



Assessing the Influence of Trade Fairs on Youth Entrepreneurship Awareness and Motivation: A Case Study of the Lagos International Trade Fair

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ABSTRACT

Trade fairs offer valuable chances for young people in developing economies to learn about entrepreneurship, gain exposure, and network. This study looks at how trade fairs affect youth awareness and motivation regarding entrepreneurship, focusing on the Lagos International Trade Fair as a case study. The research stemmed from a visit to the Lagos State Trade Fair Complex, which allowed for direct observation and interaction with exhibitors and young participants. We collected data using questionnaires, informal interviews, and field observations. The findings indicate that attending the trade fair enhanced entrepreneurial awareness, boosted knowledge of business opportunities, and sparked interest in self-employment. The study concludes that trade fairs can support the growth of youth entrepreneurship, especially when paired with support after the event.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial awareness; Trade fairs; Lagos International Trade Fair; Motivation; Youth Entrepreneurship*

INTRODUCTION:

Youth entrepreneurship is becoming more important in Nigeria as a way to address rising unemployment and economic exclusion among young people. Many graduates struggle to find formal jobs, so developing entrepreneurial skills and awareness is seen as a way to promote self-employment, innovation, and economic involvement (Ojo & Uwagwu, 2025). Entrepreneurship education and hands-on experience in business environments give young people the skills they need to start their own ventures and build resilience. This helps them overcome social and economic challenges. Research shows that Nigerian students' interest in entrepreneurship is influenced by their exposure to entrepreneurial activities and the larger business environment (University of Ibadan study, 2017).

Trade fairs serve as lively platforms that connect producers, innovators, customers, and investors for market exchanges, learning, and networking. In Nigeria, the Nigeria International Trade Fair (NITF), formerly known as the Lagos International Trade Fair, stands out as one of the country's major commercial exhibitions. It plays a vital role in promoting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), innovation, and business development. The 2025 edition of NITF, held at the Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos, attracted thousands of exhibitors and visitors. It specifically focused on areas like SME growth, digital innovation, and youth entrepreneurship (Nigeria International Trade Fair, 2025). The size and focus of this event make it an excellent opportunity to see how exposure to commercial activities can affect entrepreneurial awareness and motivation.

This study was shaped by a field trip taken by students to the Lagos International Trade Fair Complex. During this trip, we observed business showcases, interacted with entrepreneurs, and gathered data using structured questionnaires and informal interviews. Through this hands-on experience, the study looks at whether attending trade fairs improves young people's understanding of entrepreneurship, expands their views on business opportunities, and encourages them to pursue self-employment and start their own ventures in Nigeria.

Aim

This study aims to evaluate the impact of trade shows on youth entrepreneurship awareness and motivation using the Lagos International Trade Fair as a case study. The study specifically aims to comprehend how youths' perceptions of entrepreneurship, recognition of opportunities, and drive to pursue self-employment in Nigeria are affected by exposure to trade fair activities, interactions with entrepreneurs, and observation of business practices.

Objectives

1. To investigate how young people's awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities is impacted by attending the Lagos International Trade Fair.
2. To assess the degree to which young people are inspired to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors by direct exposure to exhibitors and business showcases.
3. To pinpoint particular elements of trade show activities (such as networking, product demos, and seminars) that improve students' understanding of entrepreneurship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Entrepreneurship & Empowerment in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship education is perceived to be one of the effective ways through which the issue of unemployment among the youth can be addressed in Nigeria. There is sufficient evidence that entrepreneurship education is a tool that enables the youth to acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes that improve the possibilities of self-employment (*Nnaji & Ahmed, 2018*). Other studies have shown that entrepreneurship education is a major determinant of the empowerment of the youth, which is linked to innovation, self-reliance, and employability (*Ojo & Uwagwu, 2022*). Furthermore, the empirical study of barriers affecting the development of youth entrepreneurship has pointed out some barriers, including a lack of access to finance, inadequacies of curricula, and a lack of institutional support, which make it difficult for the youth to engage in the process of starting and running businesses (*Ile & Nwaokwa, 2025*). This highlights the fact that, although there is the development of skills through entrepreneurship education, there is a need for additional exposure to the realities of the business world.

