



Citizenship Education as a Catalyst for Improving Entrepreneurship Activities in Nigeria

Mamman Saba Abdulkadir¹

Department of History and International Studies, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria

Corresponding email: amsaba@ibbu.edu.ng

Abstract

In the face of rising youth unemployment, social fragmentation, and economic stagnation in Nigeria, there is an urgent need to rethink how education can be used as a catalyst for national transformation. This study examines the intersection of citizenship education, entrepreneurship, and innovation as a strategic framework for fostering youth empowerment and sustainable development in Nigeria. It critically examines how citizenship education, traditionally focused on civic responsibility and national identity, can be leveraged to instil values such as ethical leadership, social accountability, and critical thinking, traits essential for entrepreneurial success. The research highlights the shifting role of entrepreneurship from purely private-sector ventures to include public entrepreneurship driven by civic consciousness. It also identifies key challenges, including weak curriculum integration, lack of trained educators, and poor infrastructure. The study concludes that integrating civic values into entrepreneurship education can produce a generation of socially responsible innovators capable of addressing Nigeria's socio-economic challenges. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to enhance curriculum design, improve governance, and promote inclusive development through education.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Civic Responsibility, Youth Development

Introduction

In the face of persistent youth unemployment and economic underperformance, Nigeria is increasingly exploring integrated educational approaches to equip young people with the skills, values, and mindsets necessary for national development. One such promising intersection lies between citizenship education and entrepreneurship development. While citizenship education has traditionally focused on cultivating responsible, informed, and participatory citizens, its role is expanding to include the development of traits essential for entrepreneurial success, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, and ethical decision-making (Iredia, 2018; Nwankwo & Okafor, 2020).

At the same time, entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a key driver of innovation, economic diversification, and job creation. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where over 60% of the population is under 25 years of age (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2021). However, conventional entrepreneurship education has often been criticised for being overly theoretical, poorly

¹ Holds PhD in Politics and Governance from Universiti Putra Malaysia, currently an Associate Professor in the Department of History and International Studies, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai, Nigeria.



contextualised, and lacking in value orientation (Eze & Nwali, 2019). Integrating citizenship education into entrepreneurial training could address these gaps by fostering a value-based entrepreneurial culture that emphasises civic responsibility, ethical practices, and community development.

Citizenship education, as outlined in the National Policy on Education, is not merely about democratic participation but also about inculcating knowledge of governance, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy (Abdulkadir, 2007). These principles, when embedded in entrepreneurship education, can enhance young people's ability to navigate societal systems, identify community needs, and create socially responsible businesses.

Furthermore, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) has institutionalised the teaching of Citizenship Education alongside entrepreneurship, communication, and philosophy in Nigerian polytechnics. This policy move underlines the growing recognition of civic competence as a foundational element of entrepreneurial capacity. An entrepreneur who understands their civic obligations and social environment is better equipped to build sustainable, community-focused ventures.

The objective of this study is to explore how citizenship education can catalyse the improvement of entrepreneurship activities in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to: examine the values, skills, and dispositions fostered by citizenship education that align with entrepreneurial competencies; investigate how integrating civic learning into entrepreneurship curricula can enhance youth economic empowerment; and identify the institutional strategies and educational policies needed to harness the synergy between civic education and entrepreneurship development. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader discourse on rethinking education in Nigeria, not just as a tool for knowledge transmission, but as a transformative process that empowers young citizens to drive socio-economic progress through responsible and innovative entrepreneurship.

Conceptual Framework

1. Citizenship and Citizenship Education

Citizenship is broadly understood as the legal and political status granted to individuals who are recognised as full members of a state. This recognition grants individuals rights—civil, political, and socio-economic—and obligates them to responsibilities such as obeying laws, paying taxes, and participating in civic life (Zurcher, 1996). In Nigeria, citizenship is constitutionally ascribed by birth, registration, or naturalisation, as outlined in Sections 25–32 of the 1999 Constitution.

