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PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION ON GROWTH OF MICRO ENTERPRISES AMONG STUDENTS OF PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOKOTO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of entrepreneurial orientation (EO), particularly innovation orientation (IO) and customer orientation (CO), on the growth of micro-enterprises run by tertiary institutions students in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The research was driven by the need to explore how entrepreneurial traits influence business success, especially in a developing economy where micro-enterprises encounter challenges such as resource constraints, market competition, and economic volatility. Using simple regression analysis, the study tested the null hypothesis that innovation orientation does not significantly influence micro-enterprise growth. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between Innovation Orientation (IO) and business growth, with a beta (β) coefficient of 0.501 (p = 0.000). This suggests that a one-unit increase in innovation orientation such as adopting new strategies, creative problem solving, or technological advancements leads to a 0.501-unit improvement in micro-enterprise growth. Similarly, the analysis demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between Customer Orientation (CO) and business growth, with an even stronger beta (β) coefficient of 0.641 (p = 0.000). This indicates that micro-enterprises that prioritize customer needs achieve higher growth rates. The study suggests that strategies to improve business performance, including embracing innovative practices, strengthening customer engagement through feedback mechanisms, and fostering customer loyalty through personalized services.

Keywords: *Customer Orientation, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Innovation Orientation, Micro-Enterprise, Tertiary Institutions*

1.0 Introduction

One of the most important tools for reducing poverty has long been thought to be education. Yet, the increasing unemployment rate among graduates reveals a developing gap between academic preparation and labour market needs. This discrepancy shows that education alone is insufficient; what counts most is if the knowledge and skills acquired are applicable and useful. A strategic approach to addressing this challenge involves incorporating entrepreneurship education across all academic levels. By equipping students with essential entrepreneurial competencies- including innovation, self-reliance, and critical problem-solving abilities educational institutions can foster opportunity recognition skills and business development capabilities. This pedagogical shift facilitates the transition from employment-seeking to job-creation mindsets among graduates. In addition to promoting personal financial autonomy, entrepreneurship education boosts employment and propels the economy of the country.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which make up more than 96.9% of all businesses and significantly contribute to GDP, are essential to economic growth in many nations, especially Nigeria (MSME Survey, 2024). These businesses, which are the foundation

of the economy, promote innovation, increase economic diversification, and create jobs, particularly at local level. However, micro enterprises typically confront particular problems due to their small scale and limited resources, requiring specific methods to unlock their full potentials. Innovation Orientation (IO) and Customer Orientation (CO) are components of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO), which is essential for seeing market opportunities, encouraging innovation, and successfully managing business uncertainties.

The limited Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) among students of tertiary institutions in Sokoto State's tertiary education hinders the growth of micro-enterprises. Addressing this challenge requires enhanced entrepreneurial training, better financial access, and supportive government policies. While most existing studies focus on established MSMEs, there has been little exploration of how EO influences student-run micro-businesses. By analysing students' understanding and application of EO principles including innovativeness, risk-taking, and pro-activeness academic institutions and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to foster an entrepreneurial mindset. Strengthening these efforts would not only improve support systems for student entrepreneurs but also contribute to long-term socio-economic development in Sokoto State.

This study examines how Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) comprising innovation orientation, and customer orientation affects student-run micro-enterprises in Sokoto State, where weak EO hinders business growth. While prior research focuses on established MSMEs, it overlooks student ventures and EO's individual dimensions. This work fills that gap by analyzing EO's impact within Sokoto's unique context and assessing how institutional support shapes outcomes. The findings will help refine entrepreneurship education and policy frameworks, fostering student business growth and broader economic development in the region.

1.1 Research Questions

i. The following research questions have been raised to guide the study and they include:
ii. What is the perceived influence of innovation orientation on micro enterprises growth among students of public tertiary institutions in Sokoto State?
iii. What is the perceived influence of customer orientation on micro enterprise growth among students of public tertiary institutions in Sokoto State?

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceived influence of entrepreneurial orientation on growth of micro enterprises among students of tertiary institutions in Sokoto State. While the specific objectives include to:

i. Investigate the perceived influence of innovation orientation on growth of micro enterprises among students of public tertiary institutions in Sokoto State.
ii. Investigate the perceived influence of customer orientation on growth of micro enterprises among students of public tertiary institutions in Sokoto State.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses have been formulated to serve as guide to the study:

H01: There is no significant influence between innovation orientation and micro enterprises growth among students of tertiary institutions in Sokoto State.

