Abstract
To investigate the level of basic education students' level of entrepreneurial interest and gender influence, the researchers hypothesized that the students' interest for entrepreneurship was not significantly high and that students' gender did not have significant influence on their entrepreneurial interest. Two hundred (200) JSS HI students from Calabar Metropolis were selected by the stratified random sampling technique and used as the sample. A 20-item, 4-point response option Likert Scale was designed for use titled "Entrepreneurial Interest Questionnaire" (EIQ). The EIQ was validated, with reliability index of 0.86 (Cronbach alpha). Data analysis by population and independent t-tests revealed high students' interest in entrepreneurship with no significant gender difference. Implications of these findings for educational assessment were discussed and it was recommended inter-alia that education stakeholder collaboration, interest sustaining teacher strategies and non-test assessment techniques devoid of gender bias should be given top priority in schools to sustain interest in entrepreneurship.
The need to inculcate an entrepreneurial culture in the Nigerian youth is by no means a novel idea. The 6-3-3-4 system of education, now modernized to the 9-3-4 system in line with the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was established out of the desire to embrace educational functionalism, promote self-reliance among the citizenry and foster the consequent national development. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), as enshrined in the National Policy on Education, these laudable objectives are realizable inter-alia through the instrumentality of Business Studies Curriculum as a core discipline in basic education. Undoubtedly, entrepreneurship education has capacity to equip beneficiaries with self employable skills and competencies as well as knowledge and attitude for economic development (Adeboye, 2003; Gorman, Hanlon & King, 1997; Kurilsky & Walstad, 1998).

We live in environments largely characterized by complacency, high illiteracy and rural majority with attendant poor control in the nurturing of worthwhile potentials. Whereas, the advantaged cultures elsewhere engage in deliberate efforts aimed at early identification and development of youthful potentials as insurance for future national growth. A probe into the entrepreneurial propensity of pupils could therefore, to some extent predict the degree of entrepreneurship practice in the future. There is need to ‘catch them young’, even though childhood interests are sometimes mere fantasies. For adolescent youths however, most of their interest, especially at late adolescence could mature into substantive interest.

David McClelland’s (1961) theory of entrepreneurship advocated the centrality of the entrepreneur in economic development, arguing that irrespective of natural resource endowments, trade opportunities and stable internal polity of any society, growth may still be unattainable unless individuals take advantage of available business opportunities by way of entrepreneurship. To him, the entrepreneur is not a capitalist but a manager who has need for achievement. People with high need for achievement are characterized by need for immediate feedback locus of control, motivation, preference for independence, moderate risk-taking through innovation and collaborate with the competent.

Joseph Schumpeter’s (1947) theory of entrepreneurship on the other hand postulates that entrepreneurship is synonymous with innovation, and thrives where there is intuition, mental freedom, ability to withstand social opposition and availability of credit in the system. He noted that entrepreneurs enjoy temporary monopoly as innovators, until imitators appear in the market to compete using probably same or different methods.

The two theories above relate to this work as they provide characteristics of entrepreneurs which serve to enrich the instrument for rating pupils’ interest in
entrepreneurship. They also reveal perceptual differences among experts in entrepreneurship.

Literature reveals high entrepreneurial interest among students. A national sample survey in the United States high school students reported that 67 percent wanted to start a business of their own (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998). Ninety percent (90%) of Harvard Business school students have the dream of being self-employed (Timmons, 1994). In the United Kingdom, according to Scott and Twomey (1988), 40.7 percent of the sample students and 34.3 percent of Irish students were interested in starting their own business. According to government labour statistics, approximately 20 percent of all new jobs in the United States economy were created by individuals who put themselves to work. Unfortunately, there is a general agreement throughout the field that women and minorities have been historically under-represented among successful ventures. Problems include discrimination, ranging from the “glass ceiling” phenomenon (Godfrey, 1993), to financing difficulties (Buttner & Rosen, 1992).

However, recently these problems are on the decline both in U.S. and other nations (Buttner, 1993). In Africa, with relatively sparse data, Parnell, Gandall and Menefee (1995) compared and found that Egyptian students are not as likely to pursue entrepreneurial careers within ten years of graduation compared to their American counterparts. Egyptians manifested less confidence in entering into entrepreneurship than the Americans.

The problem of this study is the low interest for entrepreneurship amidst the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria, put at 23.9 percent in 2011 from 5.3 percent in 2006 (Nwachukwu, 2012) quoting the National Bureau of Statistics. This shows that government is increasingly becoming unable to cope with the challenge of employment. An alternative employer is imperative. Early preparation of students to face this challenge is necessarily a wise intervention strategy. One therefore begins to wonder whether our higher basic education students have high interest in entrepreneurship and whether this interest is influenced by students’ gender. The purpose of the study was to assess the level of entrepreneurial interest of the students and verify whether the interest is influenced by gender.