Trade Fairs and Entrepreneurship Exposure

The trade fairs offer an ever-encouraging environment that is suitable for hands-on entrepreneurial experience and exposure. The Nigeria International Trade Fair (NITF 2025), organized at the Lagos International Trade Fair Complex, between 21st and 30th November 2025, is characterized as Nigeria's preeminent trade and investment forum, which encourages and supports trade, innovation, enterprise development, and youth's engagement in business activities (*Nigeria International Trade Fair, 2025*). Accounts regarding the successful revival of the trade fair, after a 14-year gap, identify its significance in demonstrating products and services and facilitating interactions that could expand the knowledge and perspective of the attendee regarding the context of an enterprise (*Olatunbosun, 2025*).

Entrepreneurship Education & Motivation

Research on the impact of entrepreneurship education in combating unemployment shows that formal training has a positive impact on the entrepreneurial attitudes and preparedness of the youth to venture into business (*Abubakar & Pakra, 2024*). The results validate the hypothesis that practical engagement, through trade fair participation, for example, could have a positive impact on awareness and motivation through the observation of actual business in action. Involvement in trade fair activities can offer students a firsthand experience in entrepreneurship, which can be missing in classroom instruction. Despite the evident potency of trade fairs in shaping youth entrepreneurial awareness, a gap in knowledge exists in the literature with regards to trade fair impact on youth involved in trade fair activities, especially during academic excursions.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that underpins this research is the Experiential Learning Theory, along with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, proposed by Ajzen.

Experiential Learning Theory: Kolb (1984) argued that experiential learning involves constructing knowledge through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and testing or experimenting. Applying this theory, the experiential component involves students' engagement with the Lagos International Trade Fair, where they can observe and interact with entrepreneurs and business operations. This corresponds with research conducted within Nigeria, which indicated that experiential learning, alongside theoretical teaching, increases entrepreneurial abilities and motivational levels (*Ojo, Uwagwu, and Odozi, 2025; Abubakar and Pakra, 2024*).

Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that an individual's intention to act on a given behavior will be determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over the behavior itself (*Ajzen, 1991*). In the context of youth entrepreneurship, the trade fair can have a significant attitude-enforcing role in shaping the youth's attitudes toward entrepreneurship, increase motivation levels through exposure and influence, and increase perceived control levels by giving insights into market functioning (*Adeyemi, Adebayo, and Alabi, 2018*). By using both ELT and TPB in this study, trade fair experience can be conceptualized both as a learning experience and a behavioral motivator.

Summary of Literature Review

From the literature reviewed, there are three major findings that are relevant to this study:

- i. **Entrepreneurship Education as a Basis:** Studies conducted in Nigeria have shown that entrepreneurship education is developing skills, autonomy, and innovation among young people (*Ojo, Uwagwu, & Odozi, 2025; Abubakar & Pakra, 2024*). However, infrastructure issues, such as finance, remain a major setback (*Ile & Nwaokwa, 2025*).
- ii. **Trade Fairs:** Trade fairs, for instance, the Nigeria International Trade Fair, provide youth with the opportunity to learn the realities of business, the trends, and the networking opportunities (*Nigeria International Trade Fair, 2025; Olatunbosun, 2025*). The Osun International Trade Fair, a regional program, further strengthens the capacity of trade fairs in developing the youth's entrepreneurial attitudes and skills (*Youths Enterprise Development & Innovation Society, 2021*).
- iii. **Motivation Potential of Practical Exposure:** It has been found to have a significant effect on students in improving their awareness and motivational levels regarding entrepreneurship (*Adeyemi, Adebayo, and Alabi, 2018; Abubakar and Pakra, 2024*). Nonetheless, very few studies have been conducted to examine the role of trade fair participation in motivating youth in Nigeria in general and in academic excursions in particular.

Identified Gap:

Although the importance of entrepreneurship education and experience is emphasised in the literature, there is a lack of empirical studies on the impact of structured engagement with trade fairs on the entrepreneurial awareness and motivation of Nigerian students. This research fills the gap by analysing the results of a student visit to the Lagos International Trade Fair.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

In this study, a descriptive case study approach is employed to examine trade fairs' effect on youth entrepreneurship awareness and motivation for Architecture MSc II students. A case study allows for a close study of students' experiences at the Lagos International Trade Fair and helps to explain how students' interaction with trade fair activities affects their entrepreneurial motivation (*Ojo et al., 2025*). A mixed-method study was conducted to enable both outcome measures and qualitative information to be gathered.

