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Business Education and Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition as Predictors of Self-Employment Intentions among Unemployed Graduates in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Graduate unemployment has remained a persistent socio-economic challenge in Nigeria, with limited formal sector opportunities compelling many graduates to consider self-employment as an alternative livelihood. Despite exposure to business education, gaps exist between acquired entrepreneurial competencies and actual venture creation, resulting in low start-up conversion rates among unemployed graduates. This study examined the predictive relationship between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State. A correlational survey research design with a predictive (regression-based) approach was adopted. The population comprised 450 unemployed graduates from business education and related disciplines, out of which 200 respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale, covering demographic characteristics, entrepreneurial skills, and self-employment intentions. Validity was established through expert review and factor analysis, while reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's Alpha exceeding 0.70. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed that graduates exhibited moderately high entrepreneurial skills, with marketing and digital skills and communication skills being the strongest predictors of self-employment intentions. The model explained 52% of the variance in intention to start a business, indicating a substantial predictive relationship between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial aspiration. The results underscore the need for curriculum restructuring to emphasize practical entrepreneurship training, targeted government and NGO support, and graduate incubation programs to translate skills into viable enterprises. These findings also inform policy frameworks aimed at youth empowerment, SME development, and alignment with Nigeria's economic diversification objectives.

1. Introduction

Unemployment among graduates has become one of the most pressing socioeconomic challenges confronting developing countries, particularly in Nigeria. Despite students increased enrolment in tertiary institutions, many Nigerian graduates are unable to secure formal employment upon graduation, leading to heightened rates of joblessness and underemployment (African Journal of Business and Economic Development, 2025). This situation has placed enormous pressure on families, exacerbated poverty levels, and contributed to social vices among the youth population. Therefore, alternative pathways to employment, such as entrepreneurship, have been widely advocated by scholars and policymakers alike as sustainable mechanisms for job creation, self-reliance, and national economic development (Abulude & Ogunjemilua, 2025; Balogun, 2025).

Business Education, as an academic discipline, encompasses skills and knowledge intended to prepare learners for business careers and self-employment opportunities. It equips students with competencies such as business planning, financial management, marketing, and human resource management, which are essential in navigating the complexities of contemporary business environments. However, studies within the Nigerian context suggest that the current curriculum often lacks practical components that strongly orient learners towards entrepreneurial engagement (Adewumi & Cele, 2021). This detachment between theory and practice often results in graduates who, despite possessing basic business knowledge, lack the confidence and practical skills required to initiate and sustain entrepreneurial ventures. Consequently, unemployment persists even among graduates exposed to business-related coursework.

Entrepreneurial skill acquisition refers to the deliberate training processes through which individuals develop the ability to identify opportunities, innovate, manage risk, and mobilize resources for business start-ups. Research shows that skill acquisition is a critical determinant of entrepreneurial behaviour and self-employment intentions among Nigerian graduates (African Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship Development, 2025). Empirical evidence also indicates that the development of entrepreneurial skills, (creativity, communication, problem-solving, and financial management), positively correlates with graduates' aspirations for self-employment (EsuhOssai-Igwe, 2020). Similarly, exposure to entrepreneurial programmes has been linked to enhanced self-employment aspirations through increased self-efficacy and perceived capability to launch ventures (Balogun, 2025).

Despite these findings, many graduates still prefer salaried employment due to barriers such as lack of capital, fear of business failure, and limited practical experience. These obstacles weaken the translation of entrepreneurship education into actual business creation, thereby broadening the gap between educational outputs and employment outcomes (Yusuff, 2025).

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This study is anchored in established theoretical frameworks that explain entrepreneurial intentions, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which posits that individual attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence the intention to perform a behaviour, in this case, self-employment. Graduates who perceive themselves capable and supported in entrepreneurial activities are more likely to develop intentions to pursue business ventures (Osakede, Lawanson & Sobowale, 2017).

