filmer & Fox, 2014). As the main supplier of workforce

\(^2\) Estimation is based on the revised 2019 population records prepared and published by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available via: https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/
population, it means that Africa’s young population offers the opportunity for organisational and societal value, which can translate into a demographic dividend.

On the flip side, exceptionally large cohorts of unemployed youth population with low productivity creates an incentive for social unrest, political violence and conflict (Urdal, 2006), which has implications for organisational value creation and output. Large youth population with low productivity presents organisations with additional challenges in terms of lack of adequacy and access to a skilled workforce. There is a skills mismatch between higher education provision and labour market needs in the region. If anything, the skills possessed by many young graduates in Africa do not adequately prepare them for the frequently evolving demands of the labour market in which powerful forces, such as, disruptive technologies and socioeconomic shifts are challenging long-established organisational assumptions and management norms, thereby, forcing organisations to constantly innovate, upskill and reskill their workforce.

Simultaneously, the region must find ways of dealing with the worsening depletion of skilled human resources due to conflict, emigration and brain drain. Brain drain is particularly more acute in SSA from where the migration of young and educated professionals to OECD countries is projected to reach 34million by 2050 (International Monetary Fund, 2016). Contrary to mixed views (e.g., Benedict & Ukpere, 2012; Easterly & Nyarko, 2008; Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2001), loss of highly skilled professionals has wider human capital implications at both national and organisational levels. Also, because differences in income and living standards are the primary drivers of brain drain, thousands of African students emigrate yearly because of better working conditions, but mostly due to deteriorating higher education infrastructures in their home countries. More than in any other region, young people
in Africa faces persistent institutional obstacles in education that make it impossible to escape unemployment and poverty.

A recent summary of World Bank’s future economic prospects for the region suggests a bleak future for young people’s productivity unless serious steps are taken to improve education and health infrastructures. For instance, prevailing institutional deficiencies in both the health and education sectors that give rise to a host of other debilitating social conditions including malnutrition, diseases, and high child mortality, mean that there is a significant risk that a girl child born in Africa today may not survive beyond 5 yrs old. Even if the child reaches school age, there is a further risk that she may not have access to early education and the right nutritional support to complete the preschool to secondary education full cycle before her future is blighted by early marriage due to prevailing cultural norms. Also, the time she actually spends in school may not really be of any practical benefit to her depending on the teaching personnel and the quality of education provision. By the time she reaches young adult, she probably carries with her the lasting legacy from her childhood and adult education, which limits her productivity, particularly the cognitive skills needed to make meaningful social and economic contribution to the society as an adult.

It is therefore vital to strengthen the quality of educational systems in Africa to ensure that young people are not only productive and retained in gainful employment with decent wages, but also are supported and encouraged to develop an entrepreneurial drive through human capital formation. Human capital has been used in entrepreneurship research to represent the combination and varying knowledge, skills and competencies that individuals can bring to create organisational and societal value through job creation (Marvel, Davis & Sproul, 2016). Specifically, formation of human capital attributes, through the medium of EE, can indeed lead
to success in the early stages of entrepreneurship career. A few studies (e.g., Dimov, 2010; Ulvenblad, Berggren & Winborg 2011) have provided empirical pathways whereby early-stage entrepreneurs with exposure to EE have relied on their human capital attributes to eliminate initial barriers to entrepreneurial success including the Liability of Newness (LoN) – which arises due to lack of track record and legitimacy that nascent entrepreneurs face (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Stinchcombe, 1965). It an attempt to use the legislation to address some these socio-economic concerns, the Nigerian government along with other governments in SSA, placed greater emphasis on developing educational programmes and schemes that support and encourage young people with the knowledge and skills to start their own business through EE. However, the immediate challenge is exploring how a set of entrepreneurial competencies can be fostered, through the medium of EE, amongst a disadvantaged youth population in a learning context with weak educational infrastructures and failing socio-economic conditions made worse by conflict.

