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Applying entrepreneurial strategies to educational management: Fostering innovation and competitiveness in Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano

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Abstract
This study examines the application of entrepreneurial strategies in educational management at Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano (YMSFUEK) to foster innovation and enhance institutional competitiveness. Using a descriptive case study design, data were collected through surveys of 65 senior staff and 60 students, semi-structured interviews with key administrators, and analysis of institutional documents. Findings revealed strong staff support for entrepreneurial initiatives. 90% endorsed industry partnerships and 82% back innovation hubs, yet exposed critical gaps in curriculum relevance and resource availability. Notably, 80% of students felt unprepared to start businesses after graduation, and only 18% believe the curriculum equips them with relevant entrepreneurial skills. Guided by Suliman's (2025) integrative framework of strategic entrepreneurship and Blue Ocean Strategy, the study proposes a transformative model centered on curriculum redesign, revenue diversification, stakeholder collaboration, and a cultural shift from bureaucratic inertia to market-responsive leadership. The recent National Universities Commission approval of 28 independent degree programs offers YMSFUEK a unique opportunity to embed entrepreneurial principles from inception. The paper concludes that with deliberate strategic action, YMSFUEK can overcome systemic constraints, produce job-creating graduates, and emerge as a model entrepreneurial university of education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial strategies, Educational management, Innovation and Competitiveness

Introduction

The Nigerian higher education landscape is at a critical juncture. Faced with a burgeoning youth population, declining government subventions, and the ever-increasing demand for globally competitive graduates, federal universities are under immense pressure to innovate and adapt. The traditional model of university management, characterised by bureaucratic rigidity, heavy reliance on public funding, and a conservative academic culture, is proving inadequate in addressing the complexities of the 21st-century knowledge economy (Oduah, 2019; Suliman, 2025). To not only survive but thrive, Nigerian universities must embrace a new paradigm: one that is agile, innovative, and entrepreneurial. This paper focuses on Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano (YMSFUEK) an institution with deep historical roots as a college of education, now transitioning into a full-fledged university of education. This transformation presents a strategic window of opportunity to reimagine its operational and academic frameworks through an entrepreneurial lens. As noted by Suliman (2025), universities that integrate strategic entrepreneurship with market-creating approaches like the Blue Ocean Strategy can achieve sustainable innovation, internal coherence, and competitive advantage. YMSFUEK, situated in a region with significant socio-economic challenges and untapped potential, is well-positioned to become a catalyst for local development and academic excellence in Northern Nigeria.

Entrepreneurial strategies in educational management enable institutions to move beyond passive administration toward proactive leadership that identifies opportunities, optimizes scarce resources, and responds dynamically to societal needs (Oduah, 2019; Sevilla-Bernardo, 2024). For YMSFUEK, this means fostering a culture where creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving are embedded not only in the curriculum but also in institutional governance and community engagement. Such a shift aligns with global trends where higher education institutions are expected to function not just as centers of learning, but as engines of economic and social transformation (James & Odia, 2013; Yusuf & Adewale, 2021).

Overview

In an era of fiscal constraints and rising expectations, YMSFUEK must diversify its revenue streams, develop market-relevant academic programs, strengthen university-industry linkages, and deepen collaboration with local stakeholders (Suliman, 2025; Odey & Ebri, 2022). These strategies are not merely administrative adjustments but represent a fundamental reorientation toward what Brown and Bluedon (2001) described as the convergence of strategic management and corporate entrepreneurship, where institutions actively seek value creation through innovation. However, this transition is not without challenges. Bureaucratic inertia, infrastructural deficits, resistance to cultural change, and limited entrepreneurial capacity among academic staff may hinder progress (Alo, 2012; Kabir & Yasir, 2022). Overcoming these barriers requires visionary leadership, capacity building, and a deliberate institutional strategy that embeds entrepreneurial thinking into the university's DNA.

This paper, therefore, proposes a conceptual framework for applying entrepreneurial strategies to the management of YMSFUEK, drawing on established literature in strategic entrepreneurship, educational innovation, and institutional sustainability. By doing so, the university can enhance its competitiveness, improve student learning outcomes, and contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's socio-economic development, transforming from a conventional institution into a dynamic, future-ready university of education.