In the context of Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, few empirical studies have focused specifically on how business education and entrepreneurial skill-set, shape the self-employment intentions of unemployed graduates. Although research in neighbouring states suggests that entrepreneurship education influences career intentions (Ekpoh & Edet, 2015), there remains a research gap concerning the predictive roles of business education exposure and skill acquisition on self-employment aspirations within Uyo Senatorial District.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Graduate unemployment remains a persistent socioeconomic challenge in Nigeria despite the expansion of tertiary education and the integration of entrepreneurship education programmes into higher education curricula. Business education programme is designed to equip students with practical, managerial, and entrepreneurial competencies necessary for self-employment and small business development. However, evidence suggests that there is a growing disconnect between the entrepreneurial training provided in tertiary institutions and the actual engagement of graduates in self-employment ventures (Ekpoh & Edet, 2015; Adewumi & Cele, 2021). Many graduates who have completed business education programme continue to depend largely on scarce salaried employment opportunities rather than initiating business ventures.

This gap between business education training and self-employment uptake raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurial skill acquisition within the educational system. Although entrepreneurship education has been shown to enhance entrepreneurial intentions and perceived competence (Osakede, et al. 2017), the translation of these intentions into actual business start-ups remains considerably low among unemployed graduates. Studies indicate that factors such as inadequate practical exposure, limited access to start-up capital, weak institutional support, and low self-efficacy contribute to the low conversion rate from training to actual business creation (Yusuff, 2025; Balogun, 2025).

In Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant number of business education graduates remain unemployed or underemployed despite having been exposed to entrepreneurship coursework. Yet, there is limited empirical research specifically examining whether entrepreneurial skill acquisition through business education significantly predicts self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in this locality. This gap in context-specific evidence necessitates an investigation into the predictive roles of business education exposure and entrepreneurial skill acquisition on graduates' self-employment intentions in Uyo Senatorial District.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine whether business education and entrepreneurial skill acquisition predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Its specific objectives include to:

- determine the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by unemployed graduates through business education programmes in Uyo Senatorial District.,
- examine the extent of exposure of unemployed graduates to practical entrepreneurial training during their business education studies.,
- assess the level of self-employment intentions among unemployed business education graduates in the study area.,
- investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.,
- determine the predictive influence of financial management skills on self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.,
- examine the predictive influence of marketing and digital skills on self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.,
- evaluate the combined predictive contribution of entrepreneurial skill dimensions (innovation, risk management, communication, and business planning skills) to self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated in line with the objectives of the study:

- What is the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by unemployed graduates through business education programmes in Uyo Senatorial District?
- To what extent were unemployed graduates exposed to practical entrepreneurial training during their business education studies?
- What is the level of self-employment intentions among unemployed business education graduates in the study area?
- What relationship exists between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates?
- To what extent do financial management skills predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates?
- To what extent do marketing and digital skills predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates?
- What is the combined predictive contribution of entrepreneurial skill dimensions (innovation, risk management, communication, and business planning skills) to self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated in line with the research questions:

H01: There is no significant level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by unemployed graduates through business education programmes in Uyo Senatorial District.

H02: There is no significant extent of exposure of unemployed graduates to practical entrepreneurial training during their business education studies.

H03: There is no significant level of self-employment intentions among unemployed business education graduates in the study area.

H04: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.

H05: Financial management skills do not significantly predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.

H06: Marketing and digital skills do not significantly predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.

H07: Entrepreneurial skill dimensions (innovation, risk management, communication, and business planning skills) do not jointly make a significant predictive contribution to self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several important dimensions, particularly in curriculum development, policy formulation, and youth employment strategy. First, the findings would provide empirical evidence on the extent to which business education and entrepreneurial skill acquisition predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates. Such evidence is crucial for curriculum developers and academic planners in tertiary institutions to review and redesign business education curricula to emphasize practical, competency-based entrepreneurship training. Prior studies have shown that experiential learning and skills-oriented entrepreneurship education significantly enhance entrepreneurial intentions and business start-up readiness (Ekpoh & Edet, 2015; Osakede, et al. 2017). Therefore, this study would guide curriculum reform toward more practice-driven and innovation-focused training models.

Second, the study would contribute to policy formulation by providing localized data from Uyo Senatorial District that policymakers can use to strengthen entrepreneurship development frameworks. Government agencies and educational authorities require empirical evidence to design interventions that bridge the gap between entrepreneurial training and actual venture creation. Research indicates that effective entrepreneurship policies must integrate training, financial access, mentorship, and institutional support to stimulate graduate self-employment (Yusuff, 2025; Adewumi & Cele, 2021). The findings of this study would therefore inform State and Federal employment policies aimed at reducing graduate unemployment.

