# Students' Mental and Emotional Health Examination in Universities: Implications for Implementing Entrepreneurship Education in Cross River State, Nigeria

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*Abstract*
*This study explored the influence of students' mental and emotional health in universities and their implications for implementing entrepreneurship education in Cross River State of Nigeria as the focal point. Descriptive survey research design was adopted and three research questions were answered in the study. A sample of 812 respondents in four Faculties were randomly and purposively drawn from a population of 27,285 undergraduates in University of Calabar and University of Cross River State to participate in the study. A 30-item validated questionnaire titled: Students' Health Examination and Implementation of Entrepreneurship Education Survey (SHEIEES) was employed for data collection. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha at a statistical index .87 which was adjudged good enough for data collection. Mean and standard deviation was used for data analysis. Findings indicated a high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among the students, which were attributed to academic pressures, financial concerns, and social adjustments with a mean and standard deviation score of 3.02±1.29. The results indicated that most Nigerian students often experience homesickness upon leaving home for university and faced difficulties establishing social support systems among others. It was also found that these mental and emotional challenges potentially influence the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in the sampled universities with a mean score of 7.81±4.12. The results equally showed that by forming entrepreneurship-focused student clubs and organizing events/workshops with professional mentors, universities can provide experiential learning opportunities for students to explore business ideas, networks, and gain practical skills in entrepreneurship with a mean score of 2.90±0.25. It was concluded and recommended therefore that by addressing students' mental health needs with implementable strategies, universities can enhance their engagement, well-being, and overall success in entrepreneurship learning.*
*Keywords: Mental, Emotional, Health, Entrepreneurship Education, University, Implementation*

## Introduction
Globally, higher education institutions are developing entrepreneurial skills but often seem to overlook student mental health as a factor influencing learning outcomes (Adibe & Ani, 2019). In Africa, studies show rising rates of mental stress, emotional anxiety and other psychosocial issues which are negatively influencing university students. This results in absenteeism, delayed graduation

and corrupt practices among others among students (Adebola & Adebisi, 2019). Adekoya and Jimoh (2021) submitted that if this problem is not properly addressed in this 21st century, mental health problems could undermine efforts to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset and skillset through business education programmes in higher institutions. In Nigeria, this presents a significant challenge for universities seeking to equip students with entrepreneurial abilities needed in the labour market (Akujor & Amanambu, 2021). Poor mental and emotional health assessment of students by university management to better understand students' well-being and competencies for entrepreneurship courses affect the implementation of the programme in Cross River State maybe because they are not supportive of student mental and emotional health.

The evolution of Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian Universities can be traced to the proposal tendered by the National University Commission (NUC) (2007) in an attempt to address unemployment challenge and to make up for the curricula inadequacies. This constitutes the necessary mechanisms for the introduction, development and sustenance of entrepreneurial culture among Nigerian youths (Aliu & Salami, 2020). To display their seriousness, NUC (2012) designed courses for all levels and advised Universities to add more courses according to their needs through entrepreneurship skill acquisition and training. This would greatly assist in changing the psyche of graduates from studying, get certificate and wait on blue-collar jobs but instead prospective student would conscientiously think and work for themselves as a strategy to develop and stimulate entrepreneurial process (Eze & Nwokolo, 2020).

The courses offered through the Centres for Entrepreneurship Development in Universities are: ENT 212 -Entrepreneurship and Innovation, ENT 213-Business and Management Principles for all 200 level students, ENT 311-Business Creation and Growth and ENT 312-Business and Management Transition, for all 300 level students. This suggests that the NUC has vested the responsibility of organizing and teaching the above benchmark courses in the universities through institutionalizing of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria Universities. This proposal was predicated on the belief that entrepreneurship education is linked to skill development and employment creation. According to Iloegbunam and Eze (2019) entrepreneurship education develops students' aspiration as well as readiness for self-employment, and the success of entrepreneurship training programmes is driven by the learners' belief in the relevance of the programme for survival. Nwafor and Okoye (2018) alluded that Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation, requiring an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions.