Citizenship education refers to the deliberate process of instilling in citizens—especially the youth—a comprehensive understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and roles within a democratic society. It aims to promote political literacy, ethical behaviour, social justice, patriotism, and active civic engagement. In the Nigerian context, it is embedded within the National Policy on Education as a compulsory course at the tertiary level to foster national consciousness, social cohesion, and value reorientation. Citizenship education is not only concerned with governance and political awareness but also equips individuals with cross-cutting skills such as critical thinking, leadership, responsibility, and ethical decision-making. These competencies are essential for participation in both civic life and socio-economic development.



2. Enterprise, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation

Enterprise refers to any undertaking that involves initiative, risk-taking, and the coordination of resources to achieve a defined objective. It is not limited to business creation but encompasses innovation and problem-solving across various domains – public, private, and non-profit (Bridge, O'Neill, & Martin, 2017). Enterprise is essentially a mindset, characterised by resilience, creativity, and the willingness to act, that supports value creation.

Entrepreneurship, in contrast, is the practical application of enterprise skills to the identification of opportunities, mobilisation of resources, and creation of ventures (Hisrich et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs are individuals who act on enterprise-driven insights to launch and manage businesses or initiatives, often in the face of uncertainty and risk. Entrepreneurship is therefore the action-oriented realisation of enterprise potential.

Innovation is a core component of both enterprise and entrepreneurship. It refers to the development of new ideas, products, services, or processes that improve upon existing solutions. Entrepreneurs typically serve as key agents of innovation, responding to social or market gaps with novel, scalable solutions.

The relationship between enterprise and entrepreneurship is both cyclical and symbiotic in nature. Enterprise supplies the foundational attitudes and skills—such as initiative and innovation—while entrepreneurship channels these into structured, goal-oriented action for economic, social, or political gains (Henry et al., 2005). Enterprise may occur without business creation (e.g., social initiatives), but entrepreneurship always requires enterprise as its fuel.

3. Citizenship Education, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation: A Conceptual Link

There is an emerging recognition that citizenship education can significantly enhance entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly in developing contexts like Nigeria. By fostering social responsibility, ethical reasoning, and community consciousness, citizenship education builds a values-based foundation for entrepreneurship.

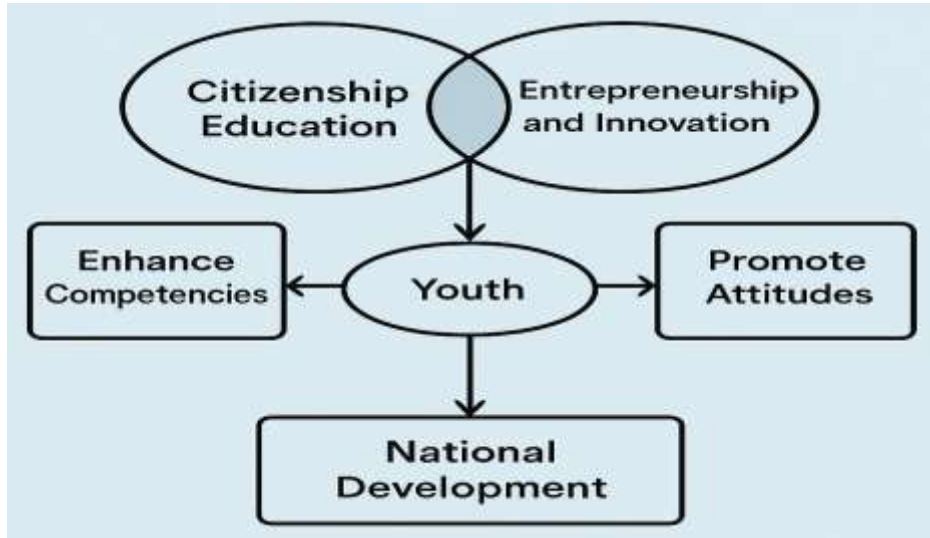
Entrepreneurship rooted in civic consciousness is more likely to pursue not just profit, but also social impact, responsible governance, and inclusive development. This convergence gives rise to public entrepreneurship and social enterprise, where individuals act both as civic actors and business innovators.