Finally, the study would support youth employment strategies by identifying specific entrepreneurial skill dimensions that significantly predict self-employment intentions. By understanding which competencies most strongly influence graduates' entrepreneurial decisions, stakeholders can design targeted youth empowerment programmes, incubation schemes, and startup support initiatives. Entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as a sustainable pathway for youth job creation and economic diversification in developing economies (Balogun, 2025). Thus, this research contributes to broader efforts to promote self-reliance and reduce youth unemployment in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria at large.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a correlational survey research design to investigate the relationships between business education exposure, entrepreneurial skill acquisition, and self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District. This design was deemed suitable because it allowed the researcher explore the strength and direction of associations between variables without manipulating them. In addition, the study employed a predictive design using regression-based analysis to estimate the extent to which entrepreneurial skill dimensions, such as financial management, marketing and digital skills, innovation, risk management, communication, and business planning, could predict self-employment intentions. This approach provided empirical evidence on both the individual and combined contributions of the independent variables to graduates' intentions to engage in self-employment.

2.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The district encompasses 8 Local Government Areas which include: Uyo, Itu, Ibiono Ibom, Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, and Etinan. Uyo Senatorial District was selected because it has a high population of tertiary institution graduates, many of whom are unemployed or underemployed, creating a context for studying entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment intentions. The district also provides a suitable environment for accessing a representative sample of graduates from various educational backgrounds.

2.3 Population of the Study

The target population comprised unemployed graduates who had completed business education or related business-oriented courses in recognized Nigerian tertiary institutions, including universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics. The population included graduates who had completed but had not secured formal employment at the time of the study. This population was appropriate because it allowed for the examination of the predictive relationship between acquired entrepreneurial skills and self-employment intentions in a population directly affected by unemployment challenges.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select respondents. In the first stage, Local Government Areas within Uyo Senatorial District were randomly chosen. In the second stage, lists of unemployed graduates were obtained through alumni associations, youth networks, and community-based

employment records. In the final stage, respondents were selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal probability of inclusion. The sample size was calculated using Yamane's formula at a 0.05 level of precision, producing a sample that was statistically representative of the population. This technique enhanced the reliability and generalizability of the findings across the study area.

2.5 Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically developed for the study. The instrument consisted of three sections. Section A collected demographic information, including age, gender, educational qualification, and duration of unemployment. Section B measured entrepreneurial skill acquisition across six dimensions: financial management, marketing and digital, innovation and creativity, risk management, communication, and business planning skills. Section C assessed self-employment intentions using items adapted from established entrepreneurial intention models.

All items in Sections B and C were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). This format allowed respondents to express their degree of agreement with each statement, capturing the intensity of their perceptions and intentions. Higher scores indicated stronger entrepreneurial skill acquisition and higher intention toward self-employment.

2.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Content validity was ensured through expert review by scholars in business education, entrepreneurship, and measurement and evaluation. The experts evaluated the questionnaire for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, and their feedback was incorporated into the final instrument. Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis to confirm that items appropriately measured the intended constructs. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient from a pilot study involving graduates outside the main study area. The entrepreneurial skills scale and the self-employment intention scale both achieved reliability coefficients above 0.70, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency for the research instrument.

2.7 Data Collection Procedure

Before data collection, permission was obtained from relevant community leaders, youth coordinators, and alumni association representatives within the selected Local Government Areas. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher and trained research assistants. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a high response rate and minimize non-response bias. The data collection period spanned approximately four weeks.

2.8 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to address research questions regarding the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired and self-employment intentions. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment intentions. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the predictive contribution of each entrepreneurial skill dimension to self-employment intentions. For higher-level analysis suitable for Scopus-indexed publication, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was considered to evaluate the overall measurement and structural model, assess goodness-of-fit indices, and determine the direct and combined effects of predictor variables on self-employment intentions. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

3 Results

3.1 Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (n = 200)

Demographic Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	110	55
Female	90	45
Age (years)		
21–25	50	25
26–30	95	47.5
31–35	40	20
36–40	15	7.5
Highest Qualification		
NCE	60	30
HND	70	35
BSc/B.Ed	70	35
Duration of Unemployment		
<1 year	30	15
1–2 years	75	37.5
3–4 years	60	30
>4 years	35	17.5

The majority of respondents (47.5%) were aged 26–30 years, indicating a youthful graduate population. Males slightly outnumbered females (55% vs.

