

IMPROVING ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACTS

This study investigated how improving entrepreneurship development can enhance sustainable employment opportunities for Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The study was anchored on the growing need to equip graduates with relevant entrepreneurial competencies capable of reducing the high unemployment rate and promoting self-reliance. Three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and area of the study was in Rivers State. a sample of 100 male and female graduates was selected for the study. Data were collected using a structured 10-item questionnaire developed by the researcher to generate responses on key indicators of entrepreneurship development improvement. The instrument yielded relevant data, which were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while the z-test statistic was employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that strengthening creativity, innovation, and effective curriculum implementation are essential strategies for improving entrepreneurship development to achieve sustainable employment among Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The results further indicated no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents regarding the perceived effectiveness of entrepreneurship development initiatives. Based on these findings, the study recommends that government and relevant stakeholders should provide strong support by ensuring sufficient funding, ensure continuous curriculum review, and integrate comprehensive entrepreneurship training into the NYSC programme.

Keywords: Business Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship and graduate self-Reliance

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has become increasingly significant in today's world, particularly in the face of global financial instability and growing economic uncertainties. Beyond economic concerns, societies are confronted with complex global issues that require innovative solutions. As such, entrepreneurship and innovation have become essential tools for addressing 21st-century challenges by promoting sustainable development, generating employment, boosting economic growth, and improving overall human well-being (OECD, 2021). Entrepreneurship manifests in various forms, ranging from establishing new ventures to driving innovation within corporations, public institutions, universities, and non-profit organizations. In this fast-changing environment, individuals across all sectors must adopt creative and solution-focused mindsets that enable them to recognize and seize emerging opportunities.

Entrepreneurship also serves as a major driver of societal progress. Although not everyone may choose to become an entrepreneur, cultivating entrepreneurial thinking remains vital for societal advancement. Government agencies, private organizations, academic institutions, and civil society all play important roles in creating environments that foster innovation and entrepreneurial activities (Brown & Nwaokokorom 2025). Promoting entrepreneurial behavior requires supportive systems that encourage creativity, risk-taking, and proactive problem-solving. Studies consistently show that

entrepreneurship contributes significantly to economic development, poverty reduction, and improved living standards, emphasizing the need for strong human capital development across different regions and cultural settings (Adeboyo & Michael, 2025). By leveraging local resources and opportunities, individuals can apply entrepreneurial strategies suitable for their environments, leading to both personal advancement and community development.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship provides a platform for personal fulfillment while addressing unemployment, poverty, and social underdevelopment. Its economic influence extends to individuals, families, and the wider society. At its core, entrepreneurship involves recognizing profitable ideas and converting them into viable business ventures. Entrepreneurs are often described as innovative, determined, goal-driven, and visionary individuals or groups committed to creating and sustaining enterprises (Hisrich et al., 2020). In practice, entrepreneurship involves organizing, managing, and growing new ventures while taking on financial risks. Entrepreneurship development, therefore, focuses on equipping individuals with entrepreneurial skills and knowledge through training, mentorship, and capacity-building programs, ultimately increasing the number of competent and confident entrepreneurs (Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022).

Education remains central to preparing individuals for modern entrepreneurial demands. It involves the comprehensive development of intellectual, emotional, social, and psychological capabilities (Otamiri, 2014). Quality education promotes experiential learning that allows learners to apply theoretical knowledge in solving real-world problems. Within Nigerian higher institutions, business education bridges theory and practice by integrating general education with specialized disciplines such as Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, and Office Management (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020).

The purpose of business education is to develop graduates who can function effectively in various professional roles, including teaching, administrative duties, and entrepreneurial activities. It equips learners with competencies needed to participate meaningfully in the business world while fostering creativity, problem-solving abilities, and occupational awareness (Ikpeama & Nwaokokorom, 2017). Some scholars view business education primarily as preparation for teaching at secondary and tertiary levels, while others argue that it is a professional component of technical and vocational education aimed at imparting essential business and employability skills (Brown & Nwaokokorom, 2025).