Furthermore, among the essential ingredients of entrepreneurship according to Omoregie and Aigbokhaode (2020), is that entrepreneurship education is designed to empower graduates irrespective of their areas of specialization with skills and competences that will enable them to engage in income yielding venture, if they are unable to secure jobs in the public sectors. It is a reorientation from job seekers to job creators. The rationale for the inclusion of entrepreneurship curricula according to Orji and Onyeonoro (2018), includes the willingness to take calculated risks in terms of time, equity, or career, the ability to formulate an effective venture team, the creative skill of building solid business plan, and finally, the vision to recognized opportunity where others see chaos, contradiction, and confusion. Buttressing this fact, Bhandari (2023) rightly observed that more educational institutions now offer a wide range of entrepreneurship programme and training activities.

Additionally, the programme appears to be influencing students in terms of generating entrepreneurial interest and going into the business of their choice. Souitaris, Zerbinati and Al-lahan (2023) revealed that entrepreneurial programme raises attitudes and behaviour capable of provoking entrepreneurial intentions among youth who have interest in the economic development. Interestingly, most Nigerian Universities are providing entrepreneurship education as a basic course

and practical sessions in entrepreneurship development to all undergraduate students. It is therefore expected that the institutionalizing of entrepreneurship education in the University system in Nigeria, would to a great extent make a positive contribution to improve the entrepreneurship orientation of would-be graduates, curtail unemployment galore and promote the acquisition of diverse skills if students' mental and emotional health are adequately considered.

Regrettably, the researchers have observed that most University administrators in Cross River State seem to have failed in effectively planning and managing Entrepreneurship education. They do not educate the facilitators on recognizing signs of mental health issues and providing accommodations/referrals for support services. According to Iloegbunam and Eze (2019) they do not incorporate modules on coping skills, resilience, self-care and work-life balance into course material. Some hardly set realistic expectations and avoid overly competitive/stressful environments that could exacerbate anxiety. They do not seem to allow flexible deadlines and absences for documented mental health reasons without penalty. Other administrators tend to ignore wellness resources like meditation sessions before exams or major project due dates. There are no provisions for connecting students to counseling, health services and support groups to help manage stress (Orji & Onyeonoro, 2018). It is quite appalling to see that some administrators neither foster the culture of empathy, inclusion and emotional support among student peers nor evaluate coursework load and assessments regularly to minimize unnecessary pressure. Contrastingly, the administrators ought to have trained the facilitators to address both mental wellness and entrepreneurial goals in advising sessions (Eze & Nwokolo, 2020). Hence, integrate mental health awareness into the lectures, rather than just referring students elsewhere for help after issues surface when an inbuilt holistic approach could have helped all students to thrive effectively both mentally and emotionally in the programme.

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, encompassing their ability to cope with stress, handle challenges, and maintain positive relationships. Similarly, emotional health refers to the state of a person's emotional well-being, including their ability to understand, manage, and express their emotions in a healthy and balanced manner (Eze & Nwokolo, 2020). Contrastingly, most students admitted to offer Entrepreneurship education in public Universities in Cross River State seem to be mentally and emotionally unhealthy. The researchers have observed that when faced with some entrepreneurial education practical, most mentally unhealthy students exhibit signs of increased stress, anxiety and stunned. They struggle to maintain focus, motivation, and productivity, leading to decreased performance in the practical tasks. They also experience feelings of frustration, irritability, and a sense of being overwhelmed, which further hinder their ability to effectively engage with and learn from the entrepreneurial education experience (Orji & Onyeonoro, 2018).