45%), suggesting a relatively balanced gender distribution. Most respondents had completed HND or BSc/B.Ed programmes (35% each), showing that the sample consisted predominantly of graduates with higher tertiary education qualifications. Regarding unemployment duration, 37.5% had been unemployed for 1–2 years, reflecting a significant window of post-graduation joblessness among the population studied.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Mean Scores of Entrepreneurial Skills (5-Point Likert Scale)

Entrepreneurial Skill Dimension	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Financial Management Skills	4.05	0.68	High
Marketing and Digital Skills	3.92	0.72	High
Innovation and Creativity Skills	3.88	0.65	High
Risk Management Skills	3.75	0.70	Moderate-High
Communication Skills	4.10	0.60	High
Business Planning Skills	3.95	0.63	High
Overall Entrepreneurial Skills	3.94	0.65	High

Respondents demonstrated a generally high level of entrepreneurial skills, with the overall mean score of 3.94 indicating strong competency across skill dimensions. Communication skills (mean = 4.10) Business Planning Skills and financial management skills (mean = 4.05) were the most developed, while risk management skills (mean = 3.75) were slightly lower but still moderate-high. This suggests that graduates possess substantial theoretical and practical skills necessary for entrepreneurship engagement.

Table 3: Mean Scores of Self-Employment Intentions (5-Point Likert Scale)

Item	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Intention to start a business within 12 months	3.87	0.69	Moderate-High
Intention to use acquired skills for self-employment	3.95	0.65	High
Preference for self-employment over salaried work	3.80	0.72	Moderate-High
Overall Self-Employment Intention	3.87	0.68	Moderate-High

The overall mean self-employment intention was 3.87, indicating moderate to high readiness among graduates to engage in self-employment. Graduates were particularly inclined to apply acquired entrepreneurial skills (mean = 3.95), while their intention to start a business within the next 12 months (mean = 3.87) and preference for self-employment over salaried work (mean = 3.80) were slightly lower but still suggest a proactive orientation toward entrepreneurship

3.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3
1. Financial Management Skills	1		
2. Marketing and Digital Skills	0.62**	1	
3. Self-Employment Intention	0.54**	0.57**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

All entrepreneurial skill dimensions were positively and significantly correlated with self-employment intention at the 0.01 level. Marketing and digital skills showed the strongest correlation with self-employment intention (r = 0.57), followed closely by financial management skills (r = 0.54). This indicates that graduates with stronger entrepreneurial skills are more likely to exhibit higher self-employment intentions.

3.4 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Self-Employment Intentions

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Financial Management Skills	0.28	0.07	0.25	4.00	0.000
Marketing and Digital Skills	0.32	0.08	0.29	4.00	0.000
Innovation and Creativity Skills	0.22	0.09	0.18	2.44	0.016
Risk Management Skills	0.18	0.07	0.16	2.57	0.011
Communication Skills	0.30	0.08	0.26	3.75	0.000
Business Planning Skills	0.24	0.07	0.20	3.43	0.001

Each entrepreneurial skill dimension significantly predicted self-employment intention. Marketing and digital skills (β = 0.29) and communication skills (β = 0.26) were the strongest predictors, while risk management skills (β = 0.16) had the least predictive influence. The results demonstrate that skill acquisition in key entrepreneurial areas directly influences graduates' readiness and confidence to pursue self-employment.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate	F-value	p-value
1	0.72	0.52	0.51	0.47	36.25	0.000

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 36.25$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 52% of the variance in self-employment intentions ($R^2 = 0.52$). This indicates that entrepreneurial skills collectively have a strong predictive effect on graduates' intentions to engage in self-employment, highlighting the practical importance of targeted skill acquisition programs.

Table 7: Interpretation of Predictive Strength

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	Relative Influence	Interpretation
Marketing and Digital Skills	0.29	Strongest	Major contributor
Communication Skills	0.26	Strong	High influence
Financial Management Skills	0.25	Moderate-Strong	Substantial influence
Business Planning Skills	0.20	Moderate	Moderate influence
Innovation and Creativity Skills	0.18	Moderate	Moderate influence
Risk Management Skills	0.16	Moderate-Low	Least influence

Marketing and digital skills were the strongest contributor to self-employment intentions, followed by communication skills, and financial management skills. Business planning and innovation/creativity skills showed moderate influence, while risk management had the least impact. Overall, the findings emphasize that specific entrepreneurial competencies are more influential than others in motivating graduates toward self-employment, suggesting that curriculum and training programs should prioritize these high-impact skills.