The goals of business education also include vocational training, career development, economic literacy, consumer understanding, personal financial management, and preparation for further studies (Adewole, 2022). Graduates are expected to display entrepreneurial skills, technical competence, and readiness for the workforce or self-employment. Entrepreneurship therefore remains a vital component of business education, equipping students with the capabilities needed to create and maintain employment opportunities. This study, therefore, focuses on improving entrepreneurship development as a pathway for promoting sustainable employment among Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Many business education graduates still struggle to establish sustainable self-employment despite ongoing efforts to strengthen entrepreneurship development. Key barriers include heavy taxation, inadequate government support, bureaucratic delays in business registration, limited access to finance, stringent regulatory policies, and rising inflation. Poor infrastructure such as unstable electricity and inefficient transportation further increases business operating costs (Sheyin, 2024). Additionally, some regulatory bodies intimidate entrepreneurs through extortion and excessive enforcement, weakening business survival (Umenzekwe, Onyekachi, & Ezenwafor, 2025). Academic institutions also provide limited mentorship and support, reducing students' confidence and motivation to pursue entrepreneurial careers (Aladejebi & Amao Taiwo, 2023). These persistent challenges indicate that existing entrepreneurship initiatives may not adequately prepare business education graduates for long-term employment. Therefore, this study investigates how improving

entrepreneurship development can enhance sustainable employment, identifies major barriers faced by graduates in Rivers State, and recommends actionable strategies for improvement.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate how improving entrepreneurship development can enhance sustainable employment opportunities for business education graduates in Rivers State. In particular, the study sought to:

- 1 Examine the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State.
- 2 Identify the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- 1 What are the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.
- 2 What are the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were used to guide the study:

Ho₁; There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Ho₂; There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

Human Capital Theory, developed by Schultz (1961) and later advanced by Becker (1964), provides the foundation for this study. The theory emerged in the 1960s to clarify how economic growth and income improvements are linked to investing in people. Earlier economists such as Karl Marx, Alfred Marshall, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus also contributed ideas that shaped its development. The theory maintains that people can increase their productivity and improve their life outcomes by investing in education, skills, and experience. It views the knowledge, competencies, and personal attributes individuals possess as valuable economic resources. These attributes enable individuals to earn income and participate effectively in economic activities. Similar to physical capital, investment in human capital is regarded as worthwhile when present costs lead to future benefits (Adeyemo, 2021). Overall, the theory positions individuals as essential economic assets and connects human capital development with key concepts such as innovation, productivity, technological progress, and competitiveness.

Concept of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship describes the capacity and readiness of individuals to identify viable investment prospects, initiate business ventures, and manage them effectively toward success (Francis & Agum, 2019). It includes the establishment and administration of enterprises, coordination of commercial activities, and the undertaking of calculated risks to achieve profit often relying on competencies developed through education and practical experience (Omolayo & Baba, 2020). The entrepreneurial mindset is crucial for nurturing an innovation-driven culture, which is fundamental to economic advancement, especially in developing nations such as Nigeria (Brown & Nwaokokorom, 2025).

Entrepreneurship also involves interpreting environmental dynamics and harnessing emerging opportunities to create goods and services that meet societal needs (Brown & Nwaokokorom, 2025; Paul & Ossai, 2020). At its core, entrepreneurship requires risk acceptance, venture creation, and wealth generation through innovative and value-driven activities. Successful entrepreneurs are often distinguished by their creativity, technical knowledge, persistence, and strategic focus required to turn ideas into commercially viable outcomes (Paul & Ossai, 2020).

Furthermore, entrepreneurship demands the skillful integration of production elements including labor, capital, and other resources to produce and distribute goods and services (Aruwa, 2020). Its effectiveness depends not only on the entrepreneur's competence and initiative but also on the presence of supportive structural conditions that enhance business viability (Ayatse, 2021). Whether pursued individually or collectively, entrepreneurs play a critical role in mobilizing resources for productive activities, thereby contributing substantially to growth, innovation, and socio-economic development in emerging economies (Aderounmu, 2020).

Entrepreneurship Development and Business Education Graduates

Entrepreneurship remains a foundational driver of societal progress. The availability of resources, cultural norms, and prevailing socio-economic conditions within a nation often shape the opportunities for delivering entrepreneurship education (Raimi et al., 2019). From an academic standpoint, entrepreneurship education represents a structured field of study designed to empower learners with the competencies needed to innovate, manage risks, identify and harness market opportunities, and coordinate production resources to offer goods and services that meet economic demands (Kanothi, 2020; Francis & Agum, 2019). In scholarly discourse, entrepreneurship is commonly associated with creativity, strategic ability, and risk-taking, while entrepreneurship education is viewed as both a learning process and a strategic mechanism for developing human capital.