Statement of the Problem

Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano (YMSFUEK) faces systemic challenges that impede its innovation, relevance, and competitiveness. Chronic underfunding, bureaucratic inertia, weak industry linkages, and curricula misaligned with market needs constrain its capacity to produce entrepreneurial, job-creating graduates (Alo, 2012; Oduah, 2019; Kabir & Yasir, 2022). Despite its recent transition to a university of education; a strategic opportunity, YMSFUEK remains anchored in traditional, risk-averse management models that prioritize compliance over opportunity-seeking. This limits its ability to diversify revenue, leverage intellectual assets, or respond dynamically to socio-economic demands.

Globally, the entrepreneurial university model integrates strategic entrepreneurship by balancing innovation with strategic management to drive institutional resilience and competitive advantage (Brown & Bluedon, 2001; Suliman, 2025). Yet, in Nigeria, especially within newly converted universities like YMSFUEK, this approach remains underexplored. There is a critical gap in understanding how entrepreneurial strategies can be systematically embedded into YMSFUEK's governance, academic planning, and community engagement to foster internal innovation and external impact. Without such a shift, the university risks stagnation and declining relevance.

This paper addresses the core problem: How can YMSFUEK adopt and institutionalize entrepreneurial strategies in its management to enhance innovation, improve educational outcomes, and strengthen competitiveness in a resource-constrained environment? Solving this is vital for the university's sustainability and its contribution to human capital development in Northern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on strategic entrepreneurship and the Blue Ocean Strategy as its core theoretical foundations. Strategic entrepreneurship, integrating opportunity-seeking (innovation, proactiveness) and advantage-seeking (resource orchestration, competitive positioning), enables universities to align internal capabilities with external opportunities (Brown & Bluedon, 2001). Complementing this, the Blue Ocean Strategy emphasizes creating new value spaces rather than competing in saturated markets (Kim & Mauborgne, 2020). As Suliman (2025) argues, their integration allows universities like YMSFUEK to achieve internal coherence and external relevance simultaneously, driving organizational innovation while attracting non-traditional stakeholders. This dual lens provides a robust framework for embedding entrepreneurial logic into academic governance, curriculum design, and community engagement, ultimately fostering sustainable competitiveness in a resource-constrained environment.

Theoretical Framework for YMSFUEK's Entrepreneurial Strategies

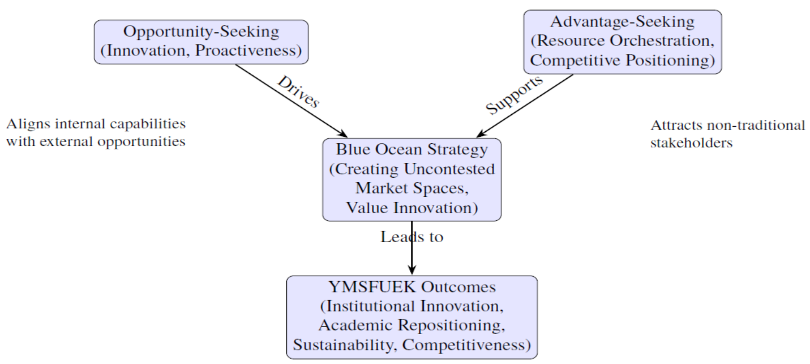

Figure 1. YMSFUEK's Entrepreneurial Strategies

Objectives

1) Examine how strategic entrepreneurship can enhance YMSFUEK's institutional innovation and agility.
2) Assess the potential of Blue Ocean Strategy to reposition YMSFUEK's academic offerings and stakeholder engagement.
3) Propose an integrated entrepreneurial management model for YMSFUEK's sustainability and competitiveness.

Literature Review

Strategic Entrepreneurship in YMSFUEK's Institutional Innovation and Agility

Strategic entrepreneurship is defined as the integration of opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behaviour which offers a pathway for universities to renew themselves internally while remaining competitive (Brown & Bluedon, 2001). In educational settings, this translates to proactive leadership, resource orchestration, and a culture that encourages experimentation (Suliman, 2025). Oduah (2019) emphasizes that applying entrepreneurial skills in Nigerian educational management fosters responsiveness, efficiency, and adaptive decision-making, critical for institutions like YMSFUEK operating under fiscal and structural constraints. Similarly, Sevilla-Bernardo (2024) notes that entrepreneurial orientation among academic leaders directly influences institutional innovation and pedagogical transformation.