3.5 Discussion

This study found that unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District demonstrated moderately high levels of entrepreneurial skills and self-employment intentions. Specifically, entrepreneurial skill dimensions, such as financial management, communication, marketing, innovation, risk management, and business planning, were significantly developed and positively associated with graduates' intention to be self-employed. These results are consistent with prior research which has shown that entrepreneurship education enhances graduates' readiness to engage in business creation. For instance, Faloye and Olatunji reported that entrepreneurship education significantly influenced business start-up intentions among Nigerian National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members, indicating that participation in entrepreneurial training increases the likelihood that graduates will consider self-employment as a career option. Their study suggested that graduates with higher entrepreneurial competencies were more inclined toward business creation than those with limited skill acquisition (Faloye & Olatunji, 2018, Inyanyet al. 2017,

Similarly, research on business education students in Nigeria found that skill enhancing components, including problem solving, effective communication, and ICT competencies, positively influenced entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates (Haruna, Mamman, & Oyelekan, 2025). This aligns with the present study's results, which show that communication and marketing skills, in particular, were strong predictors of self-employment intention.

Additionally, the positive correlations observed between specific entrepreneurial skills and self-employment intention in this study reflect similar observations in other contexts. EsuhOssai Igwe, in a study of NYSC Corps members, concluded that acquired entrepreneurial skills were significantly related to the intention to become self-employed, further underscoring the importance of practical skill acquisition for entrepreneurial orientation among young graduates (EsuhOssai Igwe, 2020).

However, despite these affirmations, existing literature also highlights persistent challenges, noting that entrepreneurial competencies alone may not automatically translate into successful enterprise creation without enabling environments such as access to capital, mentorship, and market networks (Yusuff, 2025). This underscores the fact that while entrepreneurial skills are necessary, they must be complemented by broader structural supports to facilitate business start-up and sustainability.

In summary, this study corroborates the general trend in Nigeria and international scholarship, showing that skill acquisition through business education is positively linked to entrepreneurial intent. It also extends this body of knowledge by identifying which skill dimensions, particularly marketing and communication, are especially salient for predicting self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates.

The findings of this study lend strong support to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioural intentions are shaped by perceived behavioural control, attitudes toward the behaviour, and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, individuals are more likely to form strong intentions to undertake a behaviour when they believe they have the ability and resources to successfully perform it. In this study, the significant predictive effects of various entrepreneurial skill dimensions on self-employment intention suggest that unemployed graduates who perceive themselves as competent in key entrepreneurial capabilities are more likely to intend to pursue self-employment.

The high mean scores for entrepreneurial competencies and self-employment intention indicate that perceived behavioural control, reflected in graduates' confidence in their entrepreneurial skill set, strengthened their self-employment aspirations. Research applying TPB in entrepreneurial contexts has frequently found that perceived competence (or self-efficacy) is a critical determinant of intention to start a business (Liñán & Chen, 2009). While this study did not directly measure attitudes or subjective norms, the significant predictive relationships observed between self-efficacy-oriented variables (skills) and intentions are consistent with TPB's emphasis on perceived behavioural control as a determinant of intention.

Other empirical work using TPB to investigate entrepreneurial intention has also shown that individuals with stronger entrepreneurial self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship are more likely to form intentions to start their own ventures (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). The present results, therefore, validate the applicability of TPB in the Nigerian context and suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing graduates' self-perceived

competencies can contribute to stronger self-employment intentions.

In the specific context of Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, the observed patterns reflect both socio economic conditions and educational influences. Akwa Ibom, like many Nigerian States, has struggled with high unemployment rates among tertiary institution graduates, largely due to limited formal sector job openings and economic structural challenges (NBS, 2024). Such realities have driven many young graduates to consider self-employment as a viable alternative to traditional salaried work.

