



Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship ... Aghahowa, B. N. & Odiá, A. A. (2026)

Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship Courses on Self-Employment Readiness and Poverty Reduction among Undergraduate Students in University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined Social Studies undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) entrepreneurship courses in promoting self-employment readiness and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, the study involved the entire population of 64 full-time 300 and 400 level Social Studies undergraduates (2025/2026 academic session) in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire titled "Undergraduates' Perception of the Effectiveness of the CCMAS Entrepreneurial Courses in Promoting Self-Employability Readiness and Reducing Poverty in Nigeria" and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, with a criterion mean of 2.50. Findings revealed that students perceive the CCMAS entrepreneurship courses (ENT211 and ENT312) as effective in developing practical, entrepreneurial, and employability skills, enhancing self-employment readiness, and contributing to poverty reduction. However, structural, instructional, and financial constraints were identified as barriers to the curriculum's full impact. The study recommends improving practical exposure, strengthening faculty and mentorship capacity, facilitating access to start-up funding, and promoting university-industry linkages to maximize the curriculum's potential in reducing poverty among graduates.

Keywords: Social Studies, Entrepreneurship, CCMAS, Self-Employment Readiness, Poverty Reduction

Introduction

In response to persistent youth unemployment and under-employment in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC) revised the national undergraduate curriculum, replacing the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) with the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) across Nigerian universities. Officially launched in 2022 and implemented from September 2023, CCMAS aims to produce graduates equipped with 21st-century skills, practical competencies, and entrepreneurial capabilities relevant to national development goals (Ogunode et al., 2024). This reform is also a response to the high level of poverty, which remains one of Nigeria's most pressing socio-economic challenges; over 60% of Nigerians live below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Education, particularly disciplines such as Social Studies, is regarded as a key tool for addressing socio-economic inequalities. The curriculum, defined as the totality of learning experiences offered to learners, determines both what is taught and how students are prepared for life beyond school. In Nigeria, curriculum design plays a pivotal role in ensuring that education is relevant and responsive to national development needs. Okoye and Ofoegbu (2018) highlight that curriculum design can directly influence poverty reduction by fostering employability, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving skills among Nigerian youths. Despite numerous reforms, poverty remains a persistent problem, highlighting the need for curricula that are directly linked to economic empowerment and social development (Sen, 1999; Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014). A key feature of CCMAS is the restructuring of the General Studies component, reduced from 36 credit units under BMAS to 12 under CCMAS, while strategically embedding entrepreneurship-oriented courses such as *Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ENT211)* at 200 level and *Venture Creation (ENT312)* at 300 level. These courses are designed to strengthen graduates' capacity for self-employment and enterprise creation. By prioritizing entrepreneurship education, CCMAS aligns with global and national policy calls for higher education to contribute to job creation, self-reliance, and poverty reduction (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi, Liñán, Fayolle, Krueger, & Walmsley, 2017). However, the effectiveness of these changes depends not only on curriculum content but also on students' perceptions of their relevance, practical applicability, and potential impact on livelihood opportunities. Also, despite its potentials, several factors may hinder the effectiveness of the



Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship ... Aghahowa, B. N. & Odia, A. A. (2026)

Social Studies CCMAS in promoting self-employability and reducing poverty; some of the likely factors include inadequate training for lecturers on the new CCMAS contents, lack of instructional materials and technological support, disconnect between curriculum and national policy on poverty reduction and overcrowded classrooms and poor students engagement among others (Eze & Oladipo, 2023). In this context, this study investigates Social Studies undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the newly introduced CCMAS entrepreneurship curriculum in alleviating poverty in Nigeria and provides recommendations to enhance its socio-economic relevance.

Conceptual Clarifications

Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS)

The Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) represent a major reform in Nigerian university education introduced by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 2022 to replace the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS). CCMAS was designed to modernize undergraduate curricula by incorporating contemporary competencies such as digital literacy, innovation, employability skills, and entrepreneurship. This approach aligns with poverty reduction strategies by preparing students for self-reliance and innovation (Odey, 2021). The reform also decentralizes aspects of curriculum development by allowing universities to design up to 30% of their programme content while retaining 70% nationally prescribed core standard (NUC, 2022). Within this framework, entrepreneurship education was strengthened as a cross-cutting requirement for all disciplines, including Social Studies Education. The inclusion of structured courses such as Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ENT211) and Venture Creation (ENT312) reflects a policy shift from theoretical exposure to practical enterprise development. The reform aligns with broader national development priorities emphasizing graduate employability, private sector participation, and self-reliance. From a curriculum theory perspective, CCMAS reflects elements of competency-based education, where learning outcomes are structured around demonstrable skills rather than purely content mastery (Mulder, 2014). It also reflects a human capital development orientation, which views education as an investment in productive capabilities that can stimulate economic growth (Becker, 1993).

