

PSYCHOLOGICAL HOPE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS OF STUDENTS IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT- OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the correlation between psychological hope and students' entrepreneurial intentions. The sample comprised 305 students from five Federal Government-owned universities located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. A quasi-experimental research design was utilised, and data were collected through a cross-sectional survey methodology. Data analysis was conducted using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression Analysis, employing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. The results indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between psychological hope and students' entrepreneurial intentions within these universities. Specifically, the dimensions of students' willpower (agency) and way power (pathways) were identified as significantly influencing their entrepreneurial intentions. In light of these findings, the study concludes that psychological hope is critical in enhancing students' entrepreneurial intentions. The theoretical and managerial implications of these results are also discussed.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Intentions, Niger Delta Region, Nigeria, Psychological Hope, Students, Way power (Pathway), Willpower (Agency).

Introduction

Today, scholars and practitioners have a significant consensus that entrepreneurship is vital in driving individual and global economic advancement. Lemmon (2011) articulates that "entrepreneurship seems to have become the silver bullet for a job-scarce, unemployment-saddled global economy still struggling to shake off a severe recession." Similarly, Isenberg (2010) emphasises that "economic studies globally consistently link entrepreneurship, particularly the fast-growth variety, with job creation, GDP growth, and long-term productivity." In the United States, for example, start-ups generate over 70 per cent of new employment opportunities. Across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, numerous

accounts underscore the capacity of small businesses to transition economies and regions from poverty to economic prosperity.

The case of Rwanda is particularly notable. In the aftermath of the genocide, the Rwandan government adopted a strongly interventionist stance, identifying three key local industries (coffee, tea, and tourism) with evident potential for development and actively facilitating institutional support for these sectors to foster employment for millions. The outcomes have been noteworthy: approximately 72,000 new ventures were established, a tripling of exports within a decade, and a 25% reduction in poverty levels. As Lerner and Sahlman (2012) observe, the economic culture of the United States has historically been characterised by a proclivity for pursuing opportunities, a corresponding openness to adopting new products and services, social, legal, and economic tolerance for failure, and an agility in the efficient redeployment of human and financial resources. Collectively, these factors have cultivated a highly evolved system for allocating human and financial capital to entrepreneurial ventures, thereby providing the United States with a substantial competitive advantage.

The decision of the Nigerian government to undertake a comprehensive initiative to encourage citizens to engage in entrepreneurship represents a significant and positive development. The objective is to motivate individuals to create self-employment opportunities and provide employment for others rather than pursuing non-existent job prospects within government positions and large corporations. Among the various measures implemented by the government to promote entrepreneurship development in Nigeria are (1) the introduction of mandatory entrepreneurship education for all undergraduate students in tertiary institutions; (2) the initiation and funding of robust entrepreneurship advocacy in collaboration with the private sector, non-profit organizations, professional bodies, and universities; (3) the enactment of relevant legislation to facilitate the seamless establishment and operation of businesses; (4) the establishment of specialized agencies, institutions, and programs designed to assist current and aspiring entrepreneurs in launching and expanding their enterprises, such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), the Nigeria Export/Import Bank (NEXIM), the Bank of Industry, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Small and Medium Enterprises Investment Equity Scheme (SMEIES), and the Dragon Project, a reality television competition focused on business ideas. The government anticipates that a significant number of students, if not all who have undergone entrepreneurship education, will pursue entrepreneurial ventures following graduation. To underscore this assertion, Schramm (2012) advocates for the expansion of the entrepreneurial class, stating, "The world needs more entrepreneurs: They make innovation real and advance what Brink Lindsey of the Kauffman Foundation has referred to as the 'frontier economy.'" He further contends, "If their ranks are too thin, it is the failure of society—particularly because the knowledge and skills of a successful entrepreneur can be taught."

While acknowledging the commendable efforts of the Nigerian government and other developing countries in promoting entrepreneurship education, it is essential to note that the business climate in Nigeria and similar nations remains unattractive and inhibitive. Businesses encounter numerous challenges, including inadequate electricity supply and other

infrastructural deficiencies, restricted access to credit, excessively high and multiple taxation systems, difficulties in contract enforcement, and concerns regarding investment and personal security. This complex situation has resulted in the closure of numerous large and small enterprises and simultaneously deters potential entrepreneurs from entering the market. According to the 2012 World Bank's "Ease of Doing Business Report," Nigeria is ranked 133rd out of 183 economies. This ranking suggests that Nigeria trails behind 132 other countries in terms of the ease with which the regulatory, social, and physical environments facilitate the initiation and operation of businesses. Consequently, individuals are less willing to invest their capital in Nigeria, which they perceive as unsafe. This situation necessitates proactive measures from all stakeholders, particularly the government. The pivotal question arises: How many individuals possess the psychological readiness to engage in entrepreneurship? Considering the narratives surrounding the early failures of existing business owners, one may question how many would be prepared to invest for future success and independence rather than seeking the security of paid employment. Furthermore, how can the resourcefulness of our youth be cultivated in the face of adversity and a challenging environment? If the aspirations and initiatives of the government are to be realised, then it is imperative to pose and address these questions comprehensively.