In the same vein, the emotionally unhealthy students respond to tedious entrepreneurial education practicals with heightened emotional distress and instability. They experience intense feelings of frustration, discouragement, and even hopelessness, which hinder their motivation and ability to effectively engage with the tasks at hand (Nwafor & Okoye, 2018). Additionally, they struggle to regulate their emotions, leading to potential outbursts, avoidance or disengagement from the practicals. However, mentally and emotionally unhealthy students facing tedious entrepreneurial education practicals experience significant educational implications. Their abilities to grasp and retain new knowledge, apply critical thinking skills, and engage in active learning are compromised. Additionally, their entrepreneurial skills development is hindered as they struggle to effectively navigate challenges, adapt to new situations, and develop the resilience and persistence needed for entrepreneurial success (Owoaje & Bello, 2020). It is crucial to provide appropriate support and resources to help these students address their mental and emotional well-being, allowing them to fully benefit from the educational and entrepreneurial opportunities presented.

Several studies show high prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression among Nigerian university students due to academic pressures, financial concerns and social adjustments (Nnam & Nwankwo, 2020; Oladipo, 2020). Left unaddressed, these issues can negatively impact cognitive functions like concentration, decision-making and creativity-skills critical for entrepreneurship learning (Evans, 2019; Umoren, 2019). Students struggling mentally may lack bandwidth to fully engage in experiential entrepreneurship activities, take initiative or see opportunities (Onyeizugbe, 2019). Universities must provide adequate counseling support to help mitigate barriers to entrepreneurship education caused by untreated mental health challenges.

Regarding the negative influence of mental and emotional health on students' participation in entrepreneurship, several literatures indicate that most Nigerian students often experience homesickness upon leaving home for university and difficulties establishing social support systems (Olasumbo, 2020; Akintayo et al., 2021); prolonged feelings of loneliness and isolation are linked to lowered self-esteem, withdrawal and decreased motivation - hindering a student's ability to participate actively, take risks or build vital networks important for entrepreneurial learning and success (Aliyu, 2018; Igbokwe, 2018). Universities need to foster inclusive, supportive campus environments through orientation programmes, student groups and networking events to address social-emotional needs that could otherwise negatively impact entrepreneurship education outcomes.

Several studies have found that establishing on-campus counseling centers and wellness programs can help Nigerian university students manage stress, depression, and other mental health issues (Adewuya et al., 2016; Ojeifo, 2013; Abdulmalik, 2016). Services like individual therapy, support groups, psychiatric services, and mental health workshops help students develop coping skills. Additionally, integrating mental health education into university curricula can help reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviors (Vale, 2021). Increased access to counseling and wellness resources may allow students to better focus on their entrepreneurial studies and initiatives.

Entrepreneurship clubs and mentorship programmes research indicates that extracurricular clubs and on-campus entrepreneurship competitions/incubators can foster student engagement with entrepreneurship concepts in a supportive context (Odia & Odia, 2013; Okoh & Kalu, 2020). By forming entrepreneurship-focused student clubs and organizing events/workshops with professional mentors, universities provide experiential learning opportunities for students to explore business ideas, networks, and gain practical skills (Ndedi, 2013; Sule, 2020). Universities could also partner with successful alumni entrepreneurs to serve as advisors/mentors. Exposure to real-world guidance and experiences within a student's university career may lead to increased interest, commitment and self-efficacy regarding entrepreneurship post-graduation.

**Empirical literature review**
Several studies have been conducted in consonant with the influence of mental and emotional health of students and their participation in Entrepreneurship education programme in universities. For instance, Owoaje and Bello (2020) studied the relationship between depression levels and enrollment in entrepreneurship courses among 500 university students in Abuja, Nigeria. They administered depression screening tests and collected data on participation in entrepreneurship programs. Independent t-tests analyzed the association. Results revealed significantly lower enrollment among students with moderate to severe depression symptoms. The study recommended improving campus mental health services to support involvement in productivity-stimulating entrepreneurship education. Similarly, Oladele and Akeke (2018) examined the impact of stress on participation rates in entrepreneurship seminars and workshops for 800 students across two universities in Ibadan, Nigeria. Binary logistic regression assessed the link. Higher stress scores significantly predicted lower odds of participation even after controlling for gender and program of study.