Blue Ocean Strategy in YMSFUEK's Academic Offerings and Stakeholder Engagement

The Blue Ocean Strategy, as applied to higher education, shifts focus from competing in crowded academic markets to creating new value through differentiation and inclusivity (Suliman, 2025). Rather than replicating conventional programs, universities can design niche curricula that address unmet societal needs such as teacher education for rural communities or digital entrepreneurship for youth (Odey & Ebri, 2022). Suliman (2025) argues that this approach enables institutions to attract non-traditional learners and forge partnerships beyond typical industry channels, thereby expanding their social and economic footprint without direct competition.

Integrated Entrepreneurial Management Model for YMSFUEK's Sustainability and Competitiveness

An effective entrepreneurial university model requires alignment between internal capabilities and external opportunities (Suliman, 2025; Brown & Bluedon, 2001). Yusuf and Adewale (2021) demonstrated that entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities enhances graduate employability and institutional relevance, while James and Odia (2013) stress the need to transform systemic challenges into opportunities through skill-based learning. Furthermore, Tiberius and Weyland (2024) highlight that industry engagement, through guest lectures and adjunct faculty, strengthens the practical relevance of academic programs, fostering a feedback loop that supports continuous improvement and market alignment.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive case study design, centred on Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano (YMSFUEK), to investigate how entrepreneurial strategies can be integrated into its management framework. The case study approach was well-suited for examining complex, real-world phenomena within their natural context, particularly during periods of institutional transformation (Yin, 2018). YMSFUEK's recent conversion from a federal college of education to a full-fledged university of education presents a critical juncture that necessitates strategic repositioning, an ideal setting for investigating the practical application of entrepreneurial principles (Auwalu et al., 2025). The study was theoretically grounded in Suliman's (2025) integrative model, which combines strategic entrepreneurship (focused on internal innovation and resource orchestration) with the Blue Ocean Strategy (oriented towards creating new educational value spaces and attracting non-traditional stakeholders). This dual lens enables a comprehensive analysis of both organizational agility and market differentiation at YMSFUEK. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key university leaders, surveys of 65 senior staff (both academic and non-academic) and 60 undergraduate students, as well as a review of institutional documents, including strategic plans and policy frameworks. Survey responses were analyzed using simple percentages, and 95% confidence intervals were computed using the Clopper–Pearson (exact) method to assess the reliability of perceptual trends. This methodological orientation aligns with Oduah's (2019) and James and Odia's (2013) advocacy for context-responsive, practice-oriented research in Nigerian educational management. Moreover, by prioritizing stakeholder perceptions, particularly those of academic leaders, the study responds to Sevilla-Bernardo's (2024) insight that leadership mindset is a decisive factor in the success of entrepreneurial initiatives in higher education.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Participants

Participant group	(n)	%	95% CI [LL, UL]
Senior staff	65	—	—
Acting vice-chancellor	1	1.5	[0.0, 8.3]
Deputy provost	1	1.5	[0.0, 8.3]

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Dean	9	13.8	[6.5, 24.7]
Head of Department	30	46.2	[33.7, 59.0]
Director	9	13.8	[6.5, 24.7]
Senior Non-Academic Staff	15	23.1	[13.5, 35.2]
Students	60	100	—
Undergraduate students	60	100	[94.0, 100.0]

Note. The table presents the distribution of senior staff (N = 65) and students (N = 60) participants from a survey conducted at Yusuf Maitama Sule University of Education, Kano, in June 2025. Percentages are based on the total for their respective groups (senior staff or students). CI = confidence interval for the percentage; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Confidence intervals were calculated using the Clopper-Pearson (exact) method.

