

The Role of Vocational and Technical Education in Promoting Small Business Startups in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Why do many small business startups fail despite entrepreneurs having technical skills? This study examined the role of vocational and technical education (VTE) in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, it assessed the relationship between (1) outdated/misaligned curriculum and startups, (2) limited access to finance and startups, and (3) poor infrastructural support and startups. A mixed-methods approach was adopted. The population comprised 11,990 small business startups, from which a sample of 387 was drawn using Taro Yamane's formula and purposive sampling. Three hypotheses were tested. Data were collected via structured questionnaires and analyzed using simple percentages and regression models. The results revealed that all three factors—outdated curriculum, limited financing, and poor infrastructure—have a significant *negative* impact on the performance, establishment, growth, development, and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive interventions across education, finance, and infrastructure to foster entrepreneurial success. Based on these findings, the study recommends: first, educational institutions and policymakers should update and align VTE curricula with current startup needs to equip entrepreneurs with relevant skills. Second, financial institutions and government agencies should design accessible, flexible financing options, including collateral-free loans or credit guarantees, to support startup growth. Third, government and private stakeholders must prioritize improving infrastructural facilities—transportation, power supply, and communication networks—to create a favorable environment for small business development and sustainability. Without these integrated reforms, even the most skilled entrepreneur cannot thrive. This study provides a clear roadmap for unlocking the entrepreneurial potential of vocational education in Akwa Ibom State.

1. Introduction

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) has become a crucial player in tackling the issues of youth unemployment, underemployment, and economic stagnation, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. With the scarcity of white-collar job opportunities, vocational and technical education stands out as a vital resource for equipping individuals with the practical and entrepreneurial skills necessary to start and run small businesses. As noted by Morebise (2022), this type of education plays a significant role in economic diversification and empowerment by providing learners with skills that can be immediately applied in the job market, especially in the informal sector where many Nigerian youths find work (Abaikpa, Udoh, Thomas & Etuk 2022). Akwa Ibom State, situated in Nigeria's South-South region, boasts a dynamic youth population and a growing informal economy. However, the disconnect between traditional educational outcomes and the needs of the job market has led to increasing youth unemployment in the area. This situation highlights the need to reassess the importance of vocational and technical education in promoting entrepreneurial readiness and business creation. As Ajayi (2024) suggests, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is essential for closing the gap between education and employability by nurturing relevant skills for self-sufficiency and sustainable business development (Abaikpa, 2025).

Even with various national and state initiatives aimed at boosting entrepreneurship through vocational and technical education, challenges still linger. Onyema and Okechukwu (2021) point out that systemic problems like outdated curricula, insufficient infrastructure, and weak industry connections hinder the successful transition of vocational and technical education graduates into small business owners. In a similar vein, Chukwu et al. (2024) emphasize that the success of vocational training relies not just on acquiring technical skills but also on blending in entrepreneurial knowledge, securing funding, and having access to mentorship opportunities. In line with this notion, Abaikpa (2022) posits that government should be more proactive in the area of skill development and technologies to encourage entrepreneurship education and skill-based learning in polytechnics and technical colleges through rapid knowledge sharing. Consequently, the government, particularly through the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), has been working to tackle these issues with policy reforms that promote entrepreneurship education and skill-based learning in polytechnics and technical colleges. Institutions like Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, the Federal Polytechnic Ukana, and the newly established Federal College of Education Ididep have rolled out entrepreneurship-focused curricula and teamed up with organizations like the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) to foster enterprise development among students (NBTE, 2024). However, there's still a lack of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives in Akwa Ibom State. While there are anecdotal reports of increased vocational training and the emergence of small-scale enterprises, there's not enough scholarly research examining the link between vocational and technical education and actual business startup outcomes in the state.