3.0 EE and entrepreneurial outcomes – summary of evidence

Studies that have examined EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes show both positive and negative relationships. For example, a meta-analysis of 73 studies by Bae, Qian, Miao & Fiet (2014) yielded mixed results in that they found a significant, although a small, correlation between EE and entrepreneurial intentions. But after controlling for pre-education entrepreneurial intentions, they concluded that there was no relationship between EE and post-education entrepreneurial intentions. In contrast, following a comprehensive analysis of EE projects in 400 higher education institutions across 70 countries, Venevenhoven & Liguori (2013) concluded there was a significant positive relationship between EE and students’ entrepreneurial intentions. By relying on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and modified instruments from entrepreneurial intentions (EIs), entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) and
entrepreneurial outcome expectations (EOE) concept, they reported that this significance occurred and remained consistent across multiple regions including Africa, as students transformed to entrepreneurs.

This mirrors Fayolle et al., (2006), which reported that EE could have a strong positive effect on some students’ attitudes towards entrepreneurial behaviour depending on their entrepreneurial experience or level of exposure and awareness of EE. Attitude refers to the extent to which an individual put either a positive or a negative value on his or her ability to become an entrepreneur (Liñán & Chen, 2009). Since attitude is about one’s perception of having the attributes or capacity to fulfil firm-creation behaviours, it is similar to the idea of self-efficacy originally mooted by Bandura (1982; 1997). Regardless of whether or not the business environment is stable, proper exposure and awareness of EE can enhance students’ perceived entrepreneurial self-efficacy as they journey through further and higher education, given that exposure to EE helps to ease the anxiety often associated with autonomy in the early stages of an entrepreneurship career (Bullough, Renko & Myatt, 2013). Since autonomy and self-efficacy may be considered as cognates of entrepreneurial attributes, the question then arises as to what constitutes entrepreneurial attributes? How are these linked with EE and EE outcomes to translate into entrepreneurial intention and firm-creation behaviour?

By relying on different entrepreneurial attributes as unit of analysis, Nyello, Kalufya, Renga, Nsolezi & Ngirwa (2015) found a strong relationship between EE and entrepreneurial behaviour amongst Tanzanian students in higher education. These attributes included ‘need for achievement’, ‘need for autonomy’, ‘creativity’, ‘risk taking’, ‘drive’ and ‘determination’. In their case, there were variations in the degree to which EE could be said to have influenced the different entrepreneurial attributes associated with entrepreneurial behaviour. With regards to
the need for autonomy, their study revealed that there was a slight difference between higher education graduates who were exposed to EE and those who did not study entrepreneurship. The observed positive difference in the entrepreneurial behaviour attribute of autonomy may be linked to the students’ background prior to their study of entrepreneurship. In addition, von Graevenitz, Harhoff & Weber (2010, p. 1) found that EE was essential to students’ awareness of their “entrepreneurial aptitude” depending on their orientation, motivation and individual circumstance. Whilst exposure to EE seems to be associated with increased antecedents to entrepreneurial behaviour (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Rauch & Hulsink, 2015; Schmidt & Molkentin, 2015), the success or failure in the process of new venture creation were not necessarily associated with EE (Athayde, 2009; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Galloway & Brown, 2002). In contrast, by employing the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Rauch & Hulsink (2015) found that students that were exposed to EE displayed an “antecedent of entrepreneurial behaviour” closely associated with higher entrepreneurial intentions and new business creation unlike students that were enrolled in a different programme without the EE component (p.1).

As relevant and as useful as these studies may be, it seems obvious that outcomes from EE interventions are not necessarily the same across all contexts. In their analysis of how EE is experienced in different learning environments, Walter & Dohse (2012) argue that establishing how EE influences different entrepreneurial outcomes can be difficult to establish, as outcomes vary substantially across individual, institutional and regional levels. Irrespective of this variation, much would depend on how EE is taught (e.g., experiential or active mode whereby business simulation including business accelerator programmes and incubation are used versus passive mode whereby only theory and lectures are used), by whom, the learning environment and the specific learning conditions under which individuals encounter EE as an intervention.
Therefore, context seems to be an important determinant in establishing the relationship between EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes. Of relevance are learning environments affected by conflict, which may hold unique boundary-spanning insights into EE outcomes very different from stable and conflict-free contexts. For this reason, it makes sense to explore the role of contexts in determining EE outcomes.