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education refers to structured pedagogical processes aimed at developing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and intentions. It typically includes opportunity recognition, innovation processes, risk management, business planning, venture financing, and enterprise management. Omo-Egbekuse and Akani (2016) emphasize that entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions plays a crucial role in equipping students with the skills and mindset necessary for self-employment and economic empowerment. Scholars such as Fayolle and Gailly (2015) argue that entrepreneurship education influences learners through three primary dimensions: cognitive (knowledge acquisition), affective (attitudes and motivation), and behavioral (venture creation intentions and actions). Empirical studies show a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention among university students (Bae et al., 2014). In the Nigerian context, entrepreneurship education was formally integrated into tertiary education as part of a national response to youth unemployment (Arogundade, 2011). However, earlier implementations were often criticized for being theoretical and lacking experiential depth. The CCMAS model attempts to address these limitations by embedding innovation-oriented and venture creation components that emphasize practical engagement. Within this study, entrepreneurship education specifically refers to the structured exposure of Social Studies undergraduates to ENT211 and ENT312, focusing on skill acquisition, enterprise development competencies, and self-employment readiness.

Venture Creation and Self-Employment Readiness

Venture creation is the process through which individuals identify opportunities, mobilize resources, and establish new enterprises (Gartner, 1985). It extends beyond intention to actual business formation activities, including prototyping, market validation, financial planning, and operational structuring. Self-employment readiness refers to the extent to which an individual possesses the competencies, confidence, and resources necessary to initiate and sustain an enterprise. According to Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud (2000), entrepreneurial intentions which are shaped by perceived feasibility and desirability are strong predictors of venture creation behavior. Therefore, curriculum interventions that enhance feasibility perceptions (skills, competence) are theoretically linked to self-employment outcomes. In this study, self-employment readiness serves as a measurable proxy for poverty alleviation potential. Rather than measuring poverty reduction directly,



Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship ... Aghahowa, B. N. & Odia, A. A. (2026)

which requires longitudinal economic data, perceived readiness provides an immediate indicator of economic empowerment capacity.

Poverty and Poverty Reduction

Poverty is multidimensional and extends beyond income deprivation to include limited access to education, healthcare, housing, and economic opportunities. The World Bank (2023) defines poverty primarily in monetary terms using income thresholds but also acknowledges broader vulnerability dimensions. Sen's (1999) capability approach reframes poverty as deprivation of basic capabilities and the freedom to achieve valued ways of living. Within this theoretical lens, entrepreneurship education contributes to poverty reduction by expanding individuals' economic capabilities and income-generating options. In Nigeria, high youth unemployment significantly contributes to poverty levels. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports persistently high rates of youth joblessness, reinforcing the policy rationale for embedding entrepreneurship education within university curricula. Thus, within this research, poverty alleviation is conceptualized not as immediate income change but as enhanced economic agency and capacity for income generation among undergraduates.

Students' Perceptions of CCMAS and Poverty Reduction

Perception refers to individuals' subjective evaluation or interpretation of experiences, policies, or interventions. In educational research, student perception is considered a critical determinant of curriculum effectiveness because it influences engagement, motivation, and behavioral outcomes. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior provides a useful explanatory model. According to the theory, attitudes toward a behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms influence intention formation. Therefore, if students perceive entrepreneurship courses as relevant, practical, and empowering, they are more likely to develop entrepreneurial intentions and pursue venture creation. Preliminary findings from recent studies suggest that undergraduates see the Social Studies CCMAS as moderately effective in addressing poverty. While many agree that the curriculum raises awareness and critical consciousness, others argue that practical implementation is weak due to poor instructional delivery and lack of real-world application (Ikenna & Musa, 2024). Studies have also pointed out the need for better alignment between theoretical content and job market demands. Without concrete internship or community-based components, the impact of the curriculum may remain limited to academic knowledge without practical outcomes.

Purpose of the study

The study aimed at finding out undergraduates' perception of the impact of CCMAS entrepreneurship courses on self-employment readiness and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out the perception of Social Studies undergraduates on the effectiveness of the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses in self-employability readiness and poverty reduction;
2. find out how Social Studies undergraduates perceive the relevance of the skills (practical, entrepreneurial and employability) embedded in the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses for self-employability readiness and addressing poverty; and
3. find out what challenges Social Studies undergraduates perceive as constraining the effectiveness of the CCMAS curriculum in promoting self-employability readiness and poverty reduction.

Research Questions

1. What are Social Studies undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses in promoting self-employability readiness and poverty reduction?
2. How do Social Studies undergraduates perceive the relevance of the skills (practical, entrepreneurial and employability) embedded in the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses for addressing self-employability readiness and poverty?
3. What challenges do Social Studies undergraduates perceive as constraining the effectiveness of the CCMAS curriculum in promoting self-employability readiness and poverty reduction?