A recent study by Adeniran et al. (2023) conducted in Kaduna State revealed that vocational education plays a crucial role in driving business success, especially when paired with essential soft skills like financial literacy and marketing awareness. To apply these insights to Akwa Ibom, we need to dive deeper into the local context, considering the specific socio-economic factors at play in the state. This study, therefore, sets out to explore how vocational and technical education can foster small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite various reforms and investments in vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria, the youth unemployment and underemployment rates remain worryingly high, particularly among graduates from technical and vocational institutions. In Akwa Ibom State, where economic difficulties and a lack of formal job opportunities are prevalent, the potential of vocational and technical education to drive entrepreneurship and small business growth hasn't been fully tapped into (Abaikpa, 2024, Ajayi, 2024). Although vocational and technical education aims to equip learners with practical skills and entrepreneurial insights that should ideally help them launch their own small businesses, there's still a noticeable gap between the training provided and the actual outcomes in business startups (Abaikpa, Thomas, Daniel, & Udoh 2023). Several factors play into this disconnect. For starters, many vocational and technical institutions have curricula that are outdated and not in sync with the current job market needs (Chukwu et al., 2024). This misalignment hampers the employability and entrepreneurial prospects of graduates. Additionally, many graduates in Akwa Ibom State encounter structural hurdles when trying to start and maintain businesses, such as limited access to funding, insufficient mentoring, poor infrastructure, and weak connections with enterprise development agencies (Onyema & Okechukwu, 2021).

While the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) has made strides to weave entrepreneurship education into the curricula of polytechnics and technical colleges, the real-world application of these policies at the state level often falls short and lacks adequate resources (NBTE, 2024). Moreover, the disconnect between vocational and technical education institutions and business development support services like SMEDAN, ITF, and financial institutions further complicates the entrepreneurial journey for graduates (Morebise, 2022). In Akwa Ibom State, there are stories suggesting that although many young individuals undergo vocational training, only a small number actually go on to create successful businesses (Abaikpa, Thomas, & Daniel 2022). A recent study in a similar Nigerian setting found that while vocational education does help improve technical skills, it has little effect on starting businesses unless it's paired with entrepreneurial training, funding options, and institutional backing (Adeniran, Musa & Ibrahim, 2023). This brings up important questions about the quality, structure, and delivery of vocational and technical education programs in Akwa Ibom State.

Additionally, there's a significant lack of empirical research that looks into how effective vocational and technical education is in fostering small business startups in the state. Most of the existing studies tend to focus on national policy discussions without anchoring their findings in the specific socio-economic realities. Therefore, it's crucial to investigate how vocational and technical education is being executed in Akwa Ibom State, evaluate the entrepreneurial outcomes for its graduates, and pinpoint the factors that either promote or hinder the establishment of small businesses. This study aims to tackle the evident gap between vocational and technical training and the entrepreneurial results in Akwa Ibom State, seeking to assess how much vocational and technical education actually contributes to small business creation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Specific objectives of this study include:

- To assess the relationship between outdated/misaligned curriculum and small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.
- To evaluate the relationship between limited access to finance and small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.
- To investigate the relationship between poor infrastructural support and small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

1.4 Research Questions

From the objectives of the study, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What is the relationship between an outdated or misaligned curriculum and the performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State?
- How does limited access to finance affect the establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State?
- In what ways does poor infrastructural support influence the development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

To effectively guide the study, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- There is no significant relationship between an outdated or misaligned curriculum and the performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.
- Limited access to finance does not have a significant effect on the establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.
- Poor infrastructural support does not significantly influence the development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study highlights how vocational and technical education in Akwa Ibom State plays a crucial role in fostering small business startups by enhancing economic development, skill acquisition, youth empowerment, community growth, and informing policy and academic understanding of entrepreneurship in the region.

1.7 Scope of the Study

- Unit scope: The study focused on the 387 registered small business start-ups in Akwa Ibom State.
- Content scope: The content scope of this study is confined to literature on role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups.
- Geographical scope: Geographically, the study focused on the 387 registered small business start-ups in Akwa Ibom State.