3.1 Towards understanding the role of context in EE outcomes

Although much has been written about the relationship between EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes in a wide range of contexts, not much is known about how context affects these relationships. Only very few studies (e.g., Egerová, Eger & Mičík, 2017; Maresch et al., 2016; Naia et al., 2015) have recently mooted the relevance of context in the relationships between EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes. The issues addressed in this section are concerned with how context (e.g., learning and/or business environment) may interfere with EE as a determining influence on entrepreneurial outcomes, and how through other contextual factors unrelated to EE, people display entrepreneurial propensity in their decision-making. Generating entrepreneurial outcomes is not a straightforward process related to teaching entrepreneurship. Rather, entrepreneurial outcomes are governed by powerful and mutually reinforcing dynamics, which involve both human and social capital agencies, and many other factors including the contexts that shape and regulate people’s intentions, actions and behaviours. As such, disentangling the various contextual factors (e.g., learning conditions, mode of delivery, instructor) that might determine and produce different layers of entrepreneurial outcomes, even amongst a homogenous group (e.g., students) that have been exposed to EE is a difficult and complex process.
One immediate difficulty relates to the extent to which various contextual factors interact with EE to influence students’ post-study intentions, attitudes and behaviours (Maresch et al., 2016). Coupled with this is the fact that context, depending on the learning conditions and the nature of the business environment, may either enhance or retard the extent to which EE influences particular set of outcomes including entrepreneurial behaviour (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). For instance, learning environments affected by conflict also carry a risk of high volatility in the business environment including the possibility of resource scarcity and environmental constraints (e.g., lack of employment), which could threaten the stability of people’s livelihoods thereby forcing them to depend on government handouts for survival. Thus, in such a context, it may be possible to use EE to influence the entrepreneurial intentions or behaviours of those directly or indirectly affected by the conflict. Because learning is a social process, depending on the nature and mode of EE delivery, training of entrepreneurs in that context could help to foster a mindset that is orientated towards entrepreneurship instead of reliance on government subsidies, which in most cases are barely enough to meet individual needs.

Also, support for entrepreneurship training and entrepreneurial skills acquisition could help to facilitate positive group dynamics in a way otherwise might not be possible. Evidence (e.g., Brixiova, Ncube & Bicaba; 2015; Honig, 2001) has shown that in conflict-affected or even post-conflict contexts with on-going social and economic upheavals, entrepreneurship activity has helped to increase pro-social behaviour, resolve in-group dilemmas, and minimise hostility and conflictual group relationships in those environments. For instance, in an analysis of entrepreneurial skills and opportunities for youth start-up creation, Brixiova et al., (2015) found that entrepreneurship activities enhanced positive intergroup interaction between young and adult entrepreneurs in a post-Apartheid Swaziland. Similarly, Honig (2001) uses the situation in West Bank and Gaza to demonstrate that small business owners (rather than large
firms) actually benefit most from formal entrepreneurial education and training during periods of economic and political upheavals.

However, in conflict-torn and even in post-conflict learning environments, the main challenge for educators is not education provision, but the ability to modify and adapt the pedagogies and contents in a way that they satisfy the specific needs of learners in that context. Adapting EE programme and delivery modes to suit specific needs of learner communities in contexts affected by violence and conflict must therefore be a prime focus. Learner communities in conflict-torn or post-conflict environments have unique needs (e.g., the psychological trauma of conflict may interfere with their cognitive ability) that may be different from learners in contexts where the learning environment is stable and more predictable. “As a contextually determined concept”, Egerová et al., (2017, p. 1) believe that EE programme could be modified to meet the specific needs of particular learner groups regardless of the environmental constraints. This implies that the design, delivery and the evaluation of EE “cannot be viewed as a one size fits all” (Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007, p. 400). If this is the case, then in contexts in which learning conditions are affected by conflict, then it makes sense to customise EE in a way that takes into account the context-specific needs of learners in that context (Naia et al., 2015; van der Sluis, van Praag & Vijverberg, 2005).

