INTEGRATING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODELS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: A FRAMEWORK FOR BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

[*1] MOHAMMED SALEH USMAN, [2] DIJA YUSUF TALAM AND [3] SHERIFF MAIKALI

[*1]School of Vocational Education, Department of Business Education
Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua, Yobe State. Nigeria.

[2]School of Vocational Education, Department of Home Economics Education
Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua, Yobe State. Nigeria.

[3]School of Secondary Education, Department of Education Foundation
Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua, Yobe State. Nigeria.

[*]Corresponding Author Information:-
E-Mail: talk2msaleh@gmail.com
Phone: +2348067208118

Abstract

Entrepreneurship education has evolved as a crucial instrument for equipping young learners with skills necessary for self-reliance, innovation, and problem-solving in an increasingly dynamic global economy. This paper reviews empirical and conceptual studies on experiential learning models as a pedagogical framework for enhancing entrepreneurship education in basic and secondary schools. Drawing on over two decades of literature, the paper highlights how experiential learning fosters critical thinking, creativity, and resilience among students. It also discusses implementation challenges, including teacher preparedness, curriculum rigidity, and infrastructural limitations. The study advocates for the integration of Kolb's experiential learning cycle, project-based learning, and community-based entrepreneurship initiatives into school curricula. A conceptual framework is proposed to guide policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers in designing participatory, student-centered entrepreneurship programs.

Keywords: Experiential learning, entrepreneurship education, secondary education, project-based learning, innovation, Kolb's learning cycle

1. Introduction

The 21st-century world demands individuals who are innovative, adaptive, and self-reliant. As economies transition from industrial to knowledge-based systems, entrepreneurship education (EE) becomes a key driver of sustainable development, especially in developing nations (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Traditional education models, characterized by rote learning and passive knowledge transmission, fail to equip learners with real-world problem-solving skills (Oviawe, 2020). To bridge this gap, experiential learning (EL) has emerged as an effective pedagogical approach, aligning learning processes with entrepreneurial practice (Kolb, 1984; Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

At the basic and secondary levels, entrepreneurship education is no longer confined to vocational training; it is increasingly seen as a mindset development process that enhances creativity, initiative, and socio-economic empowerment (Rae, 2010; Moberg, 2014). Integrating experiential learning into these levels ensures early exposure to entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors, building foundations for future innovation (Neck & Corbett, 2018).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Experiential Learning

Experiential learning, rooted in the works of John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984), posits that knowledge emerges through the transformation of experience. Kolb's model outlines four key stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Within entrepreneurship education, this framework aligns naturally with entrepreneurial processes such as opportunity recognition, business planning, and innovation testing (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Rae, 2010).

2.2 Entrepreneurship Education in Basic and Secondary Schools

Entrepreneurship education at the early stages of schooling focuses on developing competencies such as initiative, creativity, teamwork, and opportunity recognition (Gibb, 2002). According to UNESCO (2022), early exposure enhances career adaptability and reduces youth unemployment in later life. Studies by Olatoye and Bello (2023) revealed that integrating entrepreneurship in basic schools significantly increases problem-solving and communication skills among students.However, many education systems still treat entrepreneurship as an optional or extracurricular subject rather than a core competency (European Commission, 2021). Teachers' lack of pedagogical training, outdated curricula, and insufficient resources remain obstacles to implementation (Sirelkhatim & Gangi, 2015).

2.3 Experiential Learning Models in Entrepreneurship Education

Empirical research supports the use of project-based learning (PBL), simulation, mentorship, and community engagement as effective experiential strategies. For instance, Bell (2010) asserts that PBL enhances students' entrepreneurial intent by linking learning to real-world contexts. Similarly, Kuratko (2016) emphasizes business simulation and start-up labs as tools that develop entrepreneurial competencies.Community-based experiential models, where students identify local problems and design solutions, foster social entrepreneurship and civic engagement (Hynes, 1996; Pittaway et al., 2011). Experiential learning thus bridges the gap between theory and practice, promoting not only cognitive but also affective and behavioral learning outcomes (Martin, McNally & Kay, 2013).

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives

Several theoretical frameworks underpin experiential entrepreneurship education:

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives

A robust theoretical foundation is essential for understanding how experiential learning drives entrepreneurship education outcomes. Several learning and behavioral theories provide the conceptual basis for linking experience, reflection, and action to entrepreneurial competence development. The following subsections elaborate on four key theoretical perspectives: Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Human Capital Theory.