For example, citizenship education promotes:

- Critical awareness of societal needs, leading to socially responsive business ideas.
- Ethical behaviour informs responsible and sustainable business practices.
- Civic participation can be extended to community-based enterprises and cooperatives.
- Leadership and initiative are hallmarks of entrepreneurial success.

As such, integrating citizenship education into entrepreneurship training, especially in the Nigerian tertiary education system, can develop a new generation of entrepreneurs who are not only economically productive but also socially accountable and civically engaged. This is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Citizenship Education facilitating Entrepreneurship and Innovation for National Development: A Conceptual Link



Understanding the conceptual foundations of citizenship education and its intersection with enterprise and entrepreneurship reveals a powerful synergy. Citizenship education nurtures enterprising individuals, and entrepreneurship serves as a channel through which civic values translate into tangible innovation and socio-economic impact. This integrated model is especially vital for nations like Nigeria, seeking to empower their youth while addressing national challenges through sustainable and inclusive development.

Empirical Literature Review

Citizenship education in Nigeria has historically focused on fostering national identity, democratic participation, and social values. However, its potential role in promoting entrepreneurship—especially among youth—has gained attention due to Nigeria’s economic challenges and the need for self-reliant citizens. This review synthesises relevant empirical research examining how citizenship education can serve as a tool for improving entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria.

Studies indicate that citizenship education equips individuals with social and moral values that promote responsibility, initiative, and social integration—all of which are essential for entrepreneurship. For example, citizenship education has been found to instil self-reliance, discipline, and respect for the rule of law, which are foundational attitudes for entrepreneurial behaviour (Fan & Samuel, 2020; Fan & Umaru, 2014). Entrepreneurial activities thrive in stable, integrated societies. Citizenship education has been demonstrated to foster national unity and democratic stability, thereby creating a socio-political environment conducive to business and innovation (Ossai, 2023; Soja et al., 2014; Koku, 2017).

Active citizenship education goes beyond civic duties to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills—key entrepreneurial competencies. Research suggests that a shift from traditional to transformative civic education could empower young people with leadership and innovation skills (Okoro, 2019; Bakari, 2023).



Empirical evidence suggests that when designed effectively, citizenship education fosters entrepreneurial mindsets by emphasising practical knowledge, self-employment, and national development. A revised curriculum can help prepare youths to take initiative and create economic opportunities (Monica, 2002; Mohammed et al., 2020). Despite its potential, ineffective implementation, curriculum gaps, and lack of trained teachers hinder the role of citizenship education in entrepreneurial development. Studies recommend increased investment in teacher training and curriculum modernisation to enhance the program's impact and relevance to economic needs (Oluniyi, 2011; Bakari, 2023).

Empirical research supports the view that citizenship education, when properly designed and implemented, can foster entrepreneurial values and behaviours among Nigerians. It promotes civic virtues, national stability, and personal responsibility—conditions that collectively enhance entrepreneurial activity.

The Relationship Between Citizenship Education, Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Nigeria's Development

Nigeria, like many developing nations, faces the dual challenge of socio-political instability and high youth unemployment. To address this, researchers and policymakers are increasingly recognising the interconnected roles of citizenship education, entrepreneurship, and innovation as transformative tools for sustainable national development.

1. Citizenship Education as a Foundation for Civic Responsibility and Innovation

Citizenship education in Nigeria has traditionally focused on fostering civic responsibility, ethical awareness, and national identity. It instils in learners values such as patriotism, tolerance, discipline, and critical thinking—all of which are foundational to both civic engagement and entrepreneurial behaviour (Ossai, 2023; Mohammed et al., 2020). By cultivating critical awareness of societal challenges, citizenship education encourages young people to identify gaps in their communities, a fertile ground for social entrepreneurship and innovation. Students trained in civic values are more likely to create businesses that are ethically grounded, socially impactful, and development-oriented.