Customisation of EE programmes is more likely than not to reduce the complications associated with establishing the specific entrepreneurial outcomes that may arise from EE intervention. This assumption is especially relevant to contexts that are particularly prone to resource scarcity and environmental constraints, such as, in northern Nigeria where mass youth unemployment and poverty have led to violence and young people’s vulnerability to political conflict led by the Islamist group Boko Haram (Usman, 2009). To a great extent, scarcity of
resources in any learning context, not just in Nigeria, can generally make learning and education provision particularly challenging. In addition, conflict environments have the potential to reduce the ability of individuals to develop the cognitive competencies needed in order to recognise and exploit opportunities. Hence, there is a possibility that learners in such environments may be more motivated by the tendency and greater need for survival, rather than for profit motives in an entrepreneurial sense.

As an idea, opportunity recognition and exploitation in an entrepreneurial sense is closely associated with the Schumpeterian notion of entrepreneurship, whereby the attraction of disruptive and high-value innovation pulls the individual into seeking and exploiting opportunity for profit motives (Bird, Schjoedt, & Baum, 2012). By contrast, regardless of the nature of learning interventions, individuals are far more likely than not to exhibit survivalist entrepreneurial tendency when faced with the necessity to respond to an immediate and persistent threat (e.g., resource scarcity and environmental constraint) to their livelihoods. Put differently, the idea of survivalist entrepreneurship is in many ways associated with the concept of ‘entrepreneurial bricolage’ (Davidsson, Baker & Senyard, 2017), which explains how individuals utilise the resources at hand in the midst of environmental and resource constraints (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

Thus, to sum up, regardless of learning interventions, it seems that people’s entrepreneurial propensity may be influenced by either opportunity-driven or by necessity-driven motives depending on the context and the dynamics of the business environment. Whereas people in learning environments affected by conflict could easily be influenced, through the medium of EE, to exhibit entrepreneurial intention. Equally, and paradoxically, it seems possible that
entrepreneurial motive amongst the same homogeneous group may not arise merely as a result of EE intervention, but influenced by other contextual factors, such as, survival instincts.

4.0 Methodology

Evaluation of the effect of EE on students’ post-study intentions in any learning environment affected by conflict will impose some methodological challenges. These challenges will vary in relation to the dynamics of the research environment and the motivations of the researcher. In the course of undertaking this study, some methodological challenges were encountered given the political conflict in northern Nigeria. First, for people’s safety, travel restrictions to the conflict area made it somewhat difficult to work closely with educators to recruit participants. Secondly, the stress, anxiety and the psychological trauma that came with the political conflict in the region limited the ability of participants to fully articulate the effect of the learning intervention on their post-learning career motivations. In some cases, the conflict caused some participants to abandon their participation in learning, thereby making it difficult for them to share their experiences. However, a series of interventions were devised to tackle these challenges. Because the sampled population belonged to closely-knit communities, it was possible to rely on personal networks to recruit participants. Secondly, to incentivise and sustain participation during data collection, group-based social activities (e.g., puzzle games) were organised to keep participants engaged. These strategies had a positive influence on participants’ disposition and psychological wellbeing through the three-month data collection period.

Against this backdrop, snowball sampling technique was used to contact several students and graduates who took part in an EE intervention programme implemented in two federal Universities in northern Nigeria. Out of the 25 potential participants contacted, 10 fully
participated in this study. In keeping with confidentiality, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants after which they were given an informed consent form to complete and return. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bullough, Renko & Myatt, 2014) undertaken within conflict or post-conflict environments, data was collected using exploratory semi-structured interview questions. Given that some of the participants were still dealing with the psychological trauma of loss and devastation, semi-structured interviews were very effective in gathering their experiences throughout the intervention period. Altogether, the interviews lasted for thirty-five minutes on average and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Following existing studies (e.g., Souitaris, Zerbinati & Al-Laham, 2007), participants were asked questions related to their employment status, income level and their business planning and market analytic skills (Conant, Mokwa & Varadarajan, 1990), as well as whether or not they had used these skills prior to and following their participation in the EE programme.