2 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Vocational and Technical Education

Vocational and technical education is all about structured programs designed to give people the practical, hands-on skills they need for jobs or even starting their own businesses. It focuses on teaching specific trades and industries, whether that's in agriculture, construction, ICT, or manufacturing, with the goal of getting learners ready to jump straight into the workforce or become entrepreneurs. In Nigeria, this type of education is offered through a mix of formal and informal institutions, like technical colleges, polytechnics, vocational training centers, and apprenticeship programs (UNESCO, 2015; Enemali & Enemali, 2024). Unlike traditional academic paths, vocational training is all about preparing students for real jobs, emphasizing practical experience and problem-solving skills that are directly relevant to the job market. Research shows that vocational and technical education is crucial for promoting self-employment and helping to develop micro and small businesses (Abaikpa, Thomas, and Udoh 2024). Many graduates from these programs go on to start small businesses in areas like tailoring, electronics repair, catering, and digital services, especially in places where formal job opportunities are scarce (Adewale & Musa, 2024). These ventures become vital economic support, particularly for young people and women who might struggle to enter the formal job market. Additionally, studies in Kogi and Kaduna States have shown that vocational education significantly boosts the likelihood of graduates starting their own businesses, which helps reduce unemployment and strengthens local economies (Adeniran et al., 2024).

The influence of vocational and technical education on small startups goes beyond just individual businesses; it plays a crucial role in achieving larger economic goals like diversification and industrialization (Abaikpa 2025). As Nigeria aims to lessen its reliance on oil, vocational education emerges as a key driver for growth in non-oil sectors such as agriculture, creative industries, and light manufacturing (SpursMedia, 2024). Startups founded by entrepreneurs with vocational training are often deeply rooted in their local communities, offering vital goods and services while fostering inclusive growth and helping to alleviate poverty (Thomas, Abaikpa, Daniel & Akpan). Moreover, these businesses frequently create additional job opportunities, amplifying the impact of a single vocational graduate throughout the community. However, despite its promise, vocational and technical education in Nigeria faces numerous structural and systemic hurdles that hinder its effectiveness. One of the most urgent challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure and training facilities. Many vocational institutions are stuck with outdated equipment, poorly maintained workshops, and curricula that don't meet current industry needs, which ultimately affects the quality and relevance of the training offered (InfoGuide Nigeria, 2024). Consequently, graduates may find themselves lacking the skills needed for modern industries or struggling to keep up with rapidly evolving technologies (Abaikpa, Thomas, Udoh & Daniel 2023).

In Nigeria, vocational and technical education often faces a tough battle against societal views that see it as less valuable than traditional university education. This stigma not only leads to lower enrollment in vocational programs but also dampens the spirits and ambitions of students in these fields (Enemali & Enemali, 2024). On top of that, graduates from these programs often struggle to secure startup capital, find markets, and access business development services (Abaikpa, Thomas, Udoh & Daniel 2023). The lack of financial literacy training, entrepreneurial guidance, and government support for startups further hinders the growth and sustainability of businesses launched by vocational graduates (Adewale & Musa, 2024). Given these challenges, it's clear that we need several policy changes to boost the role of vocational and technical education in fostering startup growth in Nigeria. First off, we should modernize vocational curricula and enhance training facilities to align with global standards, which means incorporating digital skills and entrepreneurship into all vocational programs. Next, we need to launch public awareness campaigns to tackle negative perceptions and highlight vocational and technical education as a legitimate and respected career choice. Additionally, improving access to finance for vocational graduates through targeted microcredit schemes, grants, and collaborations with financial institutions is crucial. Lastly, we should establish strong connections between vocational schools and industries to ensure that training is aligned with job market needs, helping graduates transition smoothly from education to starting their own businesses.