Research Population

The study participants are Architecture MSc II students at Caleb University, Lagos, with about 100 participants at the academic excursion to the Lagos International Trade Fair. Architecture postgraduate students were chosen because they may be interested in design entrepreneurship, such as exhibition design, interior products, and creative services offered at trade fair events.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was used to incorporate all students actively involved in the trade fair. All 100 students attending the trade fair were considered in the study to guarantee that the data obtained was based on actual experience related to the trade fair. The purposive method ensured that the participants had adequate experience with entrepreneurial practices and networking, which were considered essential in the study (Adeyemi et al., 2018).

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The data were collected using structured questionnaires, observation checklists, and semi-structured interviews:

Questionnaires: These were used to measure the students' level of awareness concerning entrepreneurship, their views about trade fair activities, and their motivation for engaging in any form of entrepreneurship. These questionnaires were quantified through the use of a Likert scale.

Observation Checklists Recorded students' engagement with the exhibits, showcases, and networking activities.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants chosen randomly to gain insight into their experiences, perceptions, and motivations related to the trade fair.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, and means). On the other hand, the qualitative data collected through the interview process were analysed using thematic content analysis, with themes including the recognition of opportunity, design innovation, and the motives of the entrepreneur (Ojo et al., 2025). This was a form of triangulation, which improved the validity of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Awareness of Entrepreneurship among Students of MSc 2 of Architecture

The Lagos International Trade Fair proved a real eye-opener for the architecture and design-minded crowd. Of the 100 students who joined the trip, 92 per cent felt that their understanding of how business works, from operations to product promotion and how markets actually operate, had sharpened during the day. Students also reported frequent chats with exhibitors, everything from interior design products to architectural models, sustainable building materials, and fresh design innovations. In post-event conversations, many spoke of new angles they hadn't thought of before. One noted, *"I had not been aware of how many design products could actually be commercialised. Seeing pricing and marketing, and client engagement strategies-in other words, how to actually develop real business opportunities-made it all more achievable."* Yet another added, *"It really pushed me to think of turning my thesis into a startup. I now see what clients want in design solutions."*

Questionnaire results validated the mood: 85% of students strongly agreed that the fair fed them innovative ideas they could carry into future ventures. Thematic analysis identified three overarching learning threads: market awareness, product innovation, and the entrepreneurial process. Overall, the findings support previous studies indicating that experiential exposure enhances young people's perceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities.

Motivation to dive into entrepreneurial ventures

Engaging in hands-on activities related to trade fairs definitely influenced the entrepreneurial mindset among the students. This is evident in the fact that almost 68% indicated they would probably start their own design-related businesses within the next five years. About 15% wanted to join forces with classmates to open design consultancies, while 17% had not yet decided, since raising money and market entry seem quite daunting. In personal interviews, networking with entrepreneurs, seeing product demonstrations, and mini-workshop activities appeared to be effective motivating factors. In fact, one student remarked, *"Talking to an exhibitor about the furniture industry and seeing that I could merge my architectural background and interior design consultancy business was enlightening."* *"One does not have*

to wait for a job in order to take one's own path in life. Seeing that my peers are running their own businesses gave me the confidence," said another.

These findings are in line with *Experiential Learning Theory* (Kolb, 1984). The theory emphasises how knowledge is developed through experiences. The students participated in the trade fair activities, connecting theoretical knowledge with practical actions. These findings are also in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). This theory understands how positive actions result in activities with observed control, with findings by Ojo et al. (2025).

Activities That Fuel Learning at Trade Fair

Students have identified a number of activities that have been most influential at trade shows.

Design Exhibits and Demos: Observing the models for architectural purposes, interior design implementation, and material development made a strong impression. Around 87% of the group felt the interactive display assisted them in understanding marketing possibilities for design concepts. A classmate summarised it best: Viewing the models and listening to the presenters walk through their uses linked their design skills to entrepreneurial possibilities.