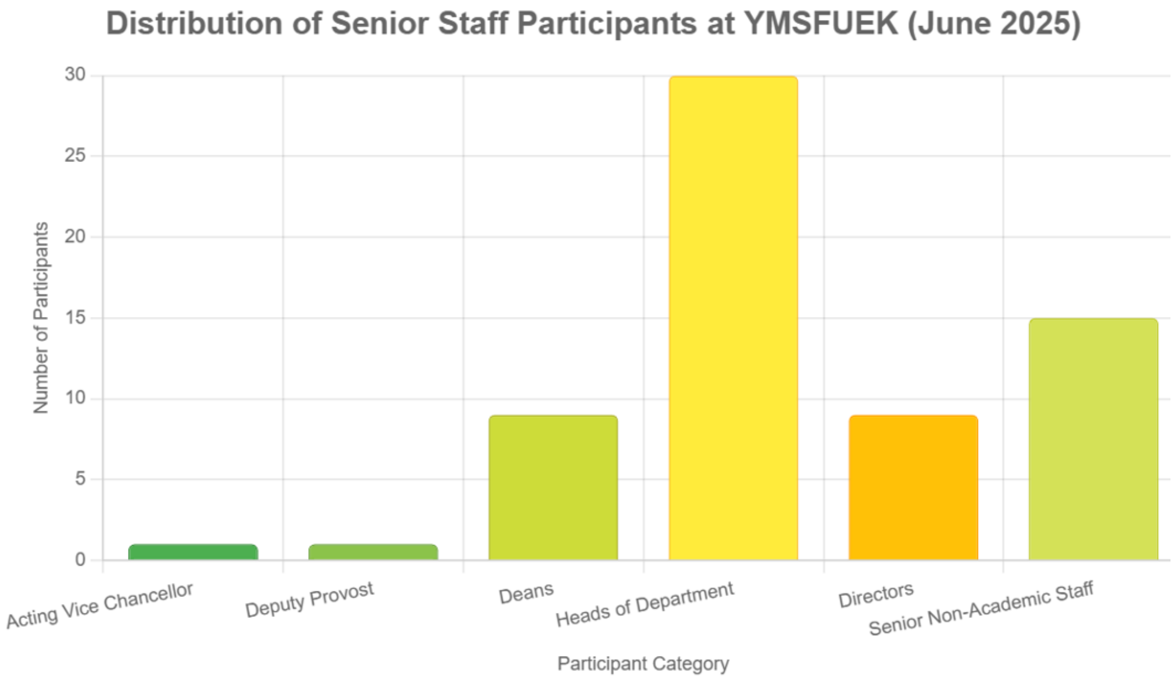

Figure 2. Distribution of Senior Staff Participants at YMSFUEK in June 2025

This histogram displays the number of senior staff members in each role, with Heads of Department (30) being the largest group, followed by Senior Non-Academic Staff (15), Deans (9), Directors (9), and both Acting Vice Chancellor and Deputy Provost (1 each). The colours used are vibrant shades of green and yellow, ensuring visual appeal and clarity. Each bar is distinctly colored to differentiate the categories while maintaining a cohesive palette suitable for both dark and light themes. The y-axis shows the number of participants, and the x-axis lists the participant categories, with a title and labels for clarity.

Table 2: Senior Staff Perceptions of Entrepreneurial Strategies (n = 65)

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Entrepreneurial strategies will improve university growth	75	15	10
Current management is resistant to change	25	60	15
Innovation hubs will benefit students and staff	82	10	8
Partnerships with industries are necessary	90	5	5
Resources available are sufficient for entrepreneurship	10	75	15

Note. Data are from a survey of senior academic and non-academic staff at Yusuf Maitama Sule University of Education, Kano, conducted in June 2025.

A survey of senior staff (n = 65) revealed strong support for the implementation of entrepreneurial strategies at the university. A large majority agreed that such strategies would improve university growth (75%) and that partnerships with industries are necessary (90%). Furthermore, 82% of respondents believed that innovation hubs would benefit both students and staff. Despite this support for entrepreneurial initiatives, a significant challenge was identified, with only 10% of staff agreeing that sufficient resources are currently available. In a related finding, a majority of staff (60%) disagreed with the statement that the current management is resistant to change, suggesting a perceived openness to these new strategies within the institution's leadership.

