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Evaluating the Role and Extent of Youth Entrepreneurship in
Developing Countries' SMEs: The Case of South-Eastern Nigeria

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Chapter 1: Introduction/background

Entrepreneurship—defined as the process of recognising opportunities, assuming risk, and creating value—plays a critical role in economic growth, job creation, and wealth generation, particularly in developing economies facing persistent youth unemployment (Yay & Yay, 2022; Krasniqi & Williams, 2020; Kuratko et al., 2021). In Nigeria, and especially in South-Eastern Nigeria, youth-led Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute a major source of livelihood and regional economic activity (Okechukwu & Nwekwo, 2020). Despite operating in highly constrained environments, many Nigerian entrepreneurs report strong commitment and fulfilment, reflecting the resilience embedded in local entrepreneurial cultures (Adelekan & Ezenwaji, 2022; St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020).

A substantial share of entrepreneurial activity in Nigeria occurs within the informal economy, driven by regulatory complexity, limited formal employment opportunities, and institutional weaknesses (Hagin & Caesar, 2021; Williams & Shahid, 2023). For many young people, entrepreneurship is necessity-driven rather than opportunity-led, serving as a coping strategy in response to job insecurity and underemployment (Fatoki, 2020; Udoeye, 2022; Adebisi & Akinola, 2022). While these conditions foster adaptability and opportunity recognition, they also heighten business risk and constrain enterprise sustainability—particularly for youths with limited education, weak technological capacity, and restricted access to institutional support (Akinbami, 2021; Ojo, 2020; Onyekwelu et al., 2023).

In response, Nigeria has expanded entrepreneurship education within tertiary institutions to improve youth entrepreneurial outcomes (Olokundun et al., 2021). However, evidence suggests that these programmes remain largely theoretical and insufficiently aligned with the realities of a predominantly informal and resource-constrained economy (Agu et al., 2023). This limitation is especially pronounced in South-Eastern Nigeria, where the Igbo Apprenticeship System remains a dominant and effective pathway for entrepreneurial skill acquisition, yet is weakly integrated into formal educational frameworks (Achebe & Nwankwo, 2020; Obiagwu,

2021). The resulting disconnect contributes to skills mismatches, weak entrepreneurial preparedness, and low venture survival rates among youth entrepreneurs (Okolie et al., 2021; Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023).

Despite growing scholarship on entrepreneurship education and youth enterprise development in Nigeria, limited research has examined how formal entrepreneurship education and indigenous apprenticeship systems interact within specific regional contexts. This study will address this gap by investigating how educational pathways, institutional conditions, and indigenous entrepreneurial practices jointly shape youth entrepreneurship and SME sustainability in South-Eastern Nigeria, with a view to advancing a more integrated and contextually grounded framework for entrepreneurship development.

1.1 Problem Statement / Motivation for this research

Despite sustained policy and curricular investment in entrepreneurship education within Nigerian tertiary institutions, youth entrepreneurial outcomes in South-Eastern Nigeria remain weak as many graduates lack the practical competencies, business resilience, and context-specific skills required to operate successfully within the region's predominantly informal and volatile SME environment (Salihu, Yusuf & Bwala, 2020; Okeke & Alonta, 2023).

A core challenge lies in the dualistic structure of entrepreneurial skill formation. Young people who are unable to progress far in formal education often enter the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS), which provides strong experiential learning, social capital, and business exposure but offers limited theoretical grounding in areas such as financial management, innovation, and strategic planning (Ugwu & Mbah, 2022; Abba, Ani & Ndubuisi, 2023). Conversely, youths who attain higher levels of formal education acquire substantial theoretical knowledge but frequently lack practical insight, hands-on entrepreneurial competence, and contextual understanding of operating within informal and volatile markets (Salihu, Yusuf & Bwala, 2020; Okeke & Alonta, 2023).

This structural divide has resulted in a persistent misalignment between theory-driven, Western-oriented entrepreneurship curricula and indigenous, experiential learning systems—most notably the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS)—that have historically underpinned entrepreneurial success in the region (Ugwu & Mbah, 2022; Abba, Ani & Ndubuisi, 2023).

At the same time, structural and institutional constraints—including weak infrastructure, inconsistent government policies, limited access to finance, and regulatory bottlenecks—continue to undermine youth engagement in sustainable enterprise development (Salawu & Fasakin, 2023; Van der Westhuizen, 2024). Rising job insecurity and underemployment further push many youths into necessity-driven entrepreneurship rather than opportunity-based venture creation (Fredström et al., 2021; Ibidunni et al., 2021). Consequently, a large proportion of youth-owned SMEs

operate informally, limiting access to finance, increasing business vulnerability, and contributing to high failure rates (Hagin & Caesar, 2021; Krasniqi & Williams, 2020).

Although existing studies examine entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, much of the literature treats youth entrepreneurship as a homogeneous phenomenon and pays limited attention to how human capital formation, institutional pressures, and indigenous learning systems interact at the regional level. In particular, South-Eastern Nigeria remains underexplored despite its strong entrepreneurial culture and distinct apprenticeship traditions.