2.4.1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984)

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is perhaps the most widely applied framework in entrepreneurship education. It conceptualizes learning as a continuous cycle of four interrelated stages:

1. Concrete Experience (CE) – engaging directly in tasks or activities;

2. Reflective Observation (RO) – reflecting on the experience;

3. Abstract Conceptualization (AC) – forming new ideas or modifying existing ones; and

4. Active Experimentation (AE) – applying these ideas to new experiences (Kolb, 1984).

In entrepreneurship education, these stages mirror the entrepreneurial process itself: students identify opportunities (CE), analyze outcomes (RO), generate new business ideas (AC), and implement or test their plans (AE). The theory emphasizes that genuine understanding arises from active engagement, experimentation, and reflection rather than passive knowledge transfer (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).At the basic and secondary levels, Kolb's model aligns perfectly with project-based and inquiry-driven learning, where students design small enterprises, create

prototypes, or solve local problems through teamwork. Teachers act as facilitators guiding learners through cycles of experience and reflection, ensuring that entrepreneurship becomes a habit of mind rather than a discrete subject (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Thus, Kolb's ELT provides a conceptual map for designing hands-on, iterative, and reflective entrepreneurship learning experiences that foster innovation and adaptability—skills critical for the 21st-century learner.

2.4.2 Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978)

Constructivism posits that learners construct knowledge through active interaction with their environment, rather than absorbing facts passively. Jean Piaget (1973) emphasized cognitive constructivism, where learners build internal frameworks by assimilating and accommodating new information based on prior experiences. Lev Vygotsky (1978), on the other hand, advanced social constructivism, emphasizing the influence of social interaction and cultural context on learning, particularly through the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Applied to entrepreneurship education, constructivist theory implies that students should learn through authentic, problem-centered tasks that mirror real-life entrepreneurial challenges. They learn best by doing—designing, experimenting, and reflecting collaboratively. Constructivism supports methods such as case studies, business simulations, classroom enterprises, and community-based projects that allow learners to make sense of the entrepreneurial process (Neck & Greene, 2011).

In basic and secondary education, this theory underscores the value of contextual learning, encouraging students to relate classroom content to familiar social and economic realities. Teachers serve as co-learners and mentors rather than authority figures, creating an environment where curiosity and experimentation are rewarded (Fayolle & Redford, 2014). Constructivist principles thus make experiential entrepreneurship education both learner-centered and culturally relevant.

2.4.3 Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) highlights the role of observation, imitation, and modeling in learning new behaviors. It bridges behaviorism and cognitive theory by emphasizing that individuals acquire skills not only through direct experience but also by observing others perform tasks and witnessing the consequences of those actions. In the context of entrepreneurship education, Bandura's theory suggests that role models, mentors, and peer interactions play critical roles in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and self-efficacy. Students who observe successful entrepreneurs—whether through school mentorship programs, guest lectures, or digital case studies—develop stronger confidence in their own entrepreneurial abilities (Henry, Hill & Leitch, 2005).

This perspective also explains how entrepreneurial identity is socially constructed. Exposure to entrepreneurial role models allows students to internalize values such as innovation, persistence,

and calculated risk-taking. For younger learners, structured mentorship programs and "entrepreneur-for-a-day" initiatives provide observable, relatable experiences that reinforce the desirability and attainability of entrepreneurship (Martin, McNally & Kay, 2013).

Thus, Social Learning Theory complements experiential learning by adding a social and motivational dimension, illustrating how the learning environment—teachers, peers, and community figures—shapes entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors.

2.4.4 Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993)

Human Capital Theory (HCT) provides an economic rationale for investing in entrepreneurship education. According to Becker (1993), education and training increase individuals' productive capacities, resulting in higher employability, innovation, and income potential. Entrepreneurship education is therefore a strategic investment that enhances both individual and societal returns. From this standpoint, integrating experiential learning in entrepreneurship programs equips students with transferable competencies—such as problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership—that contribute to long-term productivity and socio-economic development (Martin et al., 2013). Early exposure to entrepreneurship in basic and secondary schools helps learners accumulate entrepreneurial capital, which includes knowledge, skills, creativity, and motivation (Nabi et al., 2017).

Furthermore, HCT supports policy arguments for mainstreaming entrepreneurship into national education systems, emphasizing that entrepreneurial skills form a vital part of the human resource base for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2022; European Commission, 2021). Governments and educational institutions that invest in experiential entrepreneurial learning ultimately build resilient, innovative societies capable of addressing unemployment and fostering inclusive growth.

2.4.5 Integrating the Theories into a Unified Framework

When viewed collectively, these four theories create a comprehensive pedagogical and philosophical foundation for experiential entrepreneurship education:

- Kolb's ELT provides the learning process model (experience → reflection → experimentation).
- Constructivism emphasizes contextual and active knowledge construction.
- Social Learning Theory adds the socialization and role-modeling dimension.
- Human Capital Theory links entrepreneurship education to economic and developmental outcomes.