Entrepreneur Networking: Interacting with exhibitors and small business owners provided some type of mentoring experience. A vast majority of students (approximately 75 per cent) said they established some kind of connection with at least one entrepreneur at this event.

They have said that their conversations with entrepreneurs have opened their eyes to pricing strategies, marketing tactics, and client relationships.

Real-Life Observation of Market Activity: The attendees were able to observe sales activities, packaging, and other promotional activities. Approximately 80% of those who attended felt that they gained a better insight into what it takes to actually operate a business.

Areas suggested for improvement: Students also suggested ways in which the efficiency of learning could be improved in future visits. This included mini-workshops at trade fairs, which could complement the process of observation. This could be on pricing, acquiring clients, or social marketing on social media sites.

Implications for Architecture Education

These results imply that imparting postgraduate architecture students with direct exposure to trade fair events can enhance their entrepreneurial abilities. This way, the divide existing between the theoretical and practical approaches can be narrowed. Student response data demonstrate heightened sensitivity towards business opportunities, an increase in their drive to set up their own companies, and improved understanding of the commercialisation of design. Incorporating first-hand experiences, such as trade fair visits, into the architecture program might incite the students towards self-employment, which can solve the unemployment crisis while promoting innovative designs in Nigeria (Abubakar & Pakra, 2024; Adeyemi et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

The research examined the impact of the Lagos International Trade Fair on the entrepreneurial attitude and spirit of Architecture MSc 2 students at Caleb University. Findings revealed that participating in the trade fair significantly increases students' exposure to entrepreneurial potential in architecture and design-related domains. Nearly 92% of respondents indicated gaining firsthand experience with using design knowledge, imagine converting architectural models into products, interior design products, and innovative services for the market. Through observation and interviewing, it was observed that students began to understand market realities, consumer interaction, and business processes issues not fully comprehended in the classroom environment.

The Trade fair also boosted students' entrepreneurship drive. Around 68% of students indicated forming their own business, while others contemplated joint design projects. Face-to-face interactions with entrepreneurs, product demonstrations, as well as observing actual market behaviour, enhanced self-confidence, a feeling of competency, and the capacity to recognise opportunities. This fits well with

Experiential Learning Theory as proposed by Kolb in 1984 and Theory of Planned Behaviour as postulated by Ajzen in 1991. The students felt motivated to apply learnings in founded businesses, indicating actual engagement in bridging education to implementation as suggested in *Ojo et al.* in 2025 and *Abubakar in 2024*, with similar works by *Adeyemi et al. in 2018*. The study also found that there were particular components under the category of “fair components” that encouraged learning and motivation. These components included design exhibitions, networking, and viewing market operations. These not only created awareness, but they also encouraged the students to believe that they can accomplish successful undertakings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, some take-away lessons are:

- i. Trade-fair visits should be an official feature of the Architecture Master’s program. Such integration will incorporate experiential learning into postgraduate programs, resulting in the enhancement of an entrepreneurial spirit and know-how.
- ii. Provide focused workshops at trade shows. Universities can participate with the organisers to conduct workshops on entrepreneurship, marketing, pricing, and customer relationships. The students feel that the workshops would be a great value added to what they get to see at the trade shows.
- iii. Encourage postgraduate collaboration. Students recommend collaborative efforts among peers for entrepreneurship with a focus on designing goods and services that are viewed at fairs, according to students.
- iv. Develop mentorship relationships with participants or alumni entrepreneurs. Institutions can assign mentees to reasonable participants or alumni entrepreneurs if former graduates, to offer them prolonged mentoring even after the trip.
- v. Experiential learning support in terms of policy and professionalism. Policymakers in education as well as architecture institutions need to acknowledge and support programs for experiential entrepreneurship, so fair exposure becomes an essential part of postgraduate education.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Lagos International Trade Fair was a catalytic activity that positively influenced Architecture MSc 2 students in terms of broadening their awareness, motivation, and imparting knowledge to make them self-employed in Nigeria’s design and architecture industry. The integration of hands-on practices in formal education can catalyze innovation to solve the issue of unemployment among the youth in design disciplines (*Ojo et al., 2025; Abubakar and Pakra, 2024*).

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