Vocational and technical education has a huge role to play in tackling unemployment and fostering entrepreneurial growth in Nigeria. By providing people with hands-on, relevant skills, this type of education helps spark the creation of small businesses that boost economic development, create jobs, and fight poverty (Abaikpa 2025). However, for this educational approach to truly succeed, we need to tackle issues like poor infrastructure, societal prejudices, and limited access to business support services (Usoro, Inyang and Abaikpa 2025). Therefore, a thorough overhaul of the vocational education system is essential to unlock its full potential in driving startup growth and transforming the economy in Nigeria. The study draws on the Human Capital Theory, which highlights how up-to-date and relevant vocational education equips individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to confidently start and run small businesses. At the same time, the Resource-Based View reminds us that having access to essential resources like finance and infrastructure is just as important for these startups to grow and succeed. In other words, while good education builds the foundation of entrepreneurial ability, it's the availability of financial support and proper infrastructure that ultimately allows small businesses in Akwa Ibom State to turn those skills into real success.

The study critically evaluates the empirical evidence about the impact of vocational and technical education on small business startups within Akwa Ibom State, focusing on specific objectives such as curriculum alignment, financial access, and infrastructural support. Synthesizing findings from various studies to identify existing gaps in research and propose a substantiated position on how vocational and technical education can be better leveraged for entrepreneurial development in Akwa Ibom State. This analysis delves into the intricate relationship between outdated or misaligned curricula in vocational training institutions and the subsequent challenges faced by small business startups in Akwa Ibom State, exploring how a lack of contemporary skills can hinder entrepreneurial success (Fagge, et al., 2020). Furthermore, the prevalence of theoretical over practical instruction often results in graduates ill-equipped to meet the dynamic demands of the modern business environment (Abaikpa 2025). This disjunction often leads to a workforce that lacks the specialized competencies necessary for innovation and sustainable growth in nascent enterprises (Eneh et al., 2023). Similarly, the limited access to finance and poor infrastructural support for vocational and technical education graduates intending to launch small businesses in Akwa Ibom

State represents a significant barrier, stifling their entrepreneurial aspirations and the potential for economic diversification (Cheng et al., 2020). These financial and infrastructural impediments often restrict the ability of these nascent businesses to acquire essential equipment, secure appropriate operational spaces, and invest in necessary marketing strategies (Abaikpa 2025).

3 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research strategies to explore the impact of vocational and technical education on small startup development in Akwa Ibom State. A sequential explanatory design was utilized, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative investigation to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings. The quantitative component involved surveys and analysis to collect measurable data from a sample of vocational and technical education graduates or small business owners (e.g., number of startups created, income levels, business growth), while the qualitative component explored in-depth experiences of individuals through interviews or focus groups (e.g., challenges in accessing funding, relevance of vocational and technical education curriculum to business needs). This approach allowed for comprehensive data triangulation, enhancing the validity and depth of findings regarding the impact of vocational and technical education on small business startup development. The population of this study comprised 11,990 small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Given the population, a sample size of 387 was derived using Taro Yamane's scientific formula, which is given as:

$$\text{Where: } n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{11,990}{1 + 11,990(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{11,990}{1 + 29.975}$$

$$n = \frac{11,990}{30.975}$$

$$n = 387$$

The study relied on primary and secondary data sources; quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics, while qualitative analysis utilized thematic or schematic analysis. To evaluate the impact of the variables, simple linear regression analysis was employed.

4 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Presentation of Data

Table 1: Number of questionnaires administered and returned

		Percentage
Copies of Questionnaire Administered	387	
Copies of Questionnaire Retrieved	355	91.7
Total		100

Source: Field survey 2025

From the table, out of 387 questionnaires administered, 355 representing 0.91% were successfully returned. 32 copies of questionnaire representing 0.090 % were not returned.