2. Entrepreneurship Education as a Tool for Economic Empowerment

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is designed to equip students with the knowledge and practical skills to start and sustain businesses. However, traditional approaches have often been overly theoretical. A study by Sanusi et al. (2017) emphasises that effective entrepreneurship education must include attributes such as observability, trialability, and compatibility—key drivers of innovation in educational settings. When entrepreneurship is rooted in citizenship values, students not only create jobs but also businesses that reflect integrity, inclusiveness, and long-term societal benefit. This form of entrepreneurship, known as public entrepreneurship, bridges the gap between civic responsibility and economic activity.

3. Innovation as the Bridge Between Civic Values and Enterprise

Innovation thrives in environments that foster openness to change, creativity, and problem-solving. Citizenship education nurtures these qualities by encouraging learners to think critically and act with purpose in the face of national challenges (Okam & Ibrahim, 2011). Meanwhile, entrepreneurship education provides the tools to bring these ideas to life. A 2023 study found a positive and significant link between entrepreneurship education and students' innovation and creativity in Nigerian



universities (Usman et al., 2023). This implies that citizenship-rooted entrepreneurship education is a powerful engine for socially-relevant innovation.

4. Integrated Impact on National Development

The integration of citizenship education into entrepreneurship curricula can produce socially conscious entrepreneurs capable of addressing Nigeria's most pressing issues—poverty, youth unemployment, and social fragmentation. Such integration enhances national unity, reduces moral decay, and fosters democratic stability (Soja et al., 2014; Okoro, 2019). Moreover, embedding innovation into this educational framework means that learners are not only taught what to think but also how to think innovatively and act responsibly in creating change. The result is a generation of civic-minded innovators equipped for sustainable development. The relationship between citizenship education, entrepreneurship, and innovation is deeply synergistic. Citizenship education provides the values, entrepreneurship provides the vehicle, and innovation provides the engine for transforming ideas into action. For Nigeria, harnessing this relationship offers a strategic pathway to youth empowerment, economic revitalisation, and social transformation.

Challenges Facing the Integration of Citizenship Education, Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Nigeria

1. Curriculum Fragmentation and Theoretical Focus

One of the main challenges is the disconnection between curriculum content and real-life applications. Both entrepreneurship and citizenship education are often taught in overly theoretical ways, lacking practical relevance and integration with students' daily experiences. Entrepreneurship education tends to focus on abstract business concepts without engaging students in real-world problem-solving or innovation processes (Sanusi et al., 2017). Citizenship education, similarly, suffers from insufficient contextualisation, limiting its impact on behaviour and values among youth (Oluniyi, 2011).

2. Lack of Trained and Motivated Educators

A critical barrier to effective delivery is the shortage of qualified teachers who can competently integrate civic education with entrepreneurship and innovation teaching. Many teachers lack the professional development or interdisciplinary knowledge required to teach citizenship education as a dynamic, participatory subject (Mohammed et al., 2020). The absence of innovation training among entrepreneurship educators also prevents them from encouraging creativity and critical thinking (Usman et al., 2023).

3. Policy and Institutional Gaps

Despite national policies promoting citizenship and entrepreneurship education, implementation often lacks coordination, funding, and clear accountability. There are inconsistencies in how institutions interpret and implement these policies, resulting in fragmented execution and limited impact (Okoro, 2019). Education sector policies rarely prioritise innovation explicitly, which limits curriculum flexibility and responsiveness to emerging societal and economic challenges (Okam & Ibrahim, 2011).

4. Inadequate Infrastructure and Learning Resources

Poor facilities, lack of ICT access, and insufficient teaching materials make it difficult to deliver interactive and practical citizenship or entrepreneurship education. Schools often lack access to



laboratories, digital platforms, and maker spaces essential for hands-on innovation learning (Enemuo & Ozoemena, 2020).