Importantly, entrepreneurship is not restricted to small ventures; many successful large enterprises began as small initiatives that later expanded into impactful economic players. Through entrepreneurship education, aspiring entrepreneurs are equipped to exploit opportunities, meet societal needs, and introduce novel solutions while effectively managing the inherent risks involved (Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022). Thus, for Business Education graduates, entrepreneurship development offers a pathway to economic self-reliance, innovation, and expanded career possibilities.

Entrepreneurship Development and Employment Creation

Employment refers to the participation of individuals typically from age 15 and above in productive economic activities that contribute to national output and ensure personal income generation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). It encompasses all forms of engagement in the production of goods and services that add value to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provide remuneration for work performed.

Entrepreneurship development encompasses targeted initiatives and programs aimed at strengthening individuals' entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and competencies to increase the number of capable entrepreneurs within the economy (Rashmiranjan & Amitava, 2020; Adeyemo, 2021). Its primary objective is to accelerate new venture creation, stimulate innovation, and expand employment opportunities, thereby enhancing national economic growth. These initiatives focus on individuals seeking to establish or grow enterprises and emphasize creativity, growth potential, and innovative capacity.

Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in national economic advancement, especially in environments where entrepreneurial culture is still emerging. Empirical findings consistently link the level of education to individuals' willingness to become entrepreneurs and the overall success of their ventures (Aladejebi & Amao Taiwo, 2023). Consequently, strengthening entrepreneurship education is crucial to developing a skilled, self-reliant, and innovative labor force capable of generating sustainable employment and promoting widespread economic development.

Challenges of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria continues to confront a range of obstacles that limit its capacity to achieve its intended objectives. Recent research identifies persistent issues such as weak curriculum design, ineffective program implementation, late integration of entrepreneurship courses into academic programs, a shortage of qualified and experienced lecturers, and inadequate funding for entrepreneurship initiatives (Adebayo & Michael, 2025).

The literature affirms that entrepreneurship education is vital for equipping graduates with competencies necessary for innovation, self-employment, and economic transformation. Contemporary studies consistently demonstrate that well-designed entrepreneurship programs enhance students' ability to initiate business ventures, create jobs, reduce poverty, and contribute meaningfully to national development (Onuma, 2020; Brown & Nwaokokorom, 2025). Scholars also emphasize that the success of entrepreneurship education depends largely on the extent to which programs incorporate experiential learning, mentorship, and continuous skill development, as these components enable graduates to adjust effectively to dynamic economic conditions (Mania, 2021; Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022).

Despite these well-recognized benefits, the sector faces notable challenges. These include insufficient curriculum depth, inconsistent implementation of entrepreneurship programs, delayed course introduction, inadequately trained instructors, and chronic underfunding (Adebayo & Michael, 2025). These constraints collectively inhibit the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education to foster sustainable employment among Business Education graduates.

Another concern evident in existing scholarship is the limited number of empirical studies that specifically analyze how repositioning entrepreneurship development can enhance sustainable employment opportunities for Business Education graduates in Rivers State. This lack of targeted research highlights the relevance of the present study, which seeks to examine the feasibility, constraints, and strategies for strengthening entrepreneurship development as a mechanism for improving long-term employment outcomes for Business Education graduates. By addressing this gap, the study intends to advance academic knowledge, inform policy decisions, and guide practical interventions for improving entrepreneurship education and graduate employability.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine the role of moving entrepreneurship development in enhancing sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. The population comprised 180 graduates from selected institutions. From this population, a sample of 100 graduates was drawn using a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal opportunity for selection. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled *Moving Entrepreneurship Development for Sustainable Employment of Business Education Graduates in Rivers State Questionnaire (MEDSEBEG)*. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first gathered demographic information, while the second addressed issues relating to repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates. The instrument employed a four-point Likert scale with the response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), scored 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. To ensure validity, the instrument was reviewed by the research supervisor and two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. Observations and feedback from this process were used to refine the final draft. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the assistance of a trained research assistant who was briefed on the distribution and retrieval procedures. 100 copies administered, were successfully retrieved, a rate deemed manageable for analysis. Reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using the z-test at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One

What are the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Scores of the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

S/N	Items	Male		Female		XX	RANK	REMARK
		N	X	N	X			
6.	Curriculum content	60	2.87	40	2.52	2.70	2 nd	Agreed
7.	Ineffective implementation	60	2.52	40	3.87	3.20	1 st	Agreed
8.	Lateness in starting entrepreneurship education	60	2.64	40	2.36	2.41	3 rd	Disagreed
9.	Lack of competent lecturers	60	2.33	40	1.56	1.95	4 th	Disagreed
10.	Poor funding	60	1.83	40	1.05	1.44	5 th	Disagreed

The results presented in Table 1 show that respondents agreed that ineffective implementation is a key challenge to improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State, with a mean score of 3.20.