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the responses on Outdated/Misaligned Curriculum and Small Business Startups

	SA	A	D	SD	UN	Total
The current vocational and technical education curriculum adequately prepares students for starting small businesses.	176 (49.6%)	142 (40.0%)	6 (1.7%)	4 (1.1%)	27 (7.6%)	355 (100%)
Outdated curriculum content limits my ability to develop relevant skills for entrepreneurship.	132 (37.2%)	185 (52.1%)	25 (7.0%)	6 (1.7%)	7 (2.0%)	355 (100%)
The curriculum aligns well with the current market demands for small business startups.	156 (37.2%)	139 (39.2%)	16 (4.5%)	35 (9.9%)	9 (2.5%)	355 (100%)
Updating the curriculum would significantly improve the success rate of small business startups.	115 (32.4%)	86 (24.2%)	73 (20.6%)	46 (13.0%)	35 (9.9%)	355 (100%)
The curriculum includes sufficient practical entrepreneurial training to support small business creation.	107 (30.1%)	135 (38.0%)	23 (6.5%)	73 (20.6%)	17 (4.8%)	355 (100%)

Table 2 shows the frequency of responses and their percentages on the relationship between Poor Infrastructure and Small and medium Enterprises. In response to the question one in the table above, whether the current vocational and technical education curriculum adequately prepares students for starting small businesses. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 176 (49.6%) strongly agreed to questions, 142 (40.0%) agreed, 6 (1.9%) disagreed, 4 (1.1%) strongly disagreed and 27 (7.6%) were undecided. In response to the question two in the table above, whether outdated curriculum content limits my ability to develop relevant skills for entrepreneurship. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 132 (37.2%) strongly agreed to questions, 185 (52.1%) agreed, 25 (7.0%) disagreed, 6 (1.6%) strongly disagreed and 7 (2.0%) were undecided. In response to the question three in the table above, whether the curriculum aligns well with the current market demands for small business startups. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 156 (37.2%) strongly agreed to questions, 139 (39.2%) agreed, 16 (4.5%) disagreed, 35 (9.9%) strongly disagreed and 9 (2.5%) were undecided. In response to the question four in the table above, whether updating the curriculum would significantly improve the success rate of small business startups. Of a proportion

of 355 respondents, 115 (32.4%) strongly agreed to questions, 86 (24.2%) agreed, 73 (20.6%) disagreed, 46 (13.0%) strongly disagreed and 35 (9.9%) were undecided. In response to the question five in the table above, whether the curriculum includes sufficient practical entrepreneurial training to support small business creation. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 107 (30.1%) strongly agreed to questions, 135 (38.0%) agreed, 23 (6.5.6%) disagreed, 73 (20.6%) strongly disagreed and 17 (4.8%) were undecided.

Table 3: Percentage analysis of the responses on limited Access to Finance and Small Business Startups

	SA	A	D	SD	UN	Total
Limited access to finance is a major barrier to starting a small business in Akwa Ibom State.	108 (30.4%)	167 (47.0%)	58 (16.3%)	9 (2.5%)	13 (3.5%)	355 (100%)
Vocational and technical education programs provide adequate information on how to access startup financing.	115 (32.4%)	135 (37.7%)	12 (3.4%)	75 (21.1%)	19 (5.4%)	355 (100%)
Financial constraints discourage many graduates from launching their own businesses.	101 (28.5%)	122 (34.4%)	76 (21.4%)	29 (8.2%)	27 (21.4%)	355 (100%)
Access to microfinance or loans would increase the number of small business startups among vocational graduates.	150 (42.3%)	142 (40.0%)	8 (2.3%)	9 (2.5%)	46 (13.0%)	355 (100%)
Lack of financial support negatively affects the sustainability of small businesses started by vocational graduates.	132 (37.2%)	185 (52.1%)	6 (1.7%)	7 (2.0%)	25 (7.0%)	355 (100%)