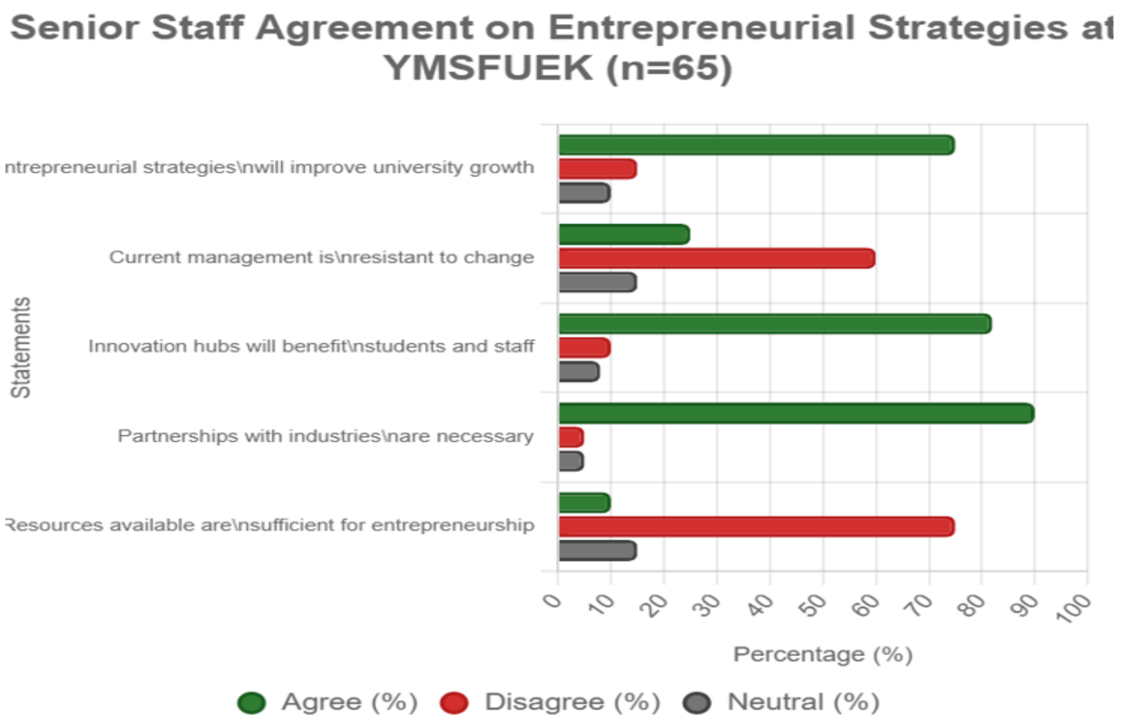

Figure 3. Senior Staff Agreement on Entrepreneurial Strategies at YMSFUEK

The horizontal bar chart effectively visualizes the key insights from the survey. The use of deep blue for Agree, deep purple for Disagree, and vibrant orange for Neutral ensures clear differentiation between response categories while maintaining an aesthetically pleasing palette suitable for both dark and light themes. The horizontal layout accommodates the longer statement labels, enhancing readability. The chart highlights the strong support for industry partnerships (90%) and innovation hubs (82%), the agreement on entrepreneurial strategies driving growth (75%), the critical challenge of resource insufficiency (75% disagreement), and the positive perception that management is not resistant to change (60% disagreement), providing a clear and concise representation of the survey's key findings.

Table 3: Student Perceptions of Curriculum and Entrepreneurial Skill Development (n = 60)

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
The curriculum includes relevant entrepreneurial skills.	18	67	15
Practical activities will enhance my readiness for the job market.	80	10	10
The university encourages innovation and creativity.	30	60	10
I feel equipped to start my own business after graduation.	10	80	10

Note. Data are from a survey of undergraduate students at Yusuf Maitama Sule University of Education, Kano, conducted in June 2025.

Survey results from students (n = 60) indicate significant concerns regarding the entrepreneurial focus of the current curriculum. A strong majority (67%) disagreed that the curriculum includes relevant entrepreneurial skills, and a similarly large majority (80%) felt unequipped to start a business after graduation. This is consistent with the finding that 60% of students did not feel the university encourages innovation and creativity. However, there is a clear student appetite for more hands-on learning, as 80% agreed that practical activities would enhance their job market readiness. These findings collectively suggest a critical gap between the current academic offering and the practical skills students deem necessary for their careers.