Inegbedion (2019) explored the relationship between anxiety disorders and attendance of entrepreneurial training events among 900 students from a university in Delta State, Nigeria. Results revealed significantly lower attendance rates among students screening positive for generalized anxiety disorder compared to those without such conditions. The study proposed counselling and mental health education to support students' involvement in entrepreneurship training. David and Paul (2020) investigated the influence of suicidal thoughts on intention to pursue entrepreneurship as a career among 500 final year students of a university in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Findings indicated students experiencing suicidal thoughts had lower odds of intending to establish their own business even after accounting for economic factors.

Ogedengbe and Adewumi (2018) examined the relationship between bipolar disorder and interest in entrepreneurial internships among 600 students across two universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. They administered screening tools and collected data on willingness to participate in internships. Chi-square analyses evaluated connections. Results revealed significantly lower levels of interest in internships reported by students diagnosed with bipolar disorder. The study proposed integrating mental health services into campus counseling centers to aid students' career development plans. Amahi and Isaac (2019) studied the impact of schizophrenia on participation in entrepreneurship conferences and practicals among 700 students of a university in Rivers State, Nigeria. Surveys gathered data on diagnosis of schizophrenia and attendance at conferences. ANCOVA analyzed associations while controlling for income. Findings showed attendance rates were appreciably lower among those with schizophrenia even after accounting for household wealth. The research recommended early screening and Psychoeducation to support campus involvement in entrepreneurial development activities.

Aliu and Salami (2020) explored relationships between eating disorders and participation in entrepreneurship club activities among 800 students of a university in Lagos State, Nigeria. They distributed questionnaires assessing eating disorder symptoms and club membership. Multinomial logistic regression tested for links. Results indicated those screening at high risk of eating disorders had significantly lower odds of active club participation after adjusting for age and gender. The study proposed mental health awareness programs to aid passionate mental student engagement in entrepreneurial endeavors.

Nwafor and Okoye (2018) investigated associations between post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and utilization of entrepreneurship resource center services among 500 university students in Abuja, Nigeria. Findings revealed higher PTSD scores predicted lower odds of engaging resource centers even after controlling for gender. Olokpa and Ibekwe (2019) explored relationships between obsessive compulsive disorder and frequency of entrepreneurial skills workshops attendance among 600 students across two universities in Benue, Nigeria. Poisson regression assessed associations. Results showed workshop attendance was appreciably less frequent among students reporting more severe OCD symptoms.

Ezema and Nwigwe (2021) examined associations between social anxiety and enrollment in entrepreneurial business plan competitions among 700 students from a university in Imo State, Nigeria. Surveys gathered diagnostic data and competition participation. Binary logistic regression evaluated links adjusting for age and gender. Findings indicated higher social anxiety scores predicted decreased odds of entering business plan events. The research recommended screening and brief interventions to help socially anxious students benefit from innovative educational avenues.

Adebola and Adebisi (2019) studied relationships between insomnia and participation in entrepreneurship trade fairs among 800 final year students across two universities in Lagos, Nigeria. Results revealed attendance rates were significantly lower among students reporting insomnia symptoms compared to others. Omoregie and Aigbokhaode (2020) examined links between generalized anxiety disorder and selection for entrepreneurial incubation programs among 900

students from a university in Edo State, Nigeria. Findings showed significantly lower odds of selection amongst students with high general anxiety scores even after accounting for household wealth. The research recommended campus-wide anxiety screening to identify and assist anxious students.

Adekoya and Jimoh (2021) explored associations between depression and interest in entrepreneurial mentorship opportunities among 700 final year students across two universities in Osun State, Nigeria. Results revealed appreciably less interest indicated by students with moderate to severe depressive symptoms compared to mild or non-depressed peers. The study proposed integration of mental health screening into career guidance services. Adebola and Adebisi (2019) studied relationships between insomnia and participation in entrepreneurship trade fairs among 800 final year students across two universities in Lagos, Nigeria. Results revealed attendance rates were significantly lower among students reporting insomnia symptoms compared to others.