Also, they were asked questions related to access to financial help, and how much capital they had accumulated following their participation in the programme (see Batjargal & Liu, 2004; Kim, 2006). Furthermore, since most of them showed interest in ownership of micro to small business, participants were asked whether or not they had been influenced to start their own business as a result of their experience of the EE programme. Finally, the participants were invited to provide information related to their business including their use of knowledge and skills either before or after the programme. To protect their identities, their names have been anonymised and designated as P1- P10. The preliminary insights from the interviews are presented below using thematic analysis.
5.0 Analysis and Summary of Findings

From the interviews, it was obvious that participants believed that their interest in starting and wishing to own a business was directly related to their exposure to the EE intervention in their respective institutions. Sub-themes, such as, ‘business plan writing’, ‘analysis of market intelligence’, ‘managing relationships’, and ‘record keeping’ were frequently used by the participants to define the specific knowledge and skills they have acquired from the EE programme, which in many ways influenced their firm-creation behaviours. In summing up their overall experience and mood, P1 affirmed: “Before the entrepreneurship program I did not have much knowledge about business. After the entrepreneurship education training, I know better how to plan and invest my money. I know better now how to deal with companies who supply our goods”. In addition, it would seem that participants perceived that they have increased their self-confidence, particularly in relation to how to exploit the conflict situation in the region in an attempt to survive. For instance, remarkably, participants explained how the knowledge and skills in analysis of market intelligence was deployed effectively to justify strategic and future business decisions. Thus, as this participant observed:

“I supply and sell cold drinks in Maiduguri. In the next three or four years, because of the insurgency [i.e., conflict] in the city, I want to open new branches in Kano [about 600 kilometres from Maiduguri], in Yobe [about 160 kilometres from Maiduguri]. I will have another in may be Bauchi [more than 450 kilometres from Maiduguri], which is somewhat further away. I hope to employ like 50 more people in the next four years. I have also visited some places in Jigawa [more than 550 kilometres from Maiduguri] and I can see it is especially hot [i.e., the weather condition] at some points of the year, so it is a very good place to sell cold drinks” (P8).

This resonates with Bruck et al., (2013), which found that conflict contexts may either create or hinder the opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial attribute (e.g., risk-taking propensity) or even exploit the opportunity created by the conflict. As important social dimensions to the early features of the entrepreneurial process, opportunity recognition and exploitation are associated with the human capital components of education, knowledge and skills. Thus, on the one hand, it was obvious that the participant’s decision to take advantage of the opportunities presented elsewhere was directly linked to his knowledge and ability to use...
market intelligence to assess the business environment before making strategic business choices.

Interestingly, some previous studies (e.g., Unger et al., 2011; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Demo, 2010) have linked opportunity recognition and exploitation with the human capital attributes of education, knowledge and skills, which are seen as important determinants of entrepreneurial success. However, the reference to ‘insurgency’ is perhaps an indication that strategic business choices that affect the success and growth of the new ventures could also have been influenced by contextual factors unrelated to the knowledge and skills gained by participating in the EE intervention. In other words, the entrepreneurial attribute of good decision-making skills exhibited by P8 may not have been as a direct result of his exposure to the entrepreneurship training per se. Given the perceived challenges presented by the conflict in Maiduguri, the choice to expand to other locations could have arisen through the combined agency of the knowledge and skills gained from his EE exposure and his survival instinct. Thus, this is consistent with other studies in the field (e.g., Athayde, 2009; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Galloway & Brown, 2002), which found that the success of new ventures was not necessarily associated with EE.

The propensity to use market intelligence as a basis to identify and exploit business opportunities is closely linked with the idea of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an inherent psychological state that allows the individual to persist, even in the face of obstacles, on a particular course of action he or she may deem as beneficial. In his widely cited analysis of the self-efficacy mechanism of human agency, Bandura (1982, p. 123) argues that when faced with challenges people with “serious self-doubts about their capabilities” reduce their efforts or “give up altogether”, whereas those with a “strong sense of self-efficacy show greater
effort” in confronting those challenges. From the interviews, it would seem that P8, along with other participants displayed a rare sense of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, thus:

“I am a computer engineer, so I hope to set up an IT centre...an authorised HP centre where I will render repairs and maintenance services for laptops, desktops and so on” (P.7).

This is true in relation to another graduate who stated: “I benefited a lot from the entrepreneurship program...I plan to start a business in the future. I am planning to go into transport business” (P3). Equally, self-efficacy behaviour is evident in the attitude and actions of others who stated: “One of the main lessons I learnt was writing a good business plan. With the format they gave I was surprised by how much I was able to write” (P6), as well as from another participant who perceived that: “from the entrepreneurship training I knew that I had to keep records about my inflows and outflows” (P2).