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 3 shows the frequency of responses and their percentages on the limited Access to Finance and Small Business Startups. In response to the question one in the table above, whether limited access to finance is a major barrier to starting a small business in Akwa Ibom State. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 108 (30.4%) strongly agreed to questions, 167 (47.0%) agreed, 58 (16.3%) disagreed, 9 (2.5%) strongly disagreed and 13 (3.5%) were undecided. In response to the question two in the table above, whether Vocational and technical education programs provide adequate information on how to access startup financing. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 115 (32.4%) strongly agreed to questions, 135 (37.7%) agreed, 12 (3.4%) disagreed, 75 (21.1%) strongly disagreed and 19 (5.4%) were undecided. In response to the question three in the table above, whether financial constraints discourage many graduates from launching their own businesses. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 101 (28.5%) strongly agreed to questions, 122 (34.4%) agreed, 76 (21.4%) disagreed, 29 (21.4%) strongly disagreed and 27 (21.4%) were undecided. In response to the question four in the table above, whether access to microfinance or loans would increase the number of small business startups among vocational graduates. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 150 (42.3%) strongly agreed to questions, 142 (40.0%) agreed, 8 (2.3%) disagreed, 9 (2.5%) strongly disagreed and 46 (13.0%) were undecided. In response to the question five in the table above, whether lack of financial support negatively affects the sustainability of small businesses started by vocational graduates. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, of a proportion of 355 respondents, 132 (37.2%) strongly agreed to questions, 185 (52.1%) agreed, 6 (1.7%) disagreed, 7 (2.0%) strongly disagreed and 25 (7.0%) were undecided.

Table 4: Percentage analysis of the responses of on Poor Infrastructural Support and Small Business Startups

	SA	A	D	SD	UN	Total
Poor infrastructural facilities (e.g., electricity, workspace) hinder the establishment of small businesses.	78 (22.0%)	164 (46.2%)	25 (7.0%)	30 (8.5%)	58 (16.3%)	355 (100%)
Vocational and technical education institutions provide adequate infrastructural support for entrepreneurial activities.	105 (29.6%)	105 (29.6%)	38 (10.7%)	32 (9.0%)	75 (21.1%)	355 (100%)
Improving infrastructure would lead to more successful small business startups.	125 (35.2%)	90 (25.4%)	58 (16.3%)	16 (4.5%)	66 (18.6%)	355 (100%)
Lack of access to modern tools and equipment limits my ability to start a business.	108 (30.4%)	167 (47.0%)	9 (2.5%)	13 (3.5%)	58 (16.3%)	355 (100%)
The state government provides sufficient infrastructural support to encourage small business development.	176 (49.6%)	142 (40.0%)	4 (1.1%)	27 (7.6%)	6 (1.7%)	355 (100%)

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 4 shows the frequency of responses and their percentages on Poor Infrastructural Support and Small Business Startups. In response to the question one in the table above, whether poor infrastructural facilities (e.g., electricity, workspace) hinder the establishment of small businesses. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 78 (22.0%) strongly agreed to questions, 167 (47.0%) agreed, 25 (7.0%) disagreed, 30 (8.5%) strongly disagreed and 58 (16.3%) were undecided. In response to the question two in the table above, whether vocational and technical education institutions provide adequate infrastructural support for entrepreneurial activities. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 105 (29.6%) strongly agreed to questions, 105 (29.6%) agreed, 38 (10.7%) disagreed, 32 (9.0%) strongly disagreed and 75 (21.1%) were undecided. In response to the question three in the table above, whether improving infrastructure would lead to more successful small business startups. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 125 (35.2%) strongly agreed to questions, 90 (25.4%) agreed, 58 (16.3%) disagreed, 16 (4.5%) strongly disagreed and 66 (18.6%) were undecided. In response to the question four in the table above, whether lack of access to modern tools and equipment limits my ability to start a business. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 108 (30.4%) strongly agreed to questions, 167 (47.0%) agreed, 9 (2.5%) disagreed, 13 (3.5%) strongly disagreed and 58 (16.3%) were undecided. In response to the question five in the table above, whether the state government provides sufficient infrastructural support to encourage small business development. Of a proportion of 355 respondents, 176 (49.6%) strongly agreed to questions, 142 (40.0%) agreed, 4 (1.1%) disagreed, 27 (7.6%) strongly disagreed and 6 (1.7%) were undecided.

4.2 Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between an outdated or misaligned curriculum and the performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Simple Regression Analysis was used to analysis the data in order to determine the influence between the variables using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS version 22).