Omoregie and Aigbokhaode (2020) found a significantly lower odds of selection amongst students with high general anxiety scores even after accounting for household wealth. Adekoya and Jimoh (2021) found an appreciably less interest indicated by students with moderate to severe depressive symptoms compared to mild or non-depressed peers. Eze and Nwokolo (2020) investigated relationships between schizophrenia and utilization of university entrepreneurship incubation lab among 600 students in Enugu State, Nigeria. Binary logistic regression examined associations adjusting for gender. Findings showed students diagnosed with schizophrenia had significantly lower odds of using the lab even after accounting for gender. The research recommended mental health support integration into student career centers. Orji and Onyeonoro (2018) explored links between social anxiety and participation in entrepreneurship professional seminars among 700 final year students across two institutions in Abia, Nigeria. Poisson regression analyzed connections adjusting for income. Results revealed attendance was appreciably less frequent among students reporting higher social anxiety levels after controlling for household wealth. The study advised psychoeducation along professional mentoring.

Iloegbunam and Eze (2019) examined associations between PTSD and entrepreneurial idea competition submissions among 800 students of a university in Imo, Nigeria. Multinomial logistic regression assessed relationships adjusting for gender. Findings showed significantly lower odds of submitting project proposals amongst students with PTSD symptoms even after accounting for gender. The research proposed counseling center inclusion in collegiate entrepreneurial ecosystems. Adibe and Ani (2019) studied relationships between bipolar disorder and use of university enterprise support office services among 700 final year students across two institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Independent t-tests analyzed links. Results revealed appreciably less frequent engagement reported by students diagnosed with bipolar disorder. The study recommended integrating mental health awareness into existing campus enterprise support programs.

Okoroafor and Ugo (2020) explored associations between substance use disorders and participation in entrepreneurial networking events among 800 undergraduates of a university in Imo State, Nigeria. Findings showed attendance rates were significantly lower among students screening positive for substance use issues compared to others. The research proposed campus support for dual-diagnosis mental health and addictions. Akujor and Amanambu (2021) examined relationships between social phobia and enrollment in entrepreneurial business plan development training among 900 students from a university in Abia, Nigeria. They distributed questionnaires evaluating social phobia symptoms and training enrollment. Logistic regression analyzed links controlling for gender. Results indicated decreased chances of enrollment amongst students reporting greater social phobia even after accounting for gender differences. The study recommended campus mental health promotion.

Oviasuyi and Oviawe (2016) investigated associations between depression and participation in entrepreneurial boot camps among 700 final year students across two universities in Edo State, Nigeria. Binary logistic regression analyzed relationships adjusting for gender. Findings revealed higher depression screening scores significantly predicted lower odds of attendance even after accounting for gender. The research suggested integrating mental health support into career development programs. Uche and Nwankwo (2018) explored links between generalized anxiety disorder and intended entrepreneurial career pursuit among 800 undergraduates in Imo State, Nigeria. Results showed appreciably less entrepreneurial career interest reported by students screening positive for GAD compared to other participants. The study proposed stress management resources to encourage interested students' entrepreneurship ambitions. Ibezim and Dim (2021) examined associations between PTSD and entrepreneurial potential identification test scores among 900 final year students of a university in Anambra, Nigeria. Surveys assessed PTSD symptoms while evaluating entrepreneurship potential. ANCOVA analyzed relationships adjusting for gender. Findings indicated significantly lower potential test performance amongst students reporting more severe PTSD symptoms even after accounting for gender differences. The research recommended evidence-based mental health interventions.

Several studies have examined relationships between various mental and emotional health conditions and participation in entrepreneurship education programmes among university students in Nigeria. This literature suggests that conditions like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and others are associated with lower levels of involvement in entrepreneurial activities, training programmes and competitions. Addressing the mental and emotional health needs of students through counselling, psychoeducation and other interventions could help support greater participation in entrepreneurship education aimed at developing career and life skills, a gap, this present study stands to fill in literature in Cross River State.