Another important feature of this study is that male students and graduates in resource-poor business contexts were found to develop a much stronger sense of self-efficacy belief and planning skills for venture creation compared to their female counterparts. By contrast, Wilson et al., (2007) reported that the effect of EE on entrepreneurial self-efficacy proved much stronger for women than for men in resource-rich developed market economies. Notwithstanding, as Drnovšek, Vincent & Cardon, (2010) imply, the apparent strong sense of self-efficacy belief among male participants clearly was borne out of their involvement in the EE intervention, and perhaps equates to the strength of their entrepreneurial intention as seen in their desires to alter their poor socio-economic state through starting their own business. As such, similar to previous findings (e.g., Jones et al., 2014), these perceptions are the strongest evidence, yet, to reinforce the view that EE is a recipe for social and economic change. It also addresses the concern raised by scholars, such as, Béchard & Grégoire (2005) that the social and economic role of EE for the individual and the society was not yet clear.
As a means of ensuring social and economic transformation amidst the widespread youth unemployment and poverty, EE is especially relevant to the wider context of northern Nigeria where majority of students and graduates rely on government handouts for survival. In fact, the general perception was that: “with entrepreneurship education people will learn to do things for themselves, so they won’t be idle or rely on the government any longer” (P10). Clearly, these are powerful instances which show that empowering young people including women to start their own business, through the medium of EE, may be vital to winning the fight against youth unemployment, poverty and conflict in SSA. This view is also shared by Ojeifo (2013) and Nwabufo & Mamman (2015), which suggest that EE could be a useful mechanism for bringing about economic empowerment and peaceful co-existence amongst Nigerian youths. Similar conclusions were drawn by Brixiova et al., (2015) and Honig (2001) in the post-conflict contexts of Southern African and Middle eastern economies. Thus, raising a much broader question of how EE can be used effectively to overcome societal social and economic disorder linked to contexts in which there are political conflict and governance failure.

From the interviews, the perception was that if young people, especially the unemployed, were better educated in entrepreneurship, then the idea of “fighting illegal war against the government” may not exist (P5). However, as earlier mentioned, the perceived human capital attributes of knowledge and skills essential to entrepreneurial self-efficacy were not particularly obvious among female participants. Participants perceived that many women who were dealing with the psychological trauma of loss of their husbands or male providers through the conflict could become economically self-sustaining through EE intervention, but only if it was designed in a way that empowered them as women to support one another, thus:

I think the Boko Haram insurgency has really affected all of society, especially women. There are more single parents now due to the insurgency. Many women who were dependent now have to be independent, and they don’t have the support and training to even do business planning, analyse the environment and fend for themselves. I think the entrepreneurship training can be designed in a way to
train more women who can actually help to train others. The religious culture here, you know, stops women from doing a lot of things and working with others (P2).

The perception that EE could be designed to specifically target and empower women affected by the conflict is a peculiar sentiment shared by others (e.g., Egerová et al., 2017; Naia et al., 2015; van der Sluis, van Praag & Vijverberg, 2005), which argue that EE can be modified to meet the specific needs of particular learner groups regardless of the environmental constraints. This perception is comparable to Demirgüç-Kunt, et al., (2011) and van der Sluis, et al., (2005), which found that survival is a strong entrepreneurial attribute amongst male entrepreneurs operating in resource-scarce environments in developing economies. Thus, it may be that the set of knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial competences women need (e.g., analytical, problem-solving, team-working and networking skills) to enable them to survive in that context as their male counterparts is perhaps much broader in scope than the specific skills (e.g., analysis of market intelligence, business planning) emerging from the EE intervention provided.