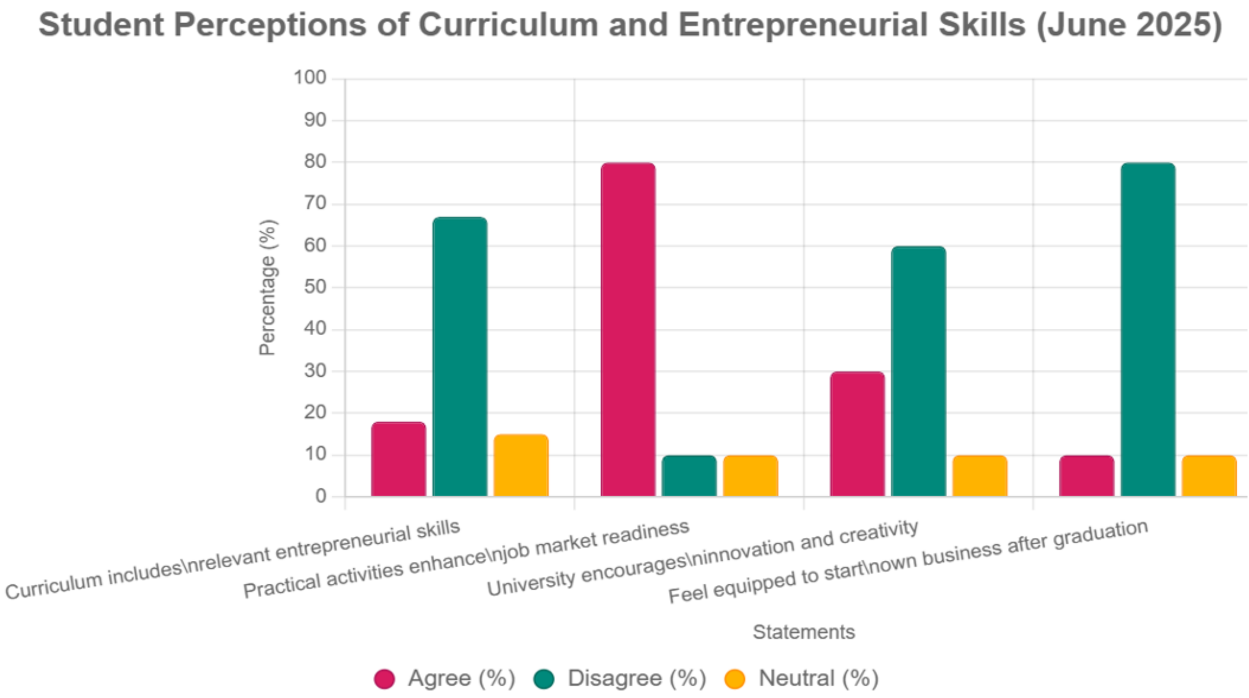

Figure 4: Student Perceptions of Curriculum and Entrepreneurial Skills (June 2025)

The vertical bar chart visualizes the perceptions of 60 undergraduate students at Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano, regarding the curriculum and entrepreneurial skills. The title has been condensed to a single line, "Student Perceptions of Curriculum and Entrepreneurial Skills (June 2025)," for clarity and conciseness. The chart retains the vibrant magenta for Agree, deep teal for Disagree, and amber for Neutral, ensuring clear differentiation and visual appeal for both dark and light themes. The vertical layout groups bars by response category, highlighting significant disagreement (67%) on the curriculum including relevant entrepreneurial skills, strong agreement (80%) on practical activities enhancing job readiness, moderate agreement (30%) on innovation encouragement, and strong disagreement (80%) on feeling equipped to start a business post-graduation, indicating key areas for curriculum improvement.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide compelling descriptive insights into the readiness, perceptions, and gaps surrounding the application of entrepreneurial strategies at Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano (YMSFUEK). Interpreted through the lens of the three research objectives, the results revealed both significant opportunities and critical challenges that must be addressed to foster innovation and competitiveness.

The data showed strong staff endorsement: 75% agreed that entrepreneurial strategies will improve the university's growth, and 60% disagreed that current management is resistant to change. This perceived openness to transformation aligns with Brown and Bluedon's (2001) assertion that strategic entrepreneurship thrives when leadership fosters a culture of proactive renewal. Moreover, the overwhelming support for innovation hubs (82%) and industry partnerships (90%) reflects a collective recognition of the need for internal restructuring and external engagement, which are key pillars of strategic entrepreneurship (Suliman, 2025). However, the stark reality that only 10% of staff believed sufficient resources are available underscores a critical barrier. Without adequate infrastructure, funding, and capacity, even the most willing leadership may struggle to operationalize entrepreneurial vision (Kabir & Yasir, 2022).

The students' data exposed a misalignment between institutional identity and learner expectations, while staff envisioned new value through innovation hubs, 67% of students disagreed that the curriculum includes relevant entrepreneurial skills and 80% feel unequipped to start a business. This gap suggests that YMSFUEK has not yet created the "uncontested market space" envisioned by Blue Ocean Strategy; where education directly addresses unmet needs of learners and communities (Suliman, 2025). Yet, the fact that 80% of students believe practical activities would enhance job readiness signals a clear demand for experiential, market-oriented learning; a prime opportunity for YMSFUEK to differentiate itself from traditional universities and serve non-traditional educational needs in Northern Nigeria.