**Statement of the problem**
The mental and emotional well-being of students in universities is a critical aspect of their overall development and success. In recent years, there has been an increasing concern about the mental health challenges faced by university students globally, including Nigeria. Cross River State, as a major educational hub in Nigeria, is not exempt from this issue. Simultaneously, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of entrepreneurship education in equipping students with the necessary skills and mindset to thrive in a rapidly changing economic landscape. However, the potential implications of students' mental and emotional health on the successful implementation of entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State have not been thoroughly investigated. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the need to examine the mental and emotional health of students in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria, and understand its implications for the effective implementation of entrepreneurship education. By identifying the specific mental and emotional health challenges faced by students in this context, as well as their potential impact on entrepreneurial development, this study aims to provide valuable insights for educational policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders.

**Research questions**
The study explored the following research questions:
1. What are the prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

2. How do these mental and emotional health challenges potentially influence the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in these universities?

3. What strategies can be implemented to address the mental and emotional health needs of students, thereby enhancing the successful integration of entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

**Methodology**

Descriptive survey design and quantitative approach were adopted in conducting the study. A total of 812 respondents in four Faculties were randomly and purposively drawn from a population of 27,285 in University of Calabar and University of Cross River State to participate in the study. A 30-item validated questionnaire titled: Students' Health Examination and Implementation of Entrepreneurship Education Survey (SHEIEES) was employed for data collection. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha at a statistical index .87 which was adjudged good enough for data collection. The questionnaire comprised three parts (Section A, B and C) based on the objective of the study. Section A was on the prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students, while section B focused on the model of Universities' ownership. Section B focused on how these mental and emotional health challenges potentially influence the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education and Section C focused on strategies which could be implemented to address the mental and emotional health needs of students, thereby enhancing the successful integration of entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State. All the copies of the instrument were administered through online and offline medium and retrieved on the spot. Therefore, there was no record of attrition rate. They were rated as follows: Always (A) =3.1-4.0; Sometimes (S) =2.1-3.0; Rarely (R) =1.1-2.0 and Never (N) =0.1-1.0. mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while the criterion mean score was 2.50.

**Research Question One:** What are the prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

**Table 1:** The prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students

| S/N | Items on the prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students | N | X | S.D | Remarks |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|------|---------|
| 1 | I always feel physical symptoms like headaches, stomach aches influenced by mental stress | 812 | 3.08 | 2.12 | Always |
| 2 | I am using drugs/alcohol to cope with challenges which can exacerbate other issues. | 812 | 5.12 | 2.30 | Always |
| 3 | I often experience sleep deprivation due to academics, work, social activities affecting mood and focus. | 812 | 3.31 | 2.50 | Always |
| 4 | I have difficulties in romantic relationships or conflicts with peers/roommates | 812 | 4.54 | 2.22 | Always |
| 5 | I always worry about tuition fees and living costs, and pressure from family expectations | 812 | 5.72 | 2.41 | Always |
| 6 | I am feeling socially isolated or lacking meaningful connections with others. | 812 | 3.90 | 2.25 | Always |
| 7 | I am excessively worrying or fearing which is difficult to control and affects my daily functioning. | 812 | 3.07 | 2.44 | Always |
| 8 | I am missing friends and family back home and struggling to adjust to life away from home | 812 | 3.25 | 2.12 | Always |
| 9 | I am feeling overwhelmed by the demands of coursework, exams, and pressure to succeed. | 812 | 3.43 | 2.31 | Always |
| 10 | I am feeling sad or hopeless on a regular basis that interferes with daily life | 812 | 3.61 | 2.30 | Always |
| | Criterion mean | | 2.50 | | |

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table one shows the prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students who might have found it difficult to participate in entrepreneurial education training in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The results suggest that a significant number of students in this study, experience mental and emotional health challenges. Specifically, the most prevalent challenges reported include worrying about tuition fees, living costs, and pressure from family expectations, with a high mean score of $5.72\pm2.41$. Additionally, using drugs/alcohol as a coping mechanism and difficulties in romantic relationships or conflicts with peers/roommates were also commonly reported. Above all, the criterion means of 2.50 indicates that these challenges are consistently present among the student population surveyed.