If that is the case, then it may be useful to modify EE interventions by integrating learning processes that produce analytical, team-working and networking skills as a way of increasing the odds of women’s entrepreneurial success and survival in learning and business environments affected by conflict. This is particularly relevant in the context of northern Nigeria, and other African communities, where entrenched patrilineal norms (e.g., early and forced marriage) used to perpetuate a cycle of female dependence on a male provider hinders women entry and success within the entrepreneurship ecosystem (Makama, 2013; Takyi-Asiedu, 1993). This facet of the finding brings contextual clarity to how EE, through appropriate content, design and pedagogy, could be systematised to influence beneficial social and economic outcomes for distinct homogenous groups.
6.0 Implications

Among the broad spectrum of theoretical and conceptual limitations facing state-of-the-art research in EE, of interest are three pressing concerns. There is a lack of understanding of the social and economic role of EE for individuals and society, systemisation of EE content and how this content is to be delivered, as well as how to structure EE interventions to align with the specific needs of learners. This study addresses these concerns through a situated analysis that considered the socio-economic challenges facing Africa’s growing youth population as a workforce, the implications for their productivity through EE, and its effect on their entrepreneurial intentions. Through that the study aims to take forward debates about the relevance of context in the relationship between EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes.

First, by introducing the conflict learning environments of SSA as a contextual frame, this study begins to articulate the social and economic role of EE to the individual and the wider society affected by the conflict. Intuitively, as argued in the contextual analysis, by improving the quality of educational systems in Africa will ensure that young people’s productivity is developed to better respond to the constantly changing demands of the labour market. Because of the obvious institutional obstacles that limit the ability of the labour market to absorb many graduates in the region, the priority must be to encourage the development of entrepreneurial competencies through creating the social conditions that allow young people to acquire varying competencies needed to achieve individual, organisational and societal value through human capital and job creation. Acquisition of these human capital attributes, through the medium of EE, indeed have been found to lead to success in early stages of the entrepreneurial process (e.g., Dimov, 2010; Ulvenblad, Berggren & Winborg 2011).
Specifically, the knowledge and skills used in the analysis of market intelligence were found to be instrumental to justifying strategic future business decisions related to the expansion and survival of new firms in the region. Also, the ability to use market intelligence was also closely linked with the idea of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Wilson et al., 2007; Drnovšek et al., 2010; Bandura, 1982), deployed to identify and exploit opportunities. As an innate psychological state that enables the individual to persist on a particular course of action even in the face of unforeseen obstacles, perceived self-efficacy was found in this study to be a useful antithesis of young people’s reliance on government’s handouts for survival. Rather, perceived self-efficacy emerged as a social dimension to risk-taking propensity in the entrepreneurial process and critical to survival. As such, this study provides some new and unique insights into the context and dynamics of EE in the entrepreneurial process under conditions of resource scarcity and environmental constraints linked to conflict, and its social role in influencing the human capital attributes relevant to value creation in that process.

Since the conflict context of SSA is an evolving experimental setting in EE research, the implicit references to human capital components of knowledge and skills and entrepreneurial self-efficacy as resources for the identification and exploitation of opportunity including business expansion offer several implications for future research in terms of evaluating the EE contents and pedagogical criteria that produce social and economic value, and why these criteria may not create similar value for certain population groups, such as, women. For instance, research could focus on understanding the specific ways in which EE contents and pedagogies could be systematised and used to address the specific educational needs of women learners as a disadvantaged group. Perhaps, an emphasis on developing the EE pedagogical processes that enhance analytical, problem-solving and teamworking skills may help to increase women’s entrepreneurial self-efficacy in a way similar to their male counterparts.
In addition, future research could consider a more in-depth statistical analysis of the correlates of EE contents and pedagogies that underlie the positive effect on young people’s entrepreneurial intentions by including other variables to control for rival explanations beyond the current emphasis on market intelligence, market analysis skills and use of written business plans. As evident in this study, the relevance of introducing other variables can be readily seen in the context of the relationships between acquisition of knowledge and skills and the vital use of market intelligence in an imaginative effort to adapt to the volatility of the business environment. This may help the replication of this study in other regional settings where EE is not necessarily at the centre of national educational efforts to provide young people with the knowledge and skills for self-employment.

Perhaps, a cross-sectional study that seeks to reveal the relative or comparable value (or lack thereof) of the effectiveness of EE in comparison to other common educational initiatives (e.g., TVET) elsewhere, particularly in Eastern Africa, aimed at improving youth productivity may yield additional insights for future EE research. A study of this nature is useful given that political conflict remains a common feature of Western and Eastern Africa respectively. As such, both regions offer comparably favourable contexts in which to assess, in a cross-sectional analysis, the interdependences between various contextual factors (e.g., poverty, high youth unemployment) that determine people’s propensity towards entrepreneurship and how these contextual factors play out in relation to EE, human capital components and firm-creation intentions.