Null Hypotheses
The null hypotheses for this study are stated as follows:
1. The entrepreneurial interest of the higher basic education pupils observed is not significantly higher than the expected, and
2. Pupils’ gender does not significantly influence their entrepreneurial interest.

Method
The study employed the survey research design which involves collection of data from the population for the purpose of describing observed phenomena. This work is situated in Calabar Metropolis, the capital of Cross River State, comprising
Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Area. The area has 58 secondary schools (public and private). Notable features of Calabar Metropolis include the University of Calabar, Cross River University of Technology and the Open University of Nigeria, Calabar Centre. The Tinapa, the Export Processing Zone (EPZ), the Marian Resort and the Calabar Museum combine to give the area a tourist attraction status of international import.

The population comprises all the Junior Secondary School students of the fifty eight schools (public and private) in Calabar Metropolis. The stratified random sampling technique was used to draw twenty (20) schools from the population of 58 schools (34 percent). Ten (10) schools were selected by the simple random technique from each of the two local government areas in the zone. In each of the sampled schools ten JSS III students were selected purposively for gender representativeness. By this process, two hundred (200) pupils were obtained in all, comprising 97 male and 103 female students.

A simply worded, structured questionnaire titled “Entrepreneurial Interest Questionnaire” (EIQ) was designed by the researchers. EIQ is a 20-item, 4-point Likert Scale Type, meant to elicit pupils’ responses on their interest for entrepreneurship. It has two sections. Section A required the pupil respondents to state the name of his school and whether he is male or female. Section B comprised the 20 items, each having option response: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Pupils were required to tick as appropriate for each item. Typical items included: working for government is not as gainful as self-employment, there is joy in doing one’s own business, I would be happy if I had opportunity to organize my own business, I love running a private business, I have much interest to do a business where I can earn my own income, if I have money, I will start my own business, and discussion on personal business will give me pleasure.

In each school, the items were read one by one and explained to pupils before they made their responses. This was to ensure that personal pupil handicaps of reading and understanding the items did not prevent them from indicating their true interest level.

EIQ passed through face and content validation. It was given to two Senior Lecturers, one of Management Studies and the other of Educational Measurement in the University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, to vet independently. They assessed EIQ vis-à-vis the purpose and hypotheses of the study. Both experts certified the instrument adequate for use, after one or two corrections. The instrument was also trial-tested on thirty (30) JSS III students of Akamkpa Government Secondary School, which is outside the research area. Reliability coefficient of 0.86 (Cronbach alpha) was established. This was considered high enough to warrant the use of EIQ.
From Table 2, since the calculated t-value of 0.431 is less than the critical t-value of 1.972 for the two-tailed test at .05 level of significance and 198 degree of freedom, it follows that there is no significant difference between the entrepreneurial interest of male and female pupils. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Discussion

The results of the analysis of the first hypothesis revealed that the pupils’ entrepreneurial interest is significantly high. This means that they have great propensity to engage in entrepreneurship in the future. This finding is consistent with Kourilsky & Walstad (1998) and Timmons (1994) who reported high rates (67 – 90 percent) of entrepreneurial interest manifestation among high school students of the United States. However, Twomey (1985) rather found relatively lower interest levels. He reported of United Kingdom that 40.7 percent of the sampled students and 34.3% of the Irish students indicated interest to start their own business. The findings could be a pointer to the fact that levels of interest in entrepreneurship may be environmentally and time dependent. Buoyant economies tend to have higher capacities for investment since entrepreneurship is capital-driven at least at the initial time. This probably explains why in the United States of America entrepreneurial ambition and interest manifestation may be quite realistic by students of Junior high school grade. There is a high likelihood that the initial capital to kick-start entrepreneurship and probably the enabling guidance oriented environment to trial-test and eventually sustain the venture are more readily available in the United States of American than Europe and Africa. This is because both funding and human resource development facilities are quite accessible. In contrast, students in developing nations and other distressed economies may perceive engagement in entrepreneurship as a risky venture amidst scarcity of resources. The fear of loss constitutes a negative stimulus in business, capable of causing withdrawal in business decision-making.

The first finding is also time dependent. Buttner (1993) averred that the
two major problems that had plagued interest in entrepreneurship in the past, namely discrimination by way of the “glass ceiling” phenomenon and financing challenges are on the decline now. Thus, it maybe reasonable to predict that entrepreneurship will thrive better in the future as these problems are being tackled, and with improvement in global economy.