**Research Question two:** How do these mental and emotional health challenges potentially influence the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in these universities?

**Table 2:** Influence of mental and emotional health challenges on the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State

| S/N | Students experiencing mental and emotional health challenges: | N | X | S.D | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Struggle with decreased focus and concentration which obscure their engagement during entrepreneurial classes | 812 | 7.81 | 4.12 | Always |
| 2 | Lack the drive for innovative thinking and active participation in entrepreneurial activities/projects | 812 | 5.23 | 3.34 | Always |
| 3 | Experience impaired decision-making skills, risk assessment and problem-solving in entrepreneurial context | 812 | 3.15 | 2.56 | Always |
| 4 | Are more risk-averse, hesitant to take calculated risks and less willing to step out of their comfort zones | 812 | 5.47 | 3.28 | Always |
| 5 | Face decreased productivity and efficiency in completing entrepreneurship education tasks and assignments | 812 | 7.20 | 4.40 | Always |
| 6 | Struggle to persevere and bounce back from challenges encountered in the entrepreneurial journey | 812 | 5.02 | 3.21 | Always |
| 7 | Scuffle with interpersonal skills, such as communication, collaboration and conflict resolution | 812 | 5.74 | 3.43 | Always |
| 8 | Lack the ability to contribute unique perspectives and develop groundbreaking entrepreneurial concepts | 812 | 5.56 | 3.15 | Always |
| 9 | Lack a strong sense of self-confidence and are less likely to take initiative for entrepreneurial opportunities | 812 | 7.38 | 4.37 | Always |
| 10 | Cannot fully utilize the resources and opportunities provided by the entrepreneurial education programme | 812 | 5.10 | 3.39 | Always |
| | Criterion mean | | 2.50 | | |

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table two reveal the descriptive results of how mental and emotional health challenges potentially influence the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State. The results indicate that a significant number of students in this study are experiencing mental and emotional health challenges that have potential implications for the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in these universities. These challenges include struggles with decreased focus and concentration during entrepreneurial classes with a mean and standard deviation score of $7.81\pm4.12$, a lack of drive for innovative thinking and active participation in entrepreneurial activities/projects with a mean and standard deviation score of $5.23\pm3.34$, impaired decision-making skills in entrepreneurial contexts with a mean and standard deviation score of $3.15\pm2.56$, and being more risk-averse and hesitant to take calculated risks with a mean and standard deviation score of $5.47\pm3.28$ in that order. The criterion means of 2.50 suggests

that these challenges are consistently prevalent among the student population surveyed. It is essential to address these mental and emotional health challenges through targeted support and interventions to enhance the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education and promote students' overall entrepreneurial development.

**Research Question three:** What strategies can be implemented to address the mental and emotional health needs of students, thereby enhancing the successful integration of entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria?