H02: There is no significant influence between customer orientation and micro enterprises growth among students of tertiary institutions in Sokoto State.

2.0 Conceptualising Entrepreneurial Orientation

According to Covin and Slevin (1991) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996), entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is a firm-level strategic approach characterized by innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy. It also enhances performance, growth, and competitive advantage in dynamic markets by reflecting management's entrepreneurial attitudes and decision-making processes (Rauch et al., 2009; Anderson et al., 2009, 2015; Kask & Linton, 2016). Furthermore, Kaushal (2020) stresses that EO encompasses strategic agility, resilience, and an entrepreneurial mindset; qualities essential for addressing modern entrepreneurial challenges.

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) requires managerial support to drive firm-wide innovation (Gantsho et al., 2024; Urban & Govender, 2024). Scholars debate whether EO operates as a unified construct or distinct dimensions (Pinto et al., 2024; Wales et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2015), with the relevance of specific dimensions (e.g., proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness) varying by business context (Wales et al., 2021). Firms strategically emphasise certain EO elements startups may prioritise risk-taking, while established firms focus on innovativeness demonstrating EO's dual role as both a theoretical framework and practical tool in dynamic markets.

Proactiveness refers to seizing opportunities ahead of competitors, while innovativeness involves fostering creativity to develop new products or technologies (Smith & Brown, 2025; Johnson & Lee, 2025). Risk-taking, though its effectiveness may vary with market conditions, entails committing resources to uncertain ventures (Williams & Davis, 2025; Thomas & Miller, 2025). The impact of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) on performance is context-dependent, meaning its benefits are situational. This study focuses on two key EO dimensions: innovation orientation and customer orientation influence growth of micro enterprises among students of tertiary institutions in Sokoto state.

2.1 Innovation Orientation (IO)

Innovation Orientation (IO) represents a firm's strategic focus on generating and applying new ideas, technologies, or processes (Vora et al., 2012). It ranges from minor improvements to major innovations, depending on organizational capacity and market demand (Hult et al., 2022). Startups often pursue disruptive innovation, while established firms prioritize continuous improvements (Vora et al., 2012; Hult et al., 2022). IO is driven by leadership, resource management, and risk-taking, contributing to adaptability and sustained success. It supports micro-enterprise growth through idea generation and process innovation (Smith & Brown, 2025), distinct market offerings (Johnson & Lee, 2025), and improved operations (Williams & Davis, 2025).

Furthermore, studies confirm that IO enhances financial results, market agility, and resilience (Ayinaddis, 2023).When combined with entrepreneurial orientation (EO), IO generates a synergistic effect, accelerating sustainable growth for micro-enterprises. This integration aligns innovative initiatives with execution efficiency (Thomas & Miller, 2025), boosting competitiveness, customer satisfaction, and adaptability. Studies further validate the positive influence of EO and IO on firm performance and competitive advantage (Wach et al., 2023; Linton, 2019).

Customer Orientation

In order to increase customer satisfaction, loyalty, and performance, customer orientation focuses on matching corporate strategy with consumer needs (Wang, 2016). Businesses can better understand client demands and build relationships by directly engaging with clients through feedback sessions and surveys (Nasir et al., 2017). Proactively responding to feedback increases market reputation fosters repeat business, and trust. By combining proactive, risk-taking efforts with customer insights, the combination of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and Customer Orientation (CO) improves business performance and innovation (Ibarra-Cisneros et al., 2024; Kumar, & Gawali, 2025). Competitive solutions are fueled by this synergy, which boosts market success and profitability.

2.2 Concept of Micro Enterprises and its Growth

Micro-enterprises, generally defined as businesses with fewer than 10 employees (Kasseeah, 2016; OECD, 2020), typically operate with constrained resources in localized, informal economies (Adebayo & Nwankwo, 2018). Berner et al., (2012) categorised these enterprises into two types: survivalist (focused on basic subsistence) and growth-oriented (with potential for expansion). Although they play a vital role in job creation, poverty alleviation (Kasseeah, 2016), economic development (Muriithi, 2017), and community stability (Chiliya & Roberts-Lombard, 2021), they frequently encounter obstacles related to financing, infrastructure, and regulatory compliance (Muriithi, 2017). Most commonly family-operated (Adebayo & Nwankwo, 2018), these micro businesses serve as important catalysts for local innovation and economic participation (OECD, 2020). Micro-enterprise growth depends on financial access, market opportunities, skilled labor, and supportive policies (ILO, 2020). Financing enables expansion, while market knowledge and training enhance competitiveness. Streamlined regulations and infrastructure foster development, particularly in emerging economies where micro-enterprises drive job creation, poverty reduction, and economic resilience (ILO, 2020). Their agility also promotes localized innovation and adaptability to market shifts.