A comprehensive review of the entrepreneurship and management literature by Liñan et al. (2004) reveals a lack of consensus among social scientists regarding the determinants influencing the decision to become an entrepreneur. The authors emphasise that this decision has been analysed through many methodologies. Their inquiry examined specific personality traits associated with entrepreneurial activity (McClelland, 1961). Subsequent studies have underscored the significance of various demographic variables and characteristics, including age, gender, origin, religion, level of education, and labour experience (Reynolds et al., 1994; Storey, 1994). Both lines of analysis have facilitated identifying significant relationships between certain traits or demographic characteristics and the exhibition of entrepreneurial behaviours. However, the predictive capacity of these analyses has been markedly limited (Reynolds, 1997).

Theoretically, these approaches have faced criticism (Gartner, 1989; Robinson et al., 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Liñan et al., 2002) due to their methodological and conceptual issues and low explanatory power. Alternatively, considering that the decision to become an entrepreneur is plausibly perceived as voluntary and conscious (Krueger et al., 2000), it is reasonable to investigate the decision-making process involved. In this regard, entrepreneurial intention can be viewed as a preliminary and critical element influencing engagement in entrepreneurial behaviours (Fayolle & Gailly, 2004; Kolvereid, 1996). Moreover, the intention to undertake a specific behaviour is contingent upon an individual's attitudes toward that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). A more favourable attitude is likely to enhance the intention to act. Consequently, this "attitude approach" is preferable to traditional frameworks, such as those focused on traits or demographics (see the entrepreneurial attitude model by Robinson et al., 1991; Krueger et al., 2000).

Attitudes, therefore, represent the degree to which an individual evaluates something positively or negatively. Meanwhile, relatively stable attitudes can evolve over time and across different contexts. This raises concerns about the potential inefficacy of policies fostering entrepreneurial behaviour. From a psychological standpoint, the intention to become an entrepreneur has been identified as the best predictor of actual entrepreneurial behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Kolvereid, 1996). Hence, it is prudent to analyse entrepreneurial intention and its psychological determinants, especially given the availability of validated instruments for measuring abilities, attitudes, and psychological variables such as hope and intentions related to entrepreneurship.

In times of adversity, individuals are often compelled to introspect and extend their perspectives to harness previously overlooked resources. As philosopher Theocritus articulated, "While there is life, there is hope, and only the dead have none." It is noteworthy that, although Theocritus lived in a time that may not have presented challenges as profound as those we encounter today, he felt the necessity to convey this reassuring notion. When confronted with the arduous circumstances previously delineated, some individuals exhibit resilience through hope, while others succumb to resignation and embrace a fatalistic view of their environment. In this context, they relinquish hope and adopt a passive stance.

In recent discourse, a cognitive-based theory of hope has emerged in the field of positive psychology, particularly concerning organisational leadership. Shorey and Snyder (1997; 2004) have articulated hope as an integral element of effective leadership, leading to its inclusion in contemporary frameworks and models of leadership. This innovative scholarship is in its nascent stages, and numerous questions remain concerning the "processes by which leaders influence hope in followers" (Avolio et al., 2004). Within this framework, hope is characterised as a positive motivational state that empowers leaders and followers to exert the necessary effort to pursue and achieve organisational objectives. To deepen the understanding of the relationship between hope and leadership, the authors draw correlations between hope and established theories of motivation, goal setting, and goal attainment that are frequently utilised in leadership research.

Judging from organisational research that is either currently underway or has been completed, hope is recognized as a crucial factor in the management of human and social capital, commonly referred to as positive psychological capital (Luthans and Youssef, 2004). Hope significantly facilitates innovation during major organizational changes, such as mergers and acquisitions (Ludema et al., in progress). The influence of high-hope human resources on various organisational outcomes, including profitability, employee retention rates, follower satisfaction, and commitment, has been well-documented (Adams et al., 2003; Luthans and Jensen, 2003). Additionally, variations in hope levels among social workers correspond with differing levels of stress, job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Kirk and Koeske, 1995). The development of positive organizational hope and its effects on organizational citizenship behaviours have also been comprehensively explored (White-Zappa, 2001).

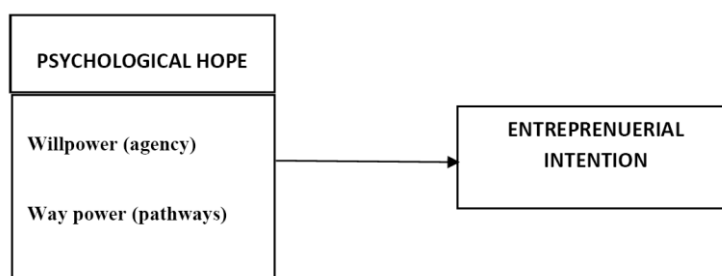
From the preceding discussion, it is evident that a considerable number of studies have focused on the constructs of psychological hope and entrepreneurial intention. This burgeoning

scholarly activity within the organisational framework represents one of the most significant advancements in the sociology of knowledge. Nonetheless, despite the extensive research on entrepreneurial development, there remains a notable deficiency: first, relative to other concepts within the Positive Organizational Behaviour (POB) framework outlined by Luthans (2002a), hope has attracted the least scholarly attention. Nevertheless, given that hope satisfies the POB criteria of being both state-like and dispositional (see Snyder, 2000), it is amenable to development (see Luthans and Jensen, 2002a). Moreover, it possesses a valid measure of 'State Hope' (Snyder et al., 1996) and has shown considerable indirect and preliminary direct evidence of its association with leadership effectiveness and employee performance. Therefore, hope appears to be precisely the type of positive psychological capacity pertinent to Organizational Behaviour (OB) that merits further investigation and application. As empirical evidence indicates that hope influences various favourable organisational outcomes, as previously discussed, we anticipate that this influence will similarly extend to the concept of students' entrepreneurial intentions. Second, there has yet to be a study investigating whether psychological hope can elucidate the entrepreneurial intentions of students in general and specifically among undergraduates in Nigerian universities.