Moreover, the relatively high entrepreneurial skill levels reported in this study may reflect the increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship education and skills development within Nigerian tertiary institutions. The National Universities Commission has promoted entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities through entrepreneurship directorates and entrepreneurship courses intended to enhance students' capacity for job creation and self-employment. Such curricular orientation is particularly relevant in the context of graduate unemployment, where entrepreneurship education is expected to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and motivation required to identify and pursue self-employment opportunities. Akere and Iwayemi (2023) similarly contend that graduate entrepreneurship education can contribute to self-employment and national economic development by equipping graduates with relevant entrepreneurial knowledge, ideas, skills and motivation. Thus, the entrepreneurial skill levels observed among the unemployed graduates in the present study may partly reflect exposure to entrepreneurship-related learning and skills-development initiatives during their tertiary education.

However, while the skill base and intention levels among graduates are encouraging, structural barriers such as limited access to start-up capital, inadequate business incubation services, and infrastructural deficiencies persist in the district. These barriers have been widely documented in Nigerian entrepreneurial research, showing that lack of financial resources and market linkages often constrain the ability of graduates to translate intention into successful enterprise establishment (Olufunmilola & Akinlabi, 2020, Effiong and Akpan 2020).

Furthermore, local cultural practices such as apprenticeship and informal business learning (e.g., the Igbo apprentice system) provide alternative pathways for developing practical business competencies and networking resources. Such indigenous mechanisms have historically enabled many Nigerian youths to acquire entrepreneurship skills outside formal educational environments, offering supplementary support to institutional training (Onuoha, 2018).

Collectively, these contextual factors help explain why unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District report high entrepreneurial competencies and self-employment intentions, while highlighting the continued need for ecosystem support, especially financial, institutional, and infrastructure support, to convert these intentions into sustained entrepreneurial outcomes.

The study established that unemployed graduates in Uyo Senatorial District possess moderately high entrepreneurial skills and demonstrate moderate to high self-employment intentions. Analysis showed that all examined entrepreneurial skill dimensions, financial management, marketing and digital skills, communication, business planning, innovation, and risk management, positively predicted self-employment intention. Among these, marketing and digital skills, as well as communication skills, were the strongest predictors, indicating that graduates who are proficient in promoting, managing, and communicating business ideas are more likely to intend to start their own enterprises. The findings confirm that equipping graduates with practical entrepreneurial competencies significantly contributes to their readiness for self-employment.

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that business education curricula be restructured to incorporate more practical, hands-on entrepreneurship training, with a focus on skill areas that strongly predict self-employment intentions. Educational institutions should implement project-based and experiential learning opportunities, including business simulations, internships, and mentoring programs. Government agencies and non-governmental organizations should provide intervention strategies such as accessible funding schemes, entrepreneurship awareness campaigns, and business incubation centers to support graduates in translating their skills into viable businesses. Additionally, universities and polytechnics should establish graduate incubation support programs to nurture business ideas and provide mentorship, technical assistance, and networking opportunities that enhance the likelihood of successful start-ups.

Policy Implications

The study's findings highlight the importance of developing and strengthening youth empowerment frameworks that emphasize entrepreneurial skill development as a tool for self-employment. Policy-makers should integrate entrepreneurship education with Nigeria's broader SME development policies to facilitate access to financial resources, market linkages, and technical support for graduates. Furthermore, aligning entrepreneurship initiatives with national economic diversification goals will enable graduates to contribute meaningfully to non-oil economic sectors, fostering job creation and sustainable economic growth across the country.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study was limited geographically to Uyo Senatorial District, which may affect the generalizability of findings to other regions of Nigeria. Additionally, the cross-sectional design provided a snapshot of entrepreneurial skills and intentions at one point in time, limiting the ability to infer causal relationships. Future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to examine changes in entrepreneurial competencies and self-employment intentions over time, as well as the effects of specific intervention programs. Expanding the study to other states or including graduates from different disciplines would further enhance the robustness and applicability of findings.

Value Added to Knowledge

This research contributes to the body of knowledge by identifying which entrepreneurial skill dimensions most strongly predict self-employment intentions among unemployed graduates in a Nigerian context. The study provides empirical evidence for curriculum planners, educators, and policymakers regarding targeted skill areas that enhance graduates' readiness for entrepreneurship. It also bridges the gap between theoretical models of intention formation, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior, and practical application in business education and youth empowerment initiatives.

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