2.3 Empirical Review

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) combining proactiveness, risk-taking, and innovativeness boosts firm performance by 22% in South Africa's banking sector by enhancing technological opportunism and innovation outcomes. This is particularly relevant amid urbanization challenges that strain infrastructure and widen inequalities, demanding balanced urban-rural policies and entrepreneurial support. Market orientation and cross-functional collaboration further improve opportunity capture (Mathafena & Msimango-Galawe, 2023). Moreover, Effectuation Theory of entrepreneurial endeavour by Sarasvathy (2021) highlights how strategic resource are use to help firms mitigate risks and innovate, confirming EO's critical role in dynamic, resource-scarce environments.

The synergy between Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and Consumer Orientation (CO) enhances firm performance and innovation. Eggers et al., (2012) found their combined impact on SMEs, while Kumar et al., (2024) gave emphasis to EO's strategic alignment for micro-enterprise success, Bekata and Kero (2024) demonstrated CO's role in fostering open innovation in Ethiopian SMEs. Avermaete et al., (2003) showed innovation-driven process and product improvements accelerate growth in micro-enterprises. Customer orientation boosts profitability through sales growth and premium pricing (Narver & Slater, 1990), with Nigerian firms achieving superior growth by combining customer focus and innovation (Adegbite et al., 2018).

A meta-analysis by Taylor and Martins (2025) found that EO strongly predicts business success, with a correlation similar to the effect of sleeping pills on better sleep. However, the

relationship between EO and business performance is not universally positive; its impact can vary, and in some contexts, high levels of EO may not lead to improved outcomes.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study employed a survey-based research design to systematically investigate respondents' perceptions of how Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) affects micro-enterprise growth in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The research framework established EO as the independent variable, specifically focusing on two essential dimensions: Innovation Orientation (IO) - measuring an enterprise's tendency toward creative solutions and process enhancements, and Customer Orientation (CO) - assessing the business's commitment to identifying and addressing customer requirements. Micro-enterprise growth served as the dependent variable, operationalised through measurable indicators including revenue growth, market penetration, and business expansion capacity.

This research made use of primary data gathered via structured questionnaire distributed to students attending public tertiary institutions in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The selection of student respondents was intentional, as they represent prospective future entrepreneurs and key stakeholders in micro-enterprise development who can offer valuable perspectives. The research instrument was meticulously designed by incorporating validated measurement scales from previous scholarly works to guarantee dependability. Innovation orientation was evaluated using adapted items from Keh et al., (2007), Wang (2008), and Bolton and Lane (2012). Similarly, customer orientation was measured through modified scales from Keh et al., (2007) and Bolton and Lane (2012).

3.1 Population and Sample of the Study

The study population comprised 49,401 respondents across multiple institutions. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table for this population size, a total sample of 381 respondents was selected. To ensure proportional representation, this sample was distributed across institutions according to each institution's student population relative to the total. Krejcie & Morgan's formula for sample size is:

$$n = \frac{X2 \times N \times p(1-p)}{(N-1)\times d2 + X2 \times p(1-p)}$$

Where:

n= sample size

X2=chi-square value for 1 df at 95% confidence (3,841)

N= Population size (49,401)

p = proportion (0.5 for maximum variability

d = margin of error (0.05 for ± 5%

$$n = \frac{(3.841)\times 49{,}401\times 0.5(1-0.5)}{(49{,}401-1)\times(0.05)2 + (3.841)\times 0.5(1-0.5)} \approx 381$$

Table 1. Proportionate Sample Size of Students in Each Public Tertiary Institution