Interest in a vocation, discipline or venture is significant because it is the motivator that propels and energizes the individual to task persistence and accomplishment. Without interest one easily chickens out of a venture at the slightest confrontation with a challenge. There is a popular adage among educators which says “you can force a cow to the stream, and if you are strong enough, you may even push its head into water but you cannot force water through its throat”. This statement is used to explain the critical place of readiness and interest in learning. By extension therefore, interest is a precursor for entrepreneurial success. Consequently, teachers must be sensitive enough to use interaction strategies that will assess and identify students’ areas of vocational strengths and weaknesses, including level of interest for entrepreneurship so as to nurture and sustain such interests for greater national development.

The second finding was that students’ gender does not significantly influence their interest in entrepreneurship. This means that there is parity in the level of interest for entrepreneurship between male and female students. This findings is at variance with western literature (Wang & Wong, 2004; Gupta, 2012). Gupta (2012) strongly contended that gender stereotypes could push women away from entrepreneurship. Therefore, the way entrepreneurship is presented, discussed and taught must change, especially for women. He asked: “Where are the role models for women?” The assistant professor of strategy at Binghamton University further said: “Pick up any book on entrepreneurship: it is all about men. Switch on the television, and when it comes to entrepreneurs, it is Bill Gates, and Steve Jobs (in the U.S.). Where are the women entrepreneurs? They are not being talked about.” p. 2.

Just as earlier discussed, environmental distinction may be accountable for this finding which is contrary to popular literature. Godfrey (1993) and Gupta (2012) lamented the unfortunate under-representation of women and the minorities among successful entrepreneurial ventures right from history. This means that though there are women who distinguished themselves in entrepreneurship, they are not publicized the way men are. Similarly, female interest in entrepreneurship may to some degree have been swept under the carpet.

Implications for Educational Assessment

High students’ interest for entrepreneurship is a privilege that needs to be effectively utilized for the gain of the individuals and for national interest. It is
an indication that the problem of total dependence on the government for employment of labour could be redressed. UBE teachers should be trained in their capacity building workshops on the subject matter of entrepreneurship and its role in economic and socio-political development of the individual and the state. The pedagogy of effective communication of the entrepreneurship message could also be taught in the workshop for onward transmission to the learners. This will help sustain pupils interest and even concretize what was initially mere fantasies and daydreaming. The use of teachers and guidance counsellors in consolidating the gains of vocational and occupational education among the UBE pupils needs to be fully exploited.

Aside from the teachers, parents and other education stakeholders, including the wider society need some value re-orientation. The mass media, including rural communication media should be used to inform the public in general that the world trend in contemporary society is pro-entrepreneurship and wealth creation. Consequently therefore, children should be taught and encouraged to develop interest and skills for coping with the demands of the new order. Gone are the days when all school graduates look up to the government as the monopolist in employment of labour. Besides, self employment is just as good as or perhaps better than government service.

Since assessment is an integral part of teaching (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), UBE teachers as instructional assessors necessarily have to learn and use non-test assessment measures for early identification of entrepreneurial interest and non-interest for nurturing and therapy respectively. Pupils who exhibit apathy to entrepreneurship could be conditioned through teacher-friendly methods to become lovers of the vocation. Such assessments should be continuous to be able to detect turning points and inflections in the lives of the students for proper redress.

Teacher retraining in instrumentation is imperative. Construction, trial-testing and use of good non-test measures in their variety will help in the monitoring and development of learners’ interest for entrepreneurship. Techniques of validation and ensuring instruments’ reliability as well as usability are subjects that teachers need to be acquainted with. This will give entrepreneurship research the needed boost and credibility.

All teachers should be taught the concept and application of test fairness, item bias and Differential Item Functioning (DIF) to beef up test and item qualities. The use of terminology, language and actions both in teaching and testing which convey gender bias should be discontinued. Just as Gupta (2012) asserted that “the way entrepreneurship is presented, discussed and taught must change, especially for women. The subjugation of women and gender stereotyping could push the women away from entrepreneurship”. This paper concludes that entrepreneurial interest is
high among male and female sample students. It may be inferred that this can also be said of the population.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Interest sustaining and boosting teacher interaction strategies should be fostered in schools. A democratic and teacher-friendly environment where the teacher acts in consciousness of the need to encourage entrepreneurship will help this form of employment to thrive.

2. Continuous assessment should be holistic and practicable (not forged), spanning cognitive and non-cognitive domains, to reveal the entire personality of the learners, so that areas of deficiencies could be easily identified and redressed.

3. There should be collaboration of all education stakeholders in students and societal value re-orientation to enable us unteach the old idea that white collar jobs are the best. Nigeria, as a subset of the world must imbibe contemporary global culture which places premium on national development through entrepreneurship.

4. All forms of gender discrimination against women should be discontinued both in entrepreneurship and in the classroom.

5. There is need to retrain the teacher through capacity building workshops on the subject matter of entrepreneurship. Knowledge of content, curriculum and pedagogy of this subject will help teachers to serve better.

**References**