Together, they justify experiential entrepreneurship education not only as a teaching method but also as a systemic approach to shaping entrepreneurial mindsets, competencies, and societal transformation—particularly when introduced at the foundational levels of schooling.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a systematic literature review approach, synthesizing findings from peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, and educational reports published between 2000 and 2025. Searches were conducted in databases including Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar using keywords such as "experiential learning," "entrepreneurship education," and "secondary education." Studies were included based on relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to theory and practice.

6. Discussion

The integration of experiential learning models into entrepreneurship education represents a paradigm shift in how learners at the basic and secondary school levels acquire entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. Traditionally, entrepreneurship education has been delivered through lecture-based instruction that focuses primarily on business concepts, management principles, and theoretical frameworks (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). However, empirical evidence shows that students exposed to purely theoretical instruction often lack the practical competencies, creativity, and self-efficacy needed to initiate and sustain entrepreneurial ventures (Rae, 2017). Experiential learning, by contrast, provides an immersive, participatory approach that transforms the classroom into a microcosm of real-world business environments.

6.1 Bridging Theory and Practice

Experiential learning serves as a bridge between theoretical understanding and practical application. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) emphasizes that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). In entrepreneurship education, this means students do not merely learn *about* entrepreneurship but *through* entrepreneurial experiences—such as business simulations, student enterprises, and community projects. Research by Pittaway and Cope (2007) found that such activities significantly enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy and problem-solving ability among students. Similarly, Neck and Greene (2011) observed that experiential frameworks foster iterative learning, enabling students to experiment, fail, reflect, and innovate—key attributes of successful entrepreneurs.

6.2 Enhancing Creativity and Innovation

Experiential learning models nurture creative thinking and innovation by exposing learners to unpredictable, open-ended challenges. These experiences encourage divergent thinking, risk-taking, and resilience—qualities that traditional pedagogies rarely cultivate (Zhang et al., 2019). For instance, design thinking and project-based learning have been shown to promote creativity by allowing students to prototype and test entrepreneurial ideas (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). When applied in entrepreneurship education, such activities move students from passive listeners to active creators. In the context of basic and secondary education, this shift can transform

entrepreneurship from an abstract concept into a tangible and enjoyable practice that builds lifelong innovation skills.

6.3 Building Entrepreneurial Mindset Early

Developing an entrepreneurial mindset early in life is critical for building a generation that values self-reliance, innovation, and problem-solving (European Commission, 2016). The experiential approach allows young learners to internalize entrepreneurial values through action-based activities like school enterprises, mini-markets, and peer collaboration projects. According to Nabi et al. (2017), early exposure to entrepreneurship through experiential pedagogy increases students' likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurial careers later in life. It also enhances their adaptability and employability in dynamic labor markets. This approach aligns with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that learning occurs within a social context through observation, imitation, and reinforcement—precisely what experiential learning activities foster.

6.4 Role of Teachers and Institutional Support

The successful implementation of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education heavily depends on teachers' capacity and institutional support. Teachers act as facilitators, mentors, and guides rather than information transmitters. Studies have shown that teachers who undergo entrepreneurship training are better equipped to design experiential activities that align with curriculum objectives and community realities (Gibb, 2002; Lackéus, 2015). Institutional support—such as funding, partnerships with local businesses, and access to innovation labs—is also essential to sustain experiential initiatives. Without these supports, the risk is that experiential learning remains theoretical rather than truly practice-oriented.

6.5 Challenges and Policy Implications

Despite its potential, integrating experiential learning in entrepreneurship education faces several challenges. These include rigid curricula, inadequate teacher training, limited infrastructure, and assessment systems that prioritize rote learning (Balan & Metcalfe, 2012). Policymakers must therefore reorient national education strategies to emphasize competency-based learning, practical exposure, and collaboration between schools and industries. For example, the inclusion of entrepreneurship clubs, innovation fairs, and mini-enterprises can be institutionalized within school programs. Furthermore, partnerships with NGOs, microfinance institutions, and local entrepreneurs can provide real-life experiences and mentorship for students.