To address these identified gaps in the management literature, the present study explores the relationship between students' levels of psychological hope and their entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-owned universities located in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Grounded in the theory of planned behaviour, this study aims explicitly to ascertain the extent to which Nigerian undergraduates perceive it as desirable and feasible to pursue business opportunities post-graduation, taking into account the prevailing environmental conditions and the role that hope plays in this decision-making process. Based on this foundation, the primary premise of this study is the potential relationship between psychological hope and entrepreneurial intention. Consequently, the central question guiding this study is: What is the nature of the relationship between psychological hope and entrepreneurial intention among students in the Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?

Conceptual Framework

The figure below presents to conceptual framework for this study.



Source: conceptualized by the researchers

Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework Showing the Hypothesized Relationship between Psychological Hope and Entrepreneurial Intention of Students in Selected Nigerian Universities.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

THE CONCEPT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HOPE DEFINED

During our review of relevant materials for this study, we encountered a wristband used as a promotional item by a confectionery firm, which bore the inscription: "Great hopes make great men." This notion finds its roots in Greek mythology, where Pandora, the first woman on earth, was entrusted with a box that she was instructed never to open. However, her overwhelming curiosity led her to do so, resulting in the release of all the world's evils—among them, hate, pain, destructiveness, starvation, and envy. Upon realizing the consequences of her actions, Pandora hastily closed the box, preventing the last entity from escaping, which was hope (Clinton, 2010).

Numerous esteemed figures from both ancient and contemporary periods have reflected on the concept of hope. For instance, President Barack Obama, in his book "The Audacity of Hope," posits that the realization of the American dream is attainable irrespective of one's circumstances. Conversely, Francis Bacon declared that "hope is a good breakfast, but it is a bad supper." Alexandre Dumas asserted that "until the day when God will desire to reveal the future to man, all human wisdom is contained in these two words: wait and hope." Similarly, Thomas Jefferson articulated, "I steer my bark with Hope in the head, leaving fear astern. My hopes sometimes fail; but not oftener than the foreboding of the gloomy." William Shakespeare noted, "True hope is swift and flies with swallows' wings; Kings it makes gods and meaner creatures kings." Theocritus famously stated, "While there's life, there's hope, and only the dead have none." Since the late 20th century, there has been a growing body of research exploring hope as a mechanism for enhancing mental health, physical well-being, and personal success, particularly among clinicians in psychology, medicine, life counselling, and recently, positive organisational behaviour (Helland and Winston, 2005).

What then is hope? Hope is an emotional state that fosters belief in a positive outcome concerning events and circumstances in an individual's life. It is characterized as the "feeling that what is desired can be attained or that events will unfold favorably," or as the act of "anticipating with desire and reasonable confidence," or "experiencing the belief that something wished for may occur." Additional definitions include "to cherish a desire with anticipation," "to desire with the expectation of fulfillment," or "to expect with assurance." In the English language, the term can function both as a noun and a verb; nonetheless, as a concept, hope retains a consistent meaning across both uses (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Empirical evidence suggests that employees who possess hope are inclined to engage in independent thinking. Luthans et al. (2007) assert that such individuals feel less constrained or conformed by the perspectives of others, including leaders, which allows them to adopt alternative viewpoints and generate creative solutions to problems while capitalizing on opportunities. An earlier study investigated the notion of hope in the context of parents of critically ill newborns. Amendolia (2010) posits that hope constitutes a recurring human phenomenon in neonatal intensive care units and defines hope as "the belief that circumstances in the future will improve. It is not a mere wish for improvement, but a genuine belief, even in the absence of evidence supporting change. Hope can encompass a broad spectrum of beliefs—

ranging from a high school student aspiring for an A in algebra to a cancer patient anticipating a cure, despite the current lack of scientific advancements toward such a solution.”

Hopeful individuals exhibit a heightened receptivity to diverse forms of information, enabling them to analyze problems and opportunities from multiple perspectives (Zhou & George, 2003). Characterized by a determination to achieve their goals, they demonstrate a propensity for risk-taking and actively seek alternative pathways when traditional routes are obstructed (Snyder, 1994, 2002). They employ self-affirmative phrases, such as “I can do it,” “this is very interesting,” “I am ready for this challenge,” and “I am not going to be stopped,” which fosters an intrinsic motivation for goal pursuit and encourages the exploration of creative solutions through the activation of their “agency energy” (Amabile, 1998; Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Snyder, 2002). Furthermore, hopeful individuals do not merely strive for goal attainment; they also introduce a degree of uncertainty into situations that appear definitive and attainable to others (Snyder, 2002). For instance, when confronted with tasks that seem effortless, they tend to “change the rules” (Snyder, 2002) to enhance their skill set (e.g., by establishing shorter deadlines or demanding novel approaches). This phenomenon can be observed among basketball players who approach the goal creatively and uniquely while attempting to score (Jones, 1973; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Consequently, they are likely to infuse creativity into their work activities and goals, facilitating skill development and enabling them to achieve objectives innovatively. Goals that seem unattainable transform into achievable targets through their creative efforts (Snyder, 2002), as they leverage their ingenuity to attain what appears unreachable to others. In instances where goals remain unachieved, hopeful individuals utilise such feedback to refine their goal-pursuit strategies, thereby increasing their energy levels and propensity to seek alternative and creative solutions to obstacles. They demonstrate a greater capacity for patience and resilience when confronted with difficulties related to problems and opportunities.