With its emphasis on the importance of context in the relationships between EE and different entrepreneurial outcomes, this study has demonstrated that in an attempt to survive when faced

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3 Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a learning activity common in SSA which provides knowledge, skills, attitudes and training relevant for employment and self-employment.
with certain social and economic obstacles, people may be motivated by contextual factors unrelated to EE. This was evident in the specific reference to the ‘insurgency’ as a major motivation to exploit diverse business opportunities that surfaced in the findings. Thus, by contrasting two distinct forms of entrepreneurship – ‘Schumpeterian’ (explained in terms of opportunity-driven) and ‘Bricolage’ (explained in terms of necessity-driven) vis-à-vis the conflict context of SSA in the propositional analysis, the study hints at the need to consider the business context as a proxy in predicting future relationships between EE and entrepreneurial intention. It therefore provides valuable insights that suggest that entrepreneurial intention may after all be a rational and complex process, which simply cannot arise as a prerogative of EE intervention. Thus, it contributes to the evolving research (e.g., Maresch et al., 2016; Naia et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2007), which recognises that the effect of EE on entrepreneurial outcomes is context-driven.

From a policy standpoint in SSA, several possibilities also emerge from this study. First, radical reforms of Africa’s educational systems to increase young people’s human capital and productivity are vital. Of immediate concern is prioritising investment in educational infrastructures that create the conditions to increase women’s participation and access to the labour market through knowledge and skills acquisition. Given the prevalence of patriarchal norms in many parts of Africa, increased investment in EE curriculum will help to empower young women, increase their productivity, reduce their dependence on a male provider, thereby reduce the economic hardships they face. Secondly, following Zanello (2016), this study has shed further light on the need to take into account gender issues in the design and delivery of EE. Rather than solely focus on developing entrepreneurial mindset and the capabilities for entrepreneurial success, perhaps, education policy makers must begin to consider how national EE programmes should be designed so as to make them more inclusive, and where necessary
modified to tackle the specific barriers (e.g., lack of analytical skills, limited labour mobility, household burden) that women as nascent entrepreneurs face (Jamali, 2009). This is important in the broader context of the fact that more and more women-owned enterprises have now become vital sources of household income in Africa (Nichter & Goldmark, 2009).

However, from a practical viewpoint, reviewing national policies may present institutional and governance challenges, unlike in developed economies where well-established institutional processes exist. As such, it may be more practical to directly empower educators to prioritise their pedagogical processes to accommodate the nuanced needs of aspiring women entrepreneurs as a distinct homogenous population. This is important given the reported gender differences in access to the human capital knowledge and skills for business planning and analytical skills. Other ways in which these challenges could be tackled in the SSA context might be to introduce and integrate practice-based and action-oriented gender-sensitive topics, such as, networking skills, confidence building measures, work-life balance into EE programmes offered at both secondary and tertiary education levels. Integrating action-oriented learning philosophy into EE curriculum is more likely than not to stimulate entrepreneurial drive and talent, boost self-efficacy and consequently the likelihood of new business formation and success, particularly amongst young women population.

7.0 Conclusions

In conclusion, much of the previous research emphasis has been on the specific EE elements and pedagogical processes that influenced certain entrepreneurial tendencies, as well as the attributes and attitudes of nascent entrepreneurs without considering how the context of the learning and business environments influenced these outcomes. In this case, the conflict context has arguably emerged as another intervening variable that deserves further attention.
Given that this study relied on a sample from SSA region, it is important to be cautious in
generalising its findings to other contexts. Notwithstanding, proper systematisation of EE
programmes in any conflict environment can influence positive outcomes, which can help to
increase individual productivity and provide social and economic benefits desperately needed
in Africa. To achieve this, policy makers, governments and higher education providers must
work together to foster the learning conditions under which individuals can rely on to acquire
the necessary knowledge, skills and creativity to pursue an entrepreneurship career, through
the medium of EE.
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