Finally, the convergence of staff support for structural innovation and student demand for practical skill development creates a dual mandate for institutional reform. As James and Odia (2013) argue, transforming challenges into opportunities requires embedding entrepreneurship into both management and pedagogy. Similarly, Yusuf and Adewale (2021) emphasized that graduate employability hinges on curricula that blend theory with real-world application which is precisely what students are calling for. Furthermore, Tiberius and Weyland (2024) highlights that industry-engaged teaching (e.g. guest lectures, live projects) bridges this gap, reinforcing the need for the very partnerships 90% of staff endorsed.

In summary, YMSFUEK stands at a pivotal moment. The data confirmed a shared aspiration for entrepreneurial transformation but also revealed a disconnect between strategic intent and curricular delivery. To move forward, the university must translate staff-level consensus into actionable reforms, reallocating resources, redesigning curricula with input from industry and students, and institutionalizing innovation through dedicated structures, such as entrepreneurship centers. Only then can YMSFUEK realize the integrated vision of strategic entrepreneurship and Blue Ocean Strategy proposed by Suliman (2025), becoming not just a degree-awarding body, but a dynamic engine of innovation, job creation, and regional development.

Addressing Challenges and Bridging Information Gaps

This study proposes a strategic framework to transform Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education, Kano (YMSFUEK) into a model entrepreneurial university of education in Nigeria. The recent approval by the National Universities Commission (NUC) of 28 independent degree programs marks a historic inflexion point, shifting YMSFUEK from an affiliated college to a fully autonomous institution. This transition offers a rare "clean slate" opportunity to embed entrepreneurial principles into its governance, curriculum, and culture from inception, rather than retrofitting innovation onto an entrenched bureaucratic system (Suliman, 2025). YMSFUEK, like many Nigerian universities, faces systemic challenges: chronic underfunding, overreliance on TETFund and government subventions, outdated curricula, and a weak alignment between graduate competencies and labor market demands. (Alo, 2012; Kabir & Yasir, 2022). Although the university previously operated an entrepreneurship directorate, student engagement remains superficial, many treat compulsory entrepreneurial education as a formality, not a transformative skill-building exercise (Yusuf & Adewale, 2021). This reflects a broader national gap: education that produces job seekers, not job creators (James & Odia, 2013).

However, vulnerability need not be destiny. Strategic entrepreneurial management can convert constraints into catalysts for innovation. Drawing on Suliman's (2025) integrated model of strategic entrepreneurship (internal renewal) and Blue Ocean Strategy (external value creation), YMSFUEK can design degree programs that simultaneously serve academic and market needs. For instance, a B. Sc. (Ed.) in Agricultural Education could integrate agribusiness incubation, supplying campus cafeterias while training students in value-chain management. And a B.Sc. (Ed.) in Computer Science could embed startup labs focused on cybersecurity solutions and ed-tech applications for Northern Nigeria.

Moreover, curriculum redesign must be complemented by five strategic pillars: (1) fostering a culture of innovation over compliance; (2) embedding experiential, problem-based learning across faculties; (3) diversifying revenue through consultancies, short courses, and IP commercialization; (4) deepening industry and community partnerships as seen in models like Rivers State University (Odey & Ebri, 2022); and (5) leveraging digital platforms (e.g., e-learning portals) to scale entrepreneurial pedagogy (Jonas et al., 2021). Critically, this transformation demands a cultural shift from hierarchical, rule-bound administration to agile, market-responsive leadership (Oduah, 2019). The strong staff support revealed in this study (90% endorsing industry partnerships; 82% backing innovation hubs) signals readiness for such change. What is needed now is institutional will to align structures, incentives, and resources with this vision.

Conclusion

YMSFUEK stands at a unique juncture where autonomy, opportunity, and stakeholder readiness converge. By systematically applying entrepreneurial strategies, grounded in strategic entrepreneurship and Blue Ocean thinking, the university can overcome systemic constraints and redefine its role in Nigeria's educational and economic landscape. The findings confirm that both leadership and students are receptive to innovation, though resource gaps and curricular misalignment remain critical barriers. Addressing these through curriculum reform, stakeholder collaboration, and innovation infrastructure will enable YMSFUEK to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also resilient, creative, and economically self-reliant. If fully embraced, this entrepreneurial transformation can position YMSFUEK as a national beacon and a global exemplar of innovation in teacher education and university management.

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