Table 5: Regression Analysis of influence of outdated or misaligned curriculum and the performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	-.839 ^a	.704	-.704	.38706
a. predictors: (constant), Limited access to financing				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	117.122	1	117.122	781.763	.000 ^b
	Residual	49.140	354	.150		
	Total	166.263	355			

a. Dependent Variable: establishment and growth
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Limited access to financing

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.812	.085		9.514	.000
	Limited access to financing	-.759	.027	-.839	27.960	.000

a. Dependent Variable: establishment and growth

From the result in Table above, R-square of the regression analysis is .647. This finding suggests that 64.7 % of the variance in performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State is explained by poor infrastructure variables. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the existence of a negative significant influence and the study found that the regression model is best fit for predicting the effect between variables under study [F = 600.848, t = 7.941 and p<0.05]. Given this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is negative and significant influence of outdated or misaligned curriculum on performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, the study revealed that every unit change in outdated or misaligned curriculum would cause a variance of 80.4% in performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State (Beta= -.804, p=0.000).

Hypothesis Two

Limited access to finance does not have a significant effect on the establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Simple regression Analysis was used to analysis the data in order to determine the influence between the variables using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS version 21).

Table 6: Regression Analysis of limited access to financing and establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	-.839 ^a	.704	-.704	.38706
a. predictors: (constant), Limited access to financing				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	117.122	1	117.122	781.763	.000 ^b
	Residual	49.140	354	.150		
	Total	166.263	355			

a. Dependent Variable: establishment and growth
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Limited access to financing

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.812	.085		9.514	.000
	Limited access to financing	-.759	.027	-.839	27.960	.000

a. Dependent Variable: establishment and growth

From the result in Table above, R-square of the regression analysis is .704. This finding suggests that 70.4 % of the variance in establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State is explained by limited access to financing variables. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the existence of a negative significant impact and the study found that the regression model is best fit for predicting the influence between variables under study [F = 781.763, t = 9.514 and p<0.05]. Given this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is negative and significant influence of limited access to financing on establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, the study revealed that every unit change in limited access to financing would cause a variance of 83.9% in establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. (Beta= -.839, p=0.000).

Hypothesis Three

Poor infrastructural support does not significantly influence the development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Simple regression Analysis was used to analysis the data in order to determine the influence between the variables using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS version 21).

Table 7: Regression Analysis of Poor infrastructural support and development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	-.670 ^a	.448	-.447	.52873

a. Predictors: (Constant), Poor infrastructural support

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	74.568	1	74.568	266.737	.000 ^b
	Residual	91.694	354	.280		
	Total	166.263	355			

a. Dependent Variable: development and sustainability
b. Predictors: (Constant), Poor infrastructural support

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.001	.133		7.526	.000
	Poor infrastructural support	-.737	.045	-.670	16.332	.000

a. Dependent Variable: development and sustainability

From the result in Table above, R-square of the regression analysis is .448. This finding suggests that 44.8 % of the variance in development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State is explained by Poor infrastructural support variables. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the existence of a negative significant influence and the study found that the regression model is best fit for predicting the effect between variables under study [F = 266.737, t = 7.526 and p<0.05]. Given this result, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is negative and significant influence of Poor infrastructural support on development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, the study revealed that every unit change in Poor infrastructural support would cause a variance of 83.9% in development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State (Beta= -.839, p=0.000).