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population consisted of 64 full-time Social Studies undergraduates in 300 and 400 levels (2025/2026 academic session) in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. Since the population was manageable, all students were included in the study as the sample. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "*Undergraduates' Perception of the Effectiveness of the CCMAS Entrepreneurial Courses in Promoting Self-Employability Readiness and Reducing Poverty*



Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship ... Aghahowa, B. N. & Odia, A. A. (2026) in Nigeria.” The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, with a criterion mean set at 2.50 to determine acceptance of the items.

Presentation of Results

Research question 1:

What is the perception of Social Studies undergraduates on the effectiveness of the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses in promoting self-employability readiness and reducing poverty?

Table 1: Social Studies Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the CCMAS Entrepreneurial Courses in Promoting Self-Employability Readiness and Reducing Poverty

S/N	Items	N	Mean Score	Remark
1	The CCMAS entrepreneurial courses are effective for self-employability readiness and reduction of poverty in Nigeria.	64	2.64	Effective
2	ENT211 & ENT312 has contents on how to become economically viable and self-reliant through its entrepreneurial contents.	64	2.88	Effective
3	The CCMAS entrepreneurial courses create awareness of social problems such as poverty, inequality and unemployment.	64	2.52	Effective
4	The CCMAS entrepreneurial courses address the causes and effects of poverty as well as practical solutions for tackling poverty.	64	2.78	Effective
5	ENT211 & ENT312 can help in achieving Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty.	64	2.78	Effective

Criterion mean: 2.50 Grand mean: 2.72

The data in Table 1 showed that items 1 to 5 met the criterion mean score of 2.50 and therefore, were all accepted since the criterion mean of 2.50 is lower than the grand mean of 2.72. It was observed that undergraduate perceive the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses for Social Studies as effective in promoting self-employability readiness and reducing poverty in Nigeria, having contents on how to become economically viable and self-reliant through its entrepreneurial contents, creating awareness of social problems such as poverty, inequality and unemployment, addressing the causes and effects of poverty as well as practical solutions for tackling poverty, and helping in achieving Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty.

Research Question 2:

How do Social Studies undergraduates perceive the relevance of the skills (practical, entrepreneurial and employability) embedded in the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses for addressing self-employability readiness and poverty?

Table 2: Social Studies Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Relevance of the Skills Taught in CCMAS Entrepreneurial Courses for Addressing Self-Employability and Poverty

S/N	Items	N	Mean score	Remark
1	The CCMAS entrepreneurial courses equip students with practical skills that can help them generate income after graduation.	64	2.64	Accepted
2	ENT211 & ENT312 encourage entrepreneurial thinking among Social Studies students.	64	3.32	Accepted
3	The CCMAS curriculum prepares Social Studies graduates for self-employment rather than dependence on paid job alone.	64	3.26	Accepted
4	Skills acquired through the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses are relevant to addressing real socio-economic problems.	64	2.79	Accepted
5	My exposure to ENT211 & ENT312 enhances my confidence in my ability to be self-employed and contribute to poverty reduction in my locality.	64	2.71	Accepted

Criterion mean: 2.50 Grand mean: 2.94

The data in Table 2 showed that items 1 to 5 met the criterion mean score of 2.50 and therefore, were all accepted since the criterion mean of 2.50 is lower than the grand mean of 2.94. It was observed that Social Studies undergraduates perceived the skills taught in the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses as effective in equipping them with practical skills to



Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship ... Aghahowa, B. N. & Odi, A. A. (2026)

generate income, encourage entrepreneurial thinking, prepare them for self-employment and addressing real socio-economic problems as well as enhances their confidence in their ability to contribute to poverty reduction.

Question 3: What challenges do Social Studies undergraduates perceive as constraining the effectiveness of the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses in promoting self-employability readiness poverty reduction?

Table 3: Social Studies Undergraduates' Perception of the Challenges to the Effectiveness of CCMAS Entrepreneurial Courses in Promoting Self-Employability Readiness and Poverty Reduction

S/N	ITEMS	N	Mean score	Remark
1	Inadequate infrastructural facilities limit the effective implementation of the CCMAS entrepreneurial courses.	64	2.64	Accepted
2	Limited opportunities to apply skills in real-life situations may reduce the impact of ENT211 & ENT312.	64	2.78	Accepted
3	Limited availability of qualified instructors and industry mentors affects the effectiveness of entrepreneurship courses under CCMAS.	64	2.73	Accepted
4	Insufficient access to funding opportunities or start-up capital reduces the poverty reduction potential of the CCMAS entrepreneurship training.	64	2.62	Accepted
5	Weak linkage between university entrepreneurship training and the local business environment limits the ability of students to translate skills into viable ventures.	64	2.51	Accepted

Criterion mean: 2.50 Grand mean: 2.66

The data in Table 3 showed that items 1 to 5 met the criterion mean score of 2.50 and therefore, were all accepted since the criterion mean of 2.50 is lower than the grand mean of 2.66. This indicates that respondents agreed that several factors constrain the effectiveness of CCMAS entrepreneurship courses in promoting self-employability readiness and poverty reduction. Key perceived challenges include limited opportunities for practical application, inadequate availability of qualified instructors and mentors, insufficient infrastructural facilities, limited access to start-up funding, and weak linkage between university training and the local business environment. Overall, the findings suggest that students perceive structural, instructional, and financial constraints as limiting the self-employability readiness and poverty reduction potential of the CCMAS entrepreneurship courses.