As Luthans et al. (2007) have suggested, “Hopeful employees tend to be creative and resourceful, even with tight budgets.” In contrast, individuals characterised by low levels of hope exhibit less cognitive flexibility and are less likely to generate alternative solutions for problem-solving and opportunity-seeking (Snyder, 1994, 2002). This diminished agency energy results in a decreased motivation to pursue goals, thereby reducing their enthusiasm for seeking creative avenues for attainment. Low-hope individuals are more inclined to adhere to organisational norms and comply with managerial directives (Luthans et al., 2007), making them less likely to propose innovative ideas that challenge the status quo or diverge from their superiors' viewpoints. With a perception of limited agency and pathways, they tend to focus on failure rather than success in relation to a given goal (Snyder, 1995). Consequently, they experience diminished motivation for goal pursuit and a lack of creativity in exploring routes to achievement. What is perceived as feasible by high-hope individuals becomes perceived as unachievable for those with low hope, leading to a reluctance to improvise and devise alternative solutions for problems and opportunities. Feedback resulting from unmet goals is often not utilized to enhance future efforts; instead, it may precipitate rumination and self-

doubt (Michael, 2000; Snyder, 1999, 2002), culminating in diminished intrinsic motivation, negative emotional states, and reduced creative endeavors in goal pursuit.

Hope theory (Snyder, Irving, and Anderson, 1991), which emerged from the field of positive psychology, has recently offered researchers a clear and measurable definition of hope. According to hope theory, hope is characterized as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)." Thus, hope transcends mere emotional experience; it is a dynamic, powerful, and pervasive cognitive process observable across a variety of contexts, including formal organizations.

Dimensions of Hope

Rather than emphasizing the emotional dimensions of hopefulness, C.R. Snyder conceptualized hope as a cognitive construct that encapsulates individuals' motivation and capacity to pursue personally relevant goals (Snyder, 1994; Snyder et al., 2002). Although the term is frequently employed in everyday discourse—such as in the phrase "hope for the best"—hope, as a construct within positive psychology, is precisely and operationally defined. Primarily through Snyder's theoretical framework and empirical research, hope is articulated as a cognitive framework that is predicated on a reciprocally derived sense of success, comprising (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of methods to achieve goals) (Snyder et al., 1991). Thus, hope is contingent upon two specific cognitive processes: agency thinking and pathways thinking. Agency thinking pertains to individuals' perceived ability to pursue goals despite obstacles, manifesting in self-statements such as "I can do this" and "I am not going to be stopped." Conversely, pathway thinking relates to individuals' perceived capacity to devise plausible routes toward their goals, evident in self-statements such as "I can find a way to get this done." This duality of both willpower (agency) and way power (pathways) distinguishes hope as a positive psychological capacity from the common usage of the term and from other conceptually related constructs, such as self-efficacy or optimism.

Specifically, the willpower dimension of hope parallels efficacy expectancies, while the pathway dimension is conceptually aligned with efficacy outcome expectancies. However, the distinction lies in that while Bandura (1997) posits that efficacy expectancies are paramount, Snyder (2000) regards agency and pathways as equally important, functioning in a combined and iterative manner. Furthermore, a conceptual differentiation exists between hope and optimism: optimism expectancies are shaped by external influences and factors outside the self (as articulated in Seligman's 1998 explanatory attribution style), whereas hope is internally initiated and determined (Snyder, 2000). A similar analysis can be applied to other conceptually analogous constructs, such as goal setting or positive affectivity; these constructs tend to emphasise either agency or pathways, but not both equally, as hope does. Research has demonstrated that hope possesses discriminant validity among various positive psychological constructs (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Scioli et al., 1997).

Extensive research has substantiated the assertion that hope is reliant on both agency and pathways thinking, that these components of hope can be reliably measured, and that individuals characterized by high levels of hope experience numerous advantages not afforded to their low-hope counterparts, including enhanced academic performance, psychological adjustment, and physical health (Arnau et al., 2010).

ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS

The significance of intentions has been recognized as pertinent within the management literature broadly, and more specifically within the entrepreneurship literature (Sutton, 1998; Bird, 1988). Research indicates that intentions can serve as predictors for both individual behaviours (Ajzen, 1991) and organisational outcomes such as survival, development, and growth (Mitchel, 1981). Consequently, understanding and predicting intentions emerges as a critical area of interest for managers and entrepreneurs (Tubbs & Ekeberg, 1991).

A substantial body of scholarship focused on entrepreneurship has centered on the concept of intentions (Bird, 1988; Krueger et al., 2000). This focus is primarily due to the fact that intentions are regarded as the most reliable predictors of individual behaviours, particularly in instances where such behaviours are infrequent, difficult to observe, or characterized by unpredictable time delays (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). The establishment of new ventures and the creation of new value within existing enterprises, as identified by Bird (1988) as key outcomes of entrepreneurial intentions, exemplify such behaviours.