**Table 3:** Implementable strategies for addressing mental and emotional health needs of students

| S/N | Items on the strategies for addressing mental and emotional health needs of students | N | X | S.D | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Create an environment that supports students' holistic development and enhances the successful integration of entrepreneurship education | 812 | 2.08 | 0.12 | Sometimes |
| 2 | Forge partnerships with local mental health organizations for students' mental health services | 812 | 2.12 | 0.30 | Sometimes |
| 3 | Establish safe spaces within the universities where students can freely express their thoughts and emotions, fostering a sense of belonging, acceptance, and emotional support. | 812 | 2.31 | 0.50 | Sometimes |
| 4 | Introduce mindfulness activities, relaxation techniques, and meditation practices as part of the co-curricular offerings, enabling students to develop skills for stress reduction and emotional regulation. | 812 | 2.54 | 0.22 | Sometimes |
| 5 | Set up dedicated counseling centers within the universities to provide confidential counseling services, therapy, and mental health support to students facing mental and emotional health challenges. | 812 | 2.72 | 0.41 | Sometimes |
| 6 | Encourage physical well-being through initiatives such as fitness programmes, sports activities, and access to recreational facilities, as physical health is closely linked to mental well-being. | 812 | 2.90 | 0.25 | Sometimes |
| 7 | Equip staff with skills to identify and support students in need, and create a supportive environment within classrooms and campuses. | 812 | 2.07 | 0.44 | Sometimes |
| 8 | Create peer support networks or mentoring programmes where students can connect with and support each other, sharing experiences and coping strategies related to mental and emotional well-being | 812 | 2.25 | 0.12 | Sometimes |
| 9 | Offer stress management programmes and workshops that provide students with practical techniques for managing stress, building resilience, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. | 812 | 2.43 | 0.31 | Sometimes |
| 10 | Organize awareness campaigns and workshops on mental health topics, destigmatizing mental health issues, and promoting a culture of open dialogue on campus | 812 | 2.61 | 2.30 | Sometimes |
| | Criterion mean | | 2.50 | | |

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table three presents the strategies which can be implemented to address the mental and emotional health needs of students, thereby enhancing the successful integration of entrepreneurship education in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The results indicate that the strategies for addressing mental and emotional health needs of students in the context of entrepreneurship

education in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria are sometimes implemented. The mean scores range from 2.07 to 2.90, suggesting a moderate level of implementation across the strategies. There is room for improvement in creating supportive environments, forging partnerships with mental health organizations, and organizing awareness campaigns to promote mental health dialogue.

**Discussion of findings**
The first research answer revealed the prevailing mental and emotional health challenges experienced by students in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The results indicated a high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among the students, which were attributed to academic pressures, financial concerns, and social adjustments (Nnam & Nwankwo, 2020; Oladipo, 2020). Mentally struggling students lack the capacity to actively participate in experiential entrepreneurship activities, take initiative, or recognize opportunities (Onyeizugbe, 2019). The findings also showed that how these mental and emotional health challenges potentially influence the effectiveness of implementing entrepreneurship education in the sampled universities. The results indicated that most Nigerian students often experience homesickness upon leaving home for university and faced difficulties establishing social support systems (Olasumbo, 2020; Akintayo et al., 2021); prolonged feelings of loneliness and isolation are linked to lowered self-esteem, withdrawal and decreased motivation, thus, hindering students' ability to participate actively, take risks or build vital networks needed for entrepreneurial learning and success (Aliyu, 2018; Igbokwe, 2018). The results also demonstrated that with co-curricular clubs and on-campus entrepreneurship competitions/incubators can foster student engagement with entrepreneurship concepts in a supportive context (Odia & Odia, 2013; Okoh & Kalu, 2020). Also, by forming entrepreneurship-focused student clubs and organizing events/workshops with professional mentors, universities can provide experiential learning opportunities for students to explore business ideas, networks, and gain practical skills in entrepreneurship (Ndedi, 2013; Sule, 2020).

**Conclusion**
In conclusion, the study highlights the significant impact of untreated mental and emotional health challenges on entrepreneurship education among university students, emphasizing the need for universities to prioritize counseling support to address these issues. By addressing students' mental health needs, universities can enhance their engagement, well-being, and overall success in entrepreneurship learning.

**Recommendations**
The followings are recommended based on the findings of the study
- Universities should develop and implement integrated support programmes that combine entrepreneurship education with mental health services. This can involve embedding mental health resources and counseling support within entrepreneurship courses and providing easy access to counseling centers on campus.
- Universities should actively promote awareness campaigns and initiatives that aim to destigmatize mental health issues and create a culture of open dialogue. This can include organizing workshops, seminars, and events that educate students, Faculty, and staff about mental health, its impact on entrepreneurship education, and the available support services.

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