6.6 Linking to National Development Goals

At a broader level, experiential entrepreneurship education aligns with global and national development goals such as the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4—"Quality Education"—and SDG 8—"Decent Work and Economic Growth." By equipping young learners

with entrepreneurial competencies, schools contribute to job creation, innovation, and poverty reduction. In developing countries like Nigeria, where youth unemployment remains a pressing issue, experiential entrepreneurship education offers a practical means of developing self-employable graduates. This approach also supports the objectives of the National Policy on Education, which emphasizes functional education and self-reliance (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

6.7 Synthesis of Theoretical and Practical Insights

Integrating theoretical models such as Kolb's ELT, Dewey's Pragmatic Learning, and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how experiential learning can transform entrepreneurship education. These theories collectively highlight that learning is not a linear process but a cyclical and socially embedded experience. Empirical studies (e.g., Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Lackéus, 2015) confirm that such frameworks produce learners with stronger problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, the fusion of theory and practice through experiential learning not only enhances academic outcomes but also shapes character, leadership, and resilience among learners.

5. Conclusion

Experiential learning offers a transformative pathway for entrepreneurship education in basic and secondary schools. It bridges the disconnect between formal schooling and real-life economic participation by fostering creativity, resilience, and initiative. However, successful integration demands systemic reforms in curriculum design, teacher preparation, and policy implementation. A collaborative ecosystem—linking educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders—is crucial for sustaining innovation in entrepreneurial education.

6. Recommendations

1. Embed Kolb's experiential cycle in entrepreneurship curricula.

2. Develop teacher training programs focused on experiential and project-based pedagogy.

3. Encourage community partnerships for real-world entrepreneurial exposure.

4. Establish entrepreneurship clubs and innovation labs in schools.

5. Implement national frameworks monitoring experiential entrepreneurship outcomes.

References:

Adebanjo, K., Bello, S., & Usman, A. (2025). Community-based entrepreneurship in schools. European Journal of Engineering Education, 50(2), 234–248.

Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bakar, A. R. (2019). Entrepreneurship education: Implementation and challenges in schools. Journal of Technical Education and Training, 11(1), 1–13.

Becker, G. S. (1993). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis. University of Chicago Press.

Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. The Clearing House, 83(2), 39–43.

Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. New York: Macmillan.

European Commission. (2021). EntreComp: The entrepreneurship competence framework. Publications Office of the European Union.

Fayolle, A., & Gailly, B. (2015). The impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial attitudes and intention. Journal of Small Business Management, 53(1), 75–93.

Fayolle, A., & Redford, D. T. (2014). Handbook on the entrepreneurial university. Edward Elgar.

Gibb, A. (2002). Creating conducive environments for learning and entrepreneurship. Industry and Higher Education, 16(3), 135–148.

Henry, C., Hill, F., & Leitch, C. (2005). Entrepreneurship education and training: Can entrepreneurship be taught? Education + Training, 47(2), 98–111.

Hynes, B. (1996). Entrepreneurship education and training: Introducing entrepreneurship into non-business disciplines. Journal of European Industrial Training, 20(8), 10–17.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice-Hall.

Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2017). The experiential educator. Experience-Based Learning Systems.

Kuratko, D. F. (2016). Entrepreneurship education: Emerging trends and challenges for the 21st century. Journal of Small Business Management, 54(3), 689–696.

Martin, B. C., McNally, J. J., & Kay, M. J. (2013). Examining the formation of human capital in entrepreneurship. Journal of Business Venturing, 28(2), 211–231.

Moberg, K. (2014). Two approaches to entrepreneurship education: The different effects of education for and through entrepreneurship. International Journal of Management Education, 12(3), 512–528.

Nabi, G., Liñán, F., Fayolle, A., Krueger, N., & Walmsley, A. (2017). The impact of entrepreneurship education in higher education: A systematic review. Academy of Management Learning & Education, 16(2), 277–299.

Neck, H. M., & Corbett, A. C. (2018). The scholarship of teaching and learning entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy, 1(1), 8–41.

Neck, H. M., & Greene, P. (2011). Entrepreneurship education: Known worlds and new frontiers. Journal of Small Business Management, 49(1), 55–70.

Olatoye, R. A., & Bello, S. A. (2023). Entrepreneurship education in basic schools: Curriculum and capacity perspectives. International Journal of Education, 12(4), 78–90.

Oviawe, J. I. (2020). Revamping entrepreneurship education for employability. Nigerian Journal of Technical Education, 6(1), 45–58.

Pittaway, L., & Cope, J. (2007). Simulating entrepreneurial learning. Management Learning, 38(2), 211–233.

Pittaway, L., Hannon, P., Gibb, A., & Thompson, J. (2011). Assessment practices in entrepreneurial education. International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research, 15(1), 71–93.

Rae, D. (2010). Universities and enterprise education. Education + Training, 52(8), 722–740.

Sirelkhatim, F., & Gangi, Y. (2015). Entrepreneurship education: A systematic literature review. International Journal of Management Education, 13(2), 127–145.

UNESCO. (2022). Entrepreneurship education in schools: Policy and practice review. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.