Bird (1988) and Shane and Venkataraman (2000) further support the notion that the two primary objectives characterizing entrepreneurship are the establishment of new independent firms and the creation of new value within existing enterprises. In alignment with this perspective, we define entrepreneurial intention as a cognitive representation of the actions individuals plan to undertake in order to establish new independent ventures, acquire or inherit existing firms, and generate new value through these endeavors.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The extant literature outlines a variety of factors that are responsible for the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. Scholars have grouped them into two macro-categories: the individual and the contextual domains (Bird, 1988, in Fini et al., 2009). The individual domain consists of demographic characteristics or personal traits, psychological characteristics, individual skills and prior knowledge, individual networks, and social ties. The contextual domain comprises environmental support, environmental influences, and organisational factors. In the following discussion, we examine each of these factors comprising the two identified domains (Ajzen, 1987 in Fini et al., 2009).

Demographic characteristics - Individual characteristics such as educational level, age, gender, marital status, and employment status have been examined to identify the factors responsible for forming entrepreneurial intention. The earlier study by Reynolds et al. (2002) indicates that men in the United States are twice as likely as women to be in the process of starting a new business. The earlier study by Boyd (1990) also shows that age correlates positively with

entrepreneurial intention. More specifically, the study of Bates (1995) demonstrates that the intention and the likelihood to be entrepreneurial increase with age, peaking as people approach age 40 and then levelling out. In their study on ethnicity, Evans and Leighton (1989) show that married individuals are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities than single individuals.

Psychological characteristics, which are individual dimensions that can change due to influences from social relations and organisational and environmental exposure, have also been studied and found to influence entrepreneurial intention. The first attempt to study individuals' willingness and drive to engage in entrepreneurial activities can be traced back to the psychological studies of Atkinson (1957) and McClelland (1961), who introduced the need-for-achievement concept. McClelland (1961) argued that individuals with a high need for achievement are more willing to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Individuals' risk-taking propensity, which is another psychological dimension, has been shown to influence entrepreneurial intention (Stewart and Roth, 2001), tolerance of ambiguity (Budner, 1982), and locus of control (Evans and Leighton, 1989).

Management scholars have also examined the influence of individual skills and prior knowledge on entrepreneurial intentions. Wiklund and Shepherd (2003) argue that both entrepreneurial intentions and behaviours can be conceptualized as functions of entrepreneurs' abilities. The background and skills accumulated by each entrepreneur are, in fact, predictors of entrepreneurial activities. Roberts and Fusfeld (1981) argue that a high level of managerial skills is required for individuals involved in high-technology firms, while Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) state that technical and procedural skills are fundamental in knowledge-intensive entrepreneurial environments.

The influence of social capital on entrepreneurial intention has also been investigated. The findings of Aldrich (1999) revealed that social networks affect entrepreneurial intentions by structuring the context in which entrepreneurs must act. In the extant literature, social ties and networks have also been identified as dimensions responsible for individual entrepreneurship intention. Network analysts argue that entrepreneurship is a consequence of taking the opportunity to be the tertius, to be between others (Burt, 1992). More specifically, they find that combining high network centrality and extensive bridging ties strengthens the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance.

It is relevant to note that the influences of the surrounding business environment may also explain entrepreneurial activities. Scholars have emphasised that such contextual factors as characteristics of the local context (e.g., availability of logistic infrastructure, financial investors, and externalities), government policies, and, more specifically, university support mechanisms influence entrepreneurial activities (Morris & Lewis, 1995; Fini et al., 2008) as having the potential to influence entrepreneurial intentions. For example, governments may intervene through funding schemes, tax policies, and other support mechanisms to mitigate market inefficiencies and promote entrepreneurship (Lerner, 1999).

Some other scholars have emphasised the predictive power that the environment has on entrepreneurial intentions and behaviours (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003; Wiklund, 1999). With

specific regard to the creation of new independent ventures, scholars have shown that start-ups are not evenly distributed across all high-technology industries: biotechnology and computer software are the two most common industries in the United States (Lowe, 2002). Industry characteristics may drive individuals' entrepreneurial intentions.

On the other hand, psychological hope has been shown to influence several organisational outcomes. Using a sample of 78 adolescents diagnosed with cancer who were recruited from two pediatric oncology clinics, Hendricks-Ferguson (2008) examined the relationships between hope and spiritual well-being (SWB) — and its dimensions, religious well-being (RWB) and existential well-being (EWB) — to time since diagnosis among adolescents with cancer and found that adolescents in the first two time periods reported significantly higher levels of SWB, RWB, and EWB than those in subsequent periods. Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that hope did not significantly vary over time and that time since diagnosis may influence adolescents' levels of SWB and its dimensions during the cancer experience. Based on the findings above, Hendricks-Ferguson (2008) recommends, among others, that adolescents' use of SWB, RWB, and EWB as coping resources should be examined in longitudinal studies from diagnosis through survivorship. On their part, Benzein and Saveman (1998) posit that hope is an essential concept in nursing that has not been satisfactorily explored. Their study aimed to elucidate the concept of hope using a concept analysis technique described by Walker and Avant (1995). The critical attributes revealed were orientation, intentionality, positive expectation, realism, goal-setting, activity, and interconnectedness. Fitzgerald (2007) examined critical dimensions of hope and hope antecedents and threats that provided direction for nursing intervention and argued that conceptualizations of hope influence one's view of "false hope." The study also discussed specific challenges to nurses related to hope inspiration that are present at the end of life and summarised hope-inspiring strategies for persons at the end of life.