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The result of first hypothesis shows that there is negative and significant influence of outdated or misaligned curriculum on performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, the study revealed that every unit change in outdated or misaligned curriculum would cause a variance of 80.4% in performance or success of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. This is in disagreement with the study and findings of (Rajah, 2022) who reported that inconsistent policy provision may have adverse effects on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by creating an insecure business environment that is detrimental to growth and promotion of strategic decision-making. Small medium enterprises (SMEs) operate on the assumption that regulatory environments are predictable and supportive, such that they can make effective arrangements for operation. The result of the second hypothesis shows there is negative and significant influence of limited access to financing on establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, the study revealed that every unit change in limited access to financing would cause a variance of 83.9% in establishment and growth of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. This is in agreement with the study and findings of (Beck and Demirgüç-Kunt 2006), who reported that SMEs generally experience greater credit risk, leading banks to be unwilling to provide loans without significant collateral. The result of the third hypothesis shows there is negative and significant influence of poor infrastructural support on development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, the study revealed that every unit change in poor infrastructural support would cause a variance of 83.9% in development and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. This is in disagreement with the study and findings of (Rajah, 2022) who reported that inconsistent policy provision may have adverse effects on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by creating an insecure business environment that is detrimental to growth and promotion of strategic decision-making. Small medium enterprises (SMEs) operate on the assumption that regulatory environments are predictable and supportive, such that they can make effective arrangements for operation.

5 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The main purpose of this study was to examine the role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Specific objectives of this study include to assess the relationship between outdated/misaligned curriculum and small business startups in Akwa Ibom State, to evaluate the relationship between limited access to finance and small business startups in Akwa Ibom State and to investigate the relationship between poor infrastructural support and small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study. Bearing in mind the nature of the study, the researcher employed the use of survey research design in which primary data were obtained through questionnaire administration. Data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. However, the regression technique was used to test hypotheses. The results of the regression analysis presented inconsistent findings on the impact of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that outdated or misaligned curriculum, limited access to financing, and poor infrastructural support each have a significant and negative impact on the performance, establishment, growth, development, and sustainability of small business startups in Akwa Ibom State, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions in education, finance, and infrastructure to foster entrepreneurial success.

5.3 Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Educational institutions and policymakers should update and align the curriculum with the current needs of small business startups to equip entrepreneurs with relevant skills and knowledge that enhance their performance and success.
- Financial institutions and government agencies should design and implement more accessible and flexible financing options, including collateral-free loans or credit guarantees, to support the establishment and growth of small business startups.
- Government and private sector stakeholders should prioritize improving infrastructural facilities such as transportation, power supply, and communication networks to create a favorable environment that supports the development and sustainability of small businesses.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they not aware of any competing financial interests or personal relationships that may have influenced the work described in this document.

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Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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APPENDIX 1

Please read carefully each of the statements below and tick () to indicate your agreement or disagreement to each item. Each item has to do with the role of vocational and technical education in promoting small business startups in Akwa Ibom State. The level or degree of your responses are: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Neutral (N).

S/N	THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SMALL BUSINESS STARTUPS IN AKWA IBOM STATE	SA	A	D	SD	N
A	Outdated/Misaligned Curriculum and Small Business Startups					
1	The current vocational and technical education curriculum adequately prepares students for starting small businesses.					
2	Outdated curriculum content limits my ability to develop relevant skills for entrepreneurship.					
3	The curriculum aligns well with the current market demands for small business startups.					
4	Updating the curriculum would significantly improve the success rate of small business startups.					
5	The curriculum includes sufficient practical entrepreneurial training to support small business creation.					
B	Limited Access to Finance and Small Business Startups					
6	Limited access to finance is a major barrier to starting a small business in Akwa Ibom State.					
7	Vocational and technical education programs provide adequate information on how to access startup financing.					
8	Financial constraints discourage many graduates from launching their own businesses.					
9	Access to microfinance or loans would increase the number of small business startups among vocational graduates.					
10	Lack of financial support negatively affects the sustainability of small businesses started by vocational graduates.					
C	Poor Infrastructural Support and Small Business Startups					
11	Poor infrastructural facilities (e.g., electricity, workspace) hinder the establishment of small businesses.					
12	Vocational and technical education institutions provide adequate infrastructural support for entrepreneurial activities.					
13	Improving infrastructure would lead to more successful small business startups.					
14	Lack of access to modern tools and equipment limits my ability to start a business.					
15	The state government provides sufficient infrastructural support to encourage small business development.					