Discussion of Findings

The finding suggests that students view the CCMAS entrepreneurship courses as relevant instruments for economic empowerment and poverty reduction. This supports evidence that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial skills and self-employment capacity, which are critical pathways to income generation (Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). It also aligns with Sen's (1999) capability approach, which links skill acquisition and expanded economic agency to poverty reduction. The finding also supports that of Ogunode et al. (2024), who argued that the new curriculum is effective in addressing both national and international challenges through pragmatic teaching, research, and community service, thereby contributing to poverty reduction. Nonetheless, prior meta-analytic evidence cautions that the actual economic impact of entrepreneurship education depends largely on implementation quality and contextual factors (Bae et al., 2014). Findings also revealed that Social Studies undergraduates perceive the practical, entrepreneurial, and employability skills embedded in the CCMAS entrepreneurship courses as relevant for income generation and poverty reduction. This aligns with empirical evidence that entrepreneurship education strengthens entrepreneurial mindset, self-efficacy, and intention toward self-employment (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014). The perception that the curriculum promotes entrepreneurial thinking and self-employment readiness is consistent with human capital theory, which posits that skill acquisition enhances individuals' productive capacity and economic outcomes (Becker, 1993). Furthermore, the reported increase in confidence to address socio-economic problems supports findings by Nabi et al. (2017), who concluded that entrepreneurship education has positive effects on entrepreneurial competencies and perceived employability outcomes. However, while students perceive these skills as relevant, evidence suggests that translating such competencies into sustainable venture creation depends significantly on ecosystem support and post-graduation opportunities (Nabi et al., 2017). Findings further indicate that students perceive structural, instructional, and financial barriers as limiting the self-employability readiness and poverty reduction potential of the CCMAS



Perceptions of the Core Course Minimum Academic Standard's Entrepreneurship ... Aghahowa, B. N. & Odiá, A. A. (2026)
entrepreneurship courses. This is supported by Eze and Oladipo (2023), who identified similar challenges in Nigerian universities, including inadequate training of lecturers on new curriculum content, lack of instructional materials and technological support, weak alignment between the curriculum and national poverty reduction policies, overcrowded classrooms, and low student engagement. This also aligns with evidence that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends not only on curriculum content but also on experiential learning opportunities, qualified instructors, and institutional support systems (Nabi et al., 2017). The concern about limited real-life application supports arguments by Pittaway and Cope (2007), who emphasize that experiential and practice-based approaches are critical for meaningful entrepreneurial learning. Similarly, inadequate access to start-up capital and weak university–industry linkages reflect broader ecosystem constraints that hinder venture creation, particularly in developing economies (Acs, Autio, & Szerb, 2014). Thus, while entrepreneurship education may enhance intentions and skills, its poverty reduction impact is likely to be constrained where infrastructural, mentorship, and financial support mechanisms are weak.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Social Studies undergraduates perceive the CCMAS entrepreneurship courses (ENT211 and ENT312) as effective and relevant for enhancing self-employment readiness and contributing to poverty reduction. Students acknowledged that the courses develop practical, entrepreneurial, and employability skills while raising awareness of socio-economic challenges such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment. However, the effectiveness of the courses is constrained by structural, instructional, and financial challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited opportunities for real-life application, insufficient mentorship, and weak university–industry linkages. Overall, while CCMAS is positively perceived as a tool for promoting economic empowerment, the realization of its poverty reduction potential depends on improving these supporting conditions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Universities should provide more opportunities for hands-on entrepreneurship experiences, such as business simulations, internships, and community-based projects, to enable students to apply the skills learned in real-life contexts.
2. There is need for the recruitment and training of qualified instructors, coupled with engagement of industry mentors, which would improve the quality of entrepreneurship education and ensure students receive relevant guidance.
3. Universities and government agencies should create mechanisms for students to access start-up capital, grants, and low-interest loans to support venture creation and poverty alleviation initiatives.
4. Efforts should be made to strengthening partnerships with local businesses and industries to enhance relevance, market readiness, and sustainability of student-led enterprises.
5. There should be regular evaluation and updating of CCMAS entrepreneurship courses to ensure alignment with current economic realities and socio-economic development goals, including poverty reduction, should be institutionalized.

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