Besides the obvious implications that hope has in the clinical psychology and health fields, there has been growing evidence that hope has a positive influence on academic and athletic performance (Curry et al., 1997; Onwuegbuzie & Snyder, 2000). Psychological hope has been shown to have the most unique POB capacity. The empirical evidence also indicates that an individual's level of hope is related to goal expectancies, perceived control, and positive affect (Curry et al., 1997). Additionally, there is initial research showing that those with hope in stressful jobs, such as human services, do better (Kirk and Koeske, 1995; Simmons and Nelson, 2001) and even a couple of workplace studies that examine the impact on performance (Adams et al., 2002; Peterson & Luthans, 2002). However, despite the other POB concepts in the CHOSE framework (see Luthans, 2002a), hope has been given the least attention yet because hope meets the POB criteria of being state-like (as well as dispositional (see Snyder, 2000)) and thus is open to development (see Luthans and Jensen, 2002a), has a valid measure of 'State Hope' (Snyder et al., 1996), and at least considerable indirect and beginning direct evidence of being related to leadership effectiveness and employee performance. Hope would seem to be precisely the type of positive psychological capacity for OB that is needed to be further explored and applied.

Since hope has been empirically shown to influence other desirable organisational outcomes, as discussed above, we also expect that the same level of influence will be extended to students' entrepreneurial intentions. Hence, we hypothesise that:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the student's psychological state of hope and their entrepreneurial intention.

Ho_{1a}: No significant relationship exists between the students' willpower and entrepreneurial intention.

Ho_{1b}: No significant relationship exists between the students' way power and their entrepreneurial intention.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study adopts a triangulation of methodologies since no single methodology will adequately enable a complete understanding of human beings- the subject of our study. We believe, for example, that human beings are both creators and creatures of their environment. Thus, while the nomothetic approach (questionnaire) was the dominant method and provided the basis for analysing objective accounts, the ideographic approach (interview) enabled us to incorporate the subjective accounts of situations. This study adopted the quasi-experimental or ex post facto research design. This is particularly so as it is the most appropriate for research in the administrative sciences (Baridam, 2001), where the researcher has no control over variables in manipulating them (Cooper and Schindler, 2001:136). More specifically, we shall employ the cross-sectional survey, which has become popular in social/administrative science research for many reasons, including (1) it is budget and time-effective, (2) it is perceived to be more anonymous, and (3) it allows respondents time to think about the questions. It will be relevant to note that the cross-sectional survey or survey design is a process whereby standardised information is collected from a representative sample of a particular group or population. To complement data obtained using a cross-sectional survey (questionnaire), a series of unstructured interview questions were put to some respondents to gain more insights into the issues.

Sampling Procedure: A total of three hundred and fifty-two (352) copies of the questionnaire were sent out to Undergraduate Students of the five Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The study sample was derived using Taro Yamen's formula, as suggested by Baridam (2001). A total of three hundred and five (305) sets of the questionnaire were returned and used for analysis. The respondents were assured confidentiality of their responses and were also promised a soft copy of the research report as an incentive for responding to the research instrument.

Operational Measures of The Variables: The independent variable in this study is hope. Based on the work of Snyder et al. (1996, 2000), the dimensions of hope include willpower (agency) and way power (pathways). Willpower or agency thinking refers to people's perceived ability to pursue goals despite obstacles and is evident in self-statements such as, "I can do this"

and "I am not going to be stopped." On the other hand, way power or pathways thinking refers to people's perceived ability to generate plausible routes toward goals and is evident in self-statements such as "I can find a way to get this done." The concept of hope was measured using the Adult Hope Scale (AHS) by Snyder. Individuals were asked to report their hope via the State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996). Small adjustments were made to adapt the items to the work context. For example, the item "If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it" was replaced by "If I should find myself in a jam at work, I could think of many ways to get out of it". The agency (willpower) subscale score is derived by summing items 2, 9, 10, and 12; the pathway (way power) subscale score is derived by adding items 1, 4, 6, and 8. The total Hope Scale score is derived by summing the four agency and the four pathway items. The response mode ranges from 1-5; where 5 = strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= not sure/neutral, 2= disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. *Note.* When administering the scale, it is called The Future Scale.

On the other hand, the dependent variable in this study is entrepreneurial intention. This variable is measured using an Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ), which has been recently validated (Francisco, et al. 2004). This enabled us to measure entrepreneurial intentions in a sample of students in the Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Subjects responded using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1-5, where 5 = strongly agree, 4= = agree, 3= = not sure/neutral, 2= = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. Six (6) items measure the concept of entrepreneurial intention (see appendix).

Test of Validity and Reliability: Several steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. To assess the validity of the survey instrument, copies of the questionnaire were given to two seasoned professionals in Organizational Behaviour and Management. Copies of the questionnaire were also given to some of our colleagues and practising managers. They were allowed time to review the questionnaire and make appropriate suggestions and/or criticisms. These suggestions and/or criticisms were noted by the researchers and used to modify the instrument. Hence, it would be safe to say that the survey instrument has face and content validity. The experts also confirmed that sampling validity was adequately achieved in the higher educational institutions used for this study.

Two major steps were taken to ensure reliability. First, data were triangulated using multiple sources. Second, the internal reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach alpha coefficients using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Hence, only the items that return alpha values of 0.7 and above were considered.

Data Analysis Technique: To empirically evaluate the relationship between this study's independent and dependent variables (including their components), the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression Analysis were employed, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The choice of these statistical techniques were informed by its amenability to the collected data type or level.