5. Cultural and Societal Constraints

Traditional values and societal expectations can conflict with entrepreneurial risk-taking or challenge the critical thinking and democratic engagement encouraged by citizenship education. Social norms may discourage youth from challenging authority or pursuing non-traditional career paths such as innovation entrepreneurship, especially in conservative or patriarchal settings (Fan & Samuel, 2020).

6. Student Apathy and Poor Engagement

Many students view both citizenship and entrepreneurship courses as compulsory but irrelevant to their goals. This is partly due to how the subjects are presented—as exam-focused rather than as tools for empowerment and real-world problem-solving. A 2023 study found that students often engage with entrepreneurship courses solely to pass exams, rather than to develop fundamental skills or launch ventures (Usman et al., 2023).

While the integration of citizenship education, entrepreneurship, and innovation holds immense potential for Nigeria’s development, these challenges must be addressed through better teacher training, practical-oriented curriculum reform, stronger policy coordination, and investment in educational infrastructure.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that integrating citizenship education and entrepreneurship into Nigeria’s educational system—particularly in polytechnic institutions—presents a transformative pathway for both civic development and economic empowerment. Citizenship education, already mandated across tertiary education, is instrumental in instilling ethical values, civic responsibility, and national consciousness among Nigerian youths. Traditionally, entrepreneurship was limited to the private sector, focusing mainly on profit-oriented ventures. However, a key finding of this study is the growing relevance of public entrepreneurship, where civic-minded individuals apply entrepreneurial principles to address societal problems and contribute to nation-building.

The study further highlights the reciprocal relationship between the state and its citizens, one that is framed by constitutional rights and duties. By cultivating a values-based entrepreneurial mindset, citizenship education can produce a generation of leaders and innovators who not only pursue personal and economic goals but also contribute meaningfully to social cohesion, inclusive development, and democratic governance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen the integration of citizenship education, entrepreneurship, and innovation in Nigeria’s development strategy:

1. **Strict Adherence to Constitutional Principles:** All citizens and leaders must respect the rule of law and uphold the constitutional values that protect civic rights and promote justice. Ambiguities in the constitution should be clarified through legislative reform to prevent conflicts and misinterpretations.



2. Promoting Civic-Conscious Entrepreneurship: Educational institutions should restructure their entrepreneurship programs to integrate citizenship education content, focusing on ethics, social responsibility, and democratic participation. This will foster socially conscious entrepreneurs who contribute to the public good.
3. Enhanced Civic Participation in Governance: The government should institutionalise inclusive decision-making by encouraging civic engagement at all levels of governance. Mechanisms for citizen feedback and accountability should be embedded in public administration.
4. Guarantee of Equal Citizenship Rights: The Government must ensure that no Nigerian is denied full citizenship rights based on ethnicity, religion, gender, or geographic origin. This includes granting full residency rights and eliminating discriminatory practices that promote micro-nationalism.
5. Improved Infrastructure for Innovation and Enterprise: To foster entrepreneurship, the state must invest in both urban and rural areas by providing basic amenities, such as clean water, electricity, quality roads, healthcare, and internet access. Such infrastructure is essential for an innovative enterprise to thrive.
6. Support for Intercultural Integration: National integration should be promoted through the unrestricted mobility of people, goods, and services. The state should encourage interethnic marriages and other cross-cultural exchanges that strengthen national unity.
7. Effective Leadership and Good Governance: Nigeria needs visionary and accountable leadership that models the values taught through citizenship education. Strong institutions and effective leadership are crucial to creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurship and innovation.
8. Entrepreneurship as a Development Tool: The government should actively support entrepreneurship as a strategy for job creation and poverty alleviation, especially by investing in youth-focused ventures, innovation hubs, and community-based cooperatives.

By aligning citizenship education with entrepreneurship and innovation, Nigeria can equip its young population not only to earn a livelihood but also to build a nation that is democratic, united, and economically resilient.

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