Research Question Two

What are the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Scores of the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

S/N	Item	Male		Female		XX	RANK	REMARK
		N	X	N	X			
11.	Support from the government	60	3.59	40	3.63	3.62	1 st	Agreed
12.	Organizing periodic programmes	60	3.46	40	3.46	3.46	3 rd	Agreed
13.	Periodic review and assessment	60	3.70	40	3.52	3.61	2 nd	Agreed
14.	Awareness and sensitization programmes	60	3.18	40	3.51	3.35	4 th	Agreed
15.	Including entrepreneurship education in the NYSC programme	60	3.14	40	3.24	3.19	5 th	Agreed

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents agreed on the identified strategies as effective ways to enhance the improving of entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State, with a mean score of 3.62.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Ho₁; There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Table 3: Z-TEST results on the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of easiness education graduates.

S/N		N	MEAN	SD	DF	z-cal	z-tab	REMARK
	MALE	60	2.44	0.22	98	-1.71	1.96	Agreed
	FEMALE	40	2.27	0.17				

Table 3 presents the results of the statistical significance test on the challenges of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. The table indicates that the calculated Z-value of -1.71 is less than the critical Z-value

of 1.96, showing that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students regarding these challenges.

Ho₂; There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-TEST results on the ways of improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates

S/N		N	MEAN	SD	DF	z-cal	z-tab	REMARK
	MALE	60	3.41	0.53	98	1.03	1.96	Agreed
	FEMALE	40	3.47	0.36				

Table 4 presents the results of the statistical significance test on the strategies for improving entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. The table shows that the calculated Z-value of 1.03 is less than the critical Z-value of 1.96, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students regarding these strategies.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Challenges of Improving Entrepreneurship Development for Sustainable Employment of Business Education Graduates in Rivers State: The study revealed that key challenges to improving entrepreneurship development include inadequate curriculum content, ineffective implementation, delayed introduction of entrepreneurship education, lack of competent lecturers, and insufficient funding. No statistically significant differences were observed between the ratings of male and female students on these challenges. This corroborates contemporary research which highlights that poorly implemented entrepreneurship programs and lack of institutional support hinder the realization of intended outcomes, limiting graduates' readiness for self-employment (Adebayo & Michael, 2020). Effective curriculum design, availability of skilled instructors, and adequate funding are essential to overcome these barriers (Gabadeen & Raimi, 2020).

Ways of Improving Entrepreneurship Development for Sustainable Employment of Business Education Graduates in Rivers State: The findings further revealed that respondents agreed on several strategies for enhancing entrepreneurship development, including government support, organizing periodic programs such as mentorship and industrial tours, regular review and assessment of curriculum content, awareness and sensitization campaigns, and integrating entrepreneurship education into the NYSC program. There was no statistically significant difference between the responses of male and female students on these improvement strategies. These findings align with recent literature, which emphasizes that sustainable entrepreneurship development requires coordinated efforts by the government, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to provide enabling environments, mentorship, and continuous skills development (Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022; Mania, 2021; Onuma, 2020). Implementing these strategies enhances graduates' entrepreneurial capacity and fosters self-employment, thereby addressing unemployment challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that without effective implementation of strategies aimed at strengthening entrepreneurship development, sustainable employment for Business Education graduates will remain unattainable, and graduate unemployment will persist. It further emphasizes that government intervention especially through adequate funding, supportive policies, and integrating entrepreneurship initiatives into national platforms such as the NYSC is essential for enhancing the capacity of entrepreneurship development to promote graduate self-employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. Government should provide strong support for entrepreneurship education by ensuring sufficient funding and integrating it meaningfully into the school curriculum.
2. Entrepreneurship education should be integrated into the NYSC program, allowing graduates to acquire and apply entrepreneurial skills during their service year, promoting self-employment.

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