4.0 RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

To be able to empirically ascertain the relationship between Hope and Entrepreneurial Intention, our hypotheses were subjected to statistical tests using the data so collected. The table below indicates the results of the Regression Analysis between the independent variable (Hope) and the dependent variable (Entrepreneurial Intention).

Table 1: Results of Regression Analysis between Hope and Entrepreneurial Intention

Independent variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Prob.	T	Prob.
Psych Hope	.928	.851	.859	2152.963	.000	47.398	.000

From Table 1, the adjusted coefficient of determination (R²) is 0.859. This implies that the independent variable (Psychological Hope) accounts for about 85.9 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable (Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions). The table above also shows that the F-calculated is 2152.963, and the corresponding significance value is 0.000, which is less than 0.01. This implies that the model is significant. The value of t-calculated is 47.398, and the corresponding significant value of 0.000 is less than 0.01. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that psychological hope plays a significant role in enhancing students' entrepreneurial intention in the Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria ($r = 47.398$, $p < 0.01$).

The specific relationship between the dimensions of psychological hope and students' entrepreneurial intention in the Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta Region was also investigated. The formulated research hypotheses were examined, and inferences were determined in this section. The administered questionnaire was retrieved, and the responses gathered from the respondents were collated. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used for data analysis. The Pearson Coefficient value, if positive, indicates a direct relationship, but if negative, indicates an inverse relation. A direct relationship implies that when one of the variables increases, the other variable will also increase. Still, an inverse relationship implies that while there is an increase in one variable, there is a decrease in the other variable. Pearson values ranged between -1 and +1. The strength of each relationship depends on the correlation value as indicated by Pearson correlation value. $\pm 0.00-0.19$ implies a very weak correlation, $\pm 0.20-0.39$, a weak correlation; $\pm 0.40-0.59$, a moderate correlation; $\pm 0.60-0.79$, strong correlation; and $\pm 0.80-0.99$, indicates a very strong correlation. The decision criteria for every bivariate relationship at a confidence interval of 95% or a significance level of 5% depends on the probability value. A $p < 0.05$ implies a rejection of the null hypothesis, while a $p > 0.05$ implies an acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Willpower (Agency) and Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions

		Correlations	
		Will Power (Agency)	Entrepreneurial Intention
Will Power (Agency)	Pearson Correlation	1	.836**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	305	305
Entrepreneurial Intentions	Pearson Correlation	.836**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	305	305

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Table above gives the statistical representation of the relationships that exist between the variables as hypothesised.

As shown in the Table above, willpower (Agency) was revealed to have a strong positive and significant correlation with students' entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-owned Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: expertise ($r = 0.836$, $p < 0.05$). The positive correlation implies a direct relation between the variables. The probability value of all three hypotheses was 0.000, which happens to be less than 0.05; therefore, null hypothesis one (H_{01}) above which state that "there is no significant relationship between willpower (Agency) and students' entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-owned Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria" is rejected. Since it is a two-way test, rejecting a null hypothesis implies the acceptance of the alternate form. On this premise, the alternate forms of the hypothesis which states that "there is a positive and significant relationship between willpower (Agency) students' entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-owned Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria" is accepted.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix for Way Power (Pathways) and Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions

		Correlations	
		Way Power (Pathways)	Entrepreneurial Intention
Way Power (Pathways)	Pearson Correlation	1	.762**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	305	305
Entrepreneurial Intention	Pearson Correlation	.762**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	305	305

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Table above gives the statistical representation of the relationships that exist between the variables as hypothesised.

As shown in the Table above, way power (Pathways) was revealed to have a strong positive and significant correlation with students' entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-

owned Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: expertise ($r = 0.762$, $p < 0.05$). The positive correlation implies a direct relation between the variables. The probability value of all three hypotheses was 0.000, which happens to be less than 0.05; therefore, null hypothesis two (H_{02}) above which state that “there is no significant relationship between way power (Pathways) and students’ entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-owned Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria” is rejected. Since it is a two-way test, rejecting a null hypothesis implies the acceptance of the alternate form. On this premise, the alternate forms of the various hypotheses which states that “there is a positive and significant relationship between way power (Pathways) and students’ entrepreneurial intentions in the Federal Government-owned Universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria” is accepted.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a pivotal mechanism for fostering economic growth and development across diverse regional and national economies. However, social scientists have yet to attain a consensus regarding the factors that influence the decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This lack of agreement raises concerns about the effectiveness of policies aimed at achieving this objective. From a psychological standpoint, intention has been identified as the most robust predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Kolvereid, 1996). Consequently, certain studies have begun to investigate entrepreneurial intention and its determinants (Krueger et al., 2000), although the methodologies and research instruments employed to date exhibit considerable variance.

This study investigates the relationship between psychological hope and the entrepreneurial intentions of students in Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between psychological hope and these students' entrepreneurial intentions. Specifically, both willpower (agency) and way power (pathways) were found to significantly influence students' entrepreneurial intentions within these institutions. The study concludes that psychological hope plays a vital role in enhancing students' entrepreneurial intentions, particularly through pathways thinking and agency thinking.

These results may be elucidated by the understanding that willpower serves as the driving force enabling individuals to surmount barriers to success, such as negative thoughts, behaviours, emotions, and self-sabotage. Unwavering determination propels individuals forward, motivating them to engage in the necessary actions to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations. Conversely, way power signifies the unique ability to devise strategies and navigate intricate pathways that lead from entrepreneurial intentions to success. This capacity involves identifying pathways, fostering innovation, and creating structured plans to actualize intentions.