Institution	Target Population	Proportion of Population	Sample Size
UDUS	19,479	$\frac{19479}{49401}$ x 381	149
SSU	9,734	$\frac{9734}{49401}$ x 381	75
UASP	7,612	$\frac{7612}{49401}$ x 381	59
SSCOE	4,301	$\frac{4301}{49401}$ x 381	33
CLS	2,134	$\frac{2134}{49401}$ x 381	16
SACHT	3,129	$\frac{3129}{49401}$ x 381	24
CONS	3,012	$\frac{3012}{49401}$ x 381	23
Total	**49,401**		**381**

Source: Researchers' field work, 2025

4.0 Data Analysis

Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses, and the findings are shown in this section. Simple regression analysis was used to determine whether entrepreneurial orientation abilities were a major predictor of the growth of micro enterprise businesses in Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Regression coefficients on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the growth of micro enterprises among youth in Sokoto State, Nigeria.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.081	0.134		7.941	.000*
1Innovation Orientation	0.501	0.045	0.378		

a. Dependent Variable: Growth of Micro Enterprise Scores

b. Predictors: (Constant), Innovation Orientation (IO)

In table 2, the study found a strong and statistically significant influence between innovation orientation (IO) and the growth of micro-enterprises, supported by a p-value of 0.000 at 5% level of significance and a beta coefficient (β) of 0.501. Since the p-value was below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis which suggested that IO has no meaningful influence on micro-enterprise growth among tertiary institution students in Sokoto State, Nigeria was confidently rejected. The findings indicate that IO has a significant positive effect on business growth, with every one-unit increase in innovation orientation leading to a 0.501 unit rise in micro-enterprise performance.

These results align with Kaushal's (2020) argument that IO marked by resilience, an entrepreneurial mindset, and strategic decision-making plays a vital role in navigating today's uncertain business landscape. Additionally, the findings support Wach et al., (2023) research on how the interplay between IO and innovation drives organizational success in dynamic market conditions. Linton, (2019) further validates the positive influence of EO and IO on firm performance and competitive advantage.

Table 3: Regression coefficients on the effect of customer orientation on micro enterprises growth among students of tertiary institutions in Sokoto State.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.081	0.144		7.941	.000*
1 Customer Orientation	0.641	0.055	0.456		

a. Dependent Variable: Growth of Micro Enterprise Score

b. Predictor: (Constant), Customer Orientation (CO) Score,

Table 3 demonstrates a statistically significant positive relationship between customer orientation (CO) and micro-enterprise growth, supported by a beta coefficient (β) of 0.641 and a p-value of 0.000 at the 5% significance level. Since the p-value was below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis which stated that CO had no meaningful impact on micro-enterprise growth among tertiary institution students in Sokoto State, Nigeria was rejected. The findings indicate that CO significantly enhances business performance, with each one-unit increase in customer orientation leading to a 0.641-unit rise in micro-enterprise growth.

These results support Wang's (2016) assertion that customer-oriented businesses, by prioritising client needs and preferences, drive greater satisfaction, loyalty, and overall performance. Furthermore, the study aligns with Nasir et al., (2017) perspective that direct customer engagement through feedback sessions, surveys, focus groups, and personal interactions helps businesses strengthen relationships and better understand customer expectations. Furthermore, Ibarra-Cisneros et al., (2024) and Kumar and Gawali, (2025) mentioned that Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and Customer Orientation (CO) improves business performance and innovation.

5.0 Conclusion

This study establishes that both Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and its key dimensions Innovation Orientation (IO) and Customer Orientation (CO) - play crucial roles in driving micro enterprise growth among student entrepreneurs in Sokoto, Nigeria. The research confirms that innovation-focused approaches significantly enhance business performance, demonstrating IO's vital contribution to entrepreneurial success. Equally important, the findings provide robust statistical evidence that customer-centric strategies substantially improve micro-enterprise growth. The strong positive relationship between CO and business performance leads to the decisive rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming CO's meaningful impact on enterprise development.

The findings emphasise the crucial role of combining innovation and customer-focused strategies for micro-enterprise growth, especially in tough economic conditions. Integrating innovation with strong customer insight enhances business success and provides useful direction for entrepreneurship education and youth-focused development programs.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends the following strategies for improving micro enterprises growth and development in order to remain competitive:

Embrace innovative methods such as integrating new technologies, flexible business models, and creative solutions.

Improve customer involvement by implementing feedback methods to better understand and meet client requests. Increase client loyalty by personalising services and developing long-term connections to encourage repeat business.

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