The synergy between willpower and way power is derived from competencies in emotional intelligence and energy management. Mastery in channeling energy and surmounting emotional impediments becomes critical to transforming individuals into formidable agents of entrepreneurial success. Human relational skills, such as emotional intelligence, empower

students to comprehend, manage, and effectively leverage emotions. Simultaneously, energy management ensures that their vitality is strategically directed toward their entrepreneurial objectives. Mastery over this integration extends beyond mere theoretical knowledge; it necessitates the embodiment of these principles in both daily life and business practices. When students harmonise willpower and way power through emotional intelligence and energy management, they emerge as formidable forces. In contrast, the absence of these strengths and knowledge may hinder students' capacity to achieve their aspirations.

The pursuit of success necessitates proactive engagement, a profound self-awareness, and the strategic interaction between willpower and way power. Hope theory underpins these observations, positing that hope constitutes a cognitive, goal-directed process. While emotions are indeed significant, cognitive processes are paramount; specifically, individuals' thoughts regarding their goals fundamentally shape their emotional responses (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1996). An individual's interpretation of success concerning personal goals directly influences ensuing emotions (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1996). Positive emotions typically emerge from perceptions of effective goal pursuit, whereas negative emotions often result from unsuccessful endeavors. Individuals possessing high levels of hope are inclined to perceive their goal pursuits as successful, as they feel invigorated to surmount obstacles. In contrast, those with low hope are more likely to interpret their pursuits as unsuccessful, primarily due to insufficient agency and pathway thinking, as well as an inability to navigate barriers encountered during goal pursuit. This can lead to what Snyder (2002, p. 252) describes as "affective lethargy about the pursuit of goals."

The data analysis results, as evidenced in the preceding tables, illustrate that both willpower (agency) and way power (pathways) exert a significant influence on students' entrepreneurial intentions within Federal Government-owned universities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Consequently, this study concludes that psychological hope, encompassing pathway thinking and agency thinking, is instrumental in enhancing students' entrepreneurial intentions in these academic institutions.

Based on the findings and conclusion above, this study proposes the following recommendations:

- First, entrepreneurship education should incorporate a more practical approach, transcending traditional classroom settings to cultivate risk-taking, goal-setting, and problem-solving skills.
- Second, students should be exposed to narratives detailing the experiences of successful entrepreneurs, as such stories may inspire their entrepreneurial aspirations. Furthermore, creating opportunities for direct interaction with these accomplished entrepreneurs could enhance students' sense of hope.
- Third, a stronger emphasis should be placed on the teaching of business ethics to foster ethical business practices among Nigerian entrepreneurs.
- Lastly, it is essential that parents, peers, relatives, and community members support both the government and educational institutions in promoting entrepreneurship as a viable career/employment option for students.

APPENDIX

THE HOPE SCALE						
Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please tick the number that best describes YOU.						
S/N	Items	1 = Strongly disagree	2= Disagree	3= Not Sure/Neutral	4= Agree	5 = Strongly Agree
1.	If I should find myself in a jam at my academic work, I could think of many ways to get out of it.					
2.	At present, I am energetically pursuing my work goals.					
3.	I feel tired most of the time.					
4.	There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now at work.					
5	I am easily downed in an argument.					
6	I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.					
7	I worry about my health.					
8	Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.					
9	My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.					
10	Right now I see myself as being pretty successful at work and in life.					
11	I usually find myself worrying about something.					
12	At this time, I am meeting the work goals that I have set for myself.					

Source: Snyder et al., (1996)

ENTERPRENUERIAL INTENTION QUESTIONNAIRE (EIQ)						
<i>Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please tick the number that best describes YOU.</i>						
S/N	Items	1 = Strongly disagree	2 = Disagree	3 = Not Sure/Neutral	4 = Agree	5 = Strongly Agree
Personal Attitude						
<i>Please indicate your level of agreement with the following sentences</i>						
1.	Being an entrepreneur implies more advantages than disadvantages to me					
2.	A career as entrepreneur is attractive for me					
3.	If I had the opportunity and resources, I'd like to start a firm					
4.	Being an entrepreneur would entail great satisfactions for me					
5	Among various options, I would rather be an entrepreneur					
Subjective Norm						
<i>If you decided to create a firm, would people in your close environment approve of that decision? Please indicate from 1 (total disapproval) to 5 (total approval).</i>						
1	Your close family					
2	Your friends					
3	Your colleagues					

Perceived behavioral control						
<i>To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your entrepreneurial capacity? Please value them from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement).</i>						
1	To start a firm and keep it working would be easy for me					
2	I am prepared to start a viable firm					
3	I can control the creation process of a new firm					
4	I know the necessary practical details to start a firm					
5	I know how to develop an entrepreneurial project					
6	If I tried to start a firm, I would have a high probability of succeeding					
Entrepreneurial intention						
<i>Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement)</i>						
1	I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur					
2	My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur					
3	I will make every effort to start and run my own firm					
4	I am determined to create a firm in the future					
5	I have very seriously thought of starting a firm					
6	I have the firm intention to start a firm some day					

Source: Liñán, F. and Chen, Y. ("Development and cross-cultural application of a specific instrument to measure entrepreneurial intentions.")

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