Accordingly, this study addresses a critical empirical and theoretical gap by developing a context-sensitive framework that explains how formal entrepreneurship education and indigenous apprenticeship systems jointly shape youth entrepreneurial outcomes within the SME ecosystem of South-Eastern Nigeria. While existing studies examine these pathways in isolation, little is known about their combined effects on business formality, access to start-up finance, and venture sustainability, particularly within environments characterised by institutional constraints and informality. By integrating human capital development, experiential learning, and institutional conditions, this study advances a more holistic understanding of youth entrepreneurship in developing-country contexts.

1.2 Key Research Gaps

Category of gaps	Key gaps	How Gaps will be addressed
Contextual gap	Much of the existing literature conceptualises youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria as a relatively homogeneous phenomenon, with empirical focus disproportionately centred on Lagos and Abuja, thereby offering limited insight into the distinctive entrepreneurial dynamics of South-Eastern Nigeria.	This study will address this imbalance by providing region-specific evidence from South-Eastern Nigeria, where indigenous apprenticeship systems and informal enterprise structures are particularly prominent.
Theoretical gap	Much of the entrepreneurship literature relies on single-theory explanations, often focusing exclusively on human capital or institutional perspectives. E.g Okafor and Obi (2023)	This study will advance theory by integrating human capital theory, necessity-based entrepreneurship, psychological motivation, and institutional theory to explain youth entrepreneurial behaviour more holistically.
Empirical gap	Prior research largely examines formal entrepreneurship education and indigenous apprenticeship systems in isolation. There is limited empirical evidence on how these pathways interact to shape youth entrepreneurial outcomes.	This study will contribute methodologically by adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data with pilot qualitative insights to capture both statistical patterns and youths' lived entrepreneurial experiences to fill this gap by examining their combined effects on business formality, access to start-up finance, and venture sustainability within youth-led SMEs.
Policy gap	Youth entrepreneurship policies often treat skills development and institutional reform as separate interventions.	This study will demonstrate the need for integrated policy frameworks that align entrepreneurship education, experiential apprenticeship learning, and supportive institutional conditions to enhance sustainable youth-led SME development.

Author, 2025

1.3 Research objectives

1. Investigate the extent, nature, and effectiveness of youth entrepreneurship within South-Eastern Nigeria's SME sector.
2. To assess the extent to which formal education influences youth entrepreneurial participation and SME performance in the region.
3. To evaluate the role of indigenous apprenticeship systems (e.g., *Igba-boi*) in shaping youth entrepreneurial skills and business outcomes.
4. To examine the nature and extent of the mismatch between theoretical and practical entrepreneurship education.
5. To analyze the impact of institutional factors (such as access to finance, regulatory environment, and government support) on youth-owned SMEs.
6. To identify the key challenges confronting youth entrepreneurs operating SMEs in South-Eastern Nigeria.
7. Develop a hybrid conceptual framework that integrates formal education and training models with indigenous SMEs owners for practical reasons to better reflect local realities.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ1. What key socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors influence the youths to engage in self-employment in South-Eastern Nigeria?

RQ2. To what extent does entrepreneurs' level of formal education shape their access to formal financing opportunities?

RQ3: How do formal entrepreneurship education and indigenous apprenticeship systems influence business formality, access to start-up finance, and venture sustainability youth-owned enterprises in South-Eastern Nigeria?

RQ4. How can entrepreneurship education, indigenous apprenticeship systems, and institutional support mechanisms be better integrated to enhance sustainable youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria?

1.5 Business and Societal Problems to be Addressed in This Study

This study will address several interrelated business and societal challenges that constrain youth entrepreneurship and SME development in South-Eastern Nigeria.

1.5.1 Weak Entrepreneurial Performance and SME Failure

Despite strong entrepreneurial intentions among Nigerian youths, according to the studies of both Agu & Nwachukwu, (2020) and Olaore et al, (2020), a significant proportion of youth-owned SMEs in South-Eastern Nigeria exhibit low survival rates, limited scalability, and weak competitiveness or cease trading. Empirical evidence attributes these outcomes to deficits in practical entrepreneurial skills, limited business resilience, constrained access to start-up and growth finance, and weak institutional support structures (Onyema & Iwu, 2023; Nkwo & Eneiga, 2024). These constraints are exacerbated by the dominance of informal enterprise arrangements and fragmented entrepreneurship support systems, which restrict firm formalisation and access to external resources (Williams & Kedir, 2022; Godfrey et al., 2023). Persistent business failure among youth-led SMEs undermines local economic development, limits employment creation, and weakens the contribution of the SME sector to regional growth and structural transformation (Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023; Van der Westhuizen, 2024).

1.5.2 Misalignment Between Entrepreneurship Education and Market Realities

A major societal and educational challenge in Nigeria is the persistent disconnect between formal entrepreneurship education and the practical demands of a predominantly informal economy where experiential learning, improvisation, and social capital often matter more than formal business theory (Okolie et al., 2021; Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023; Meagher, 2020; Williams & Shahid, 2023). Contemporary university-based entrepreneurship programmes continue to emphasise theoretical knowledge and formal business models, with limited integration of experiential and

culturally embedded learning systems such as the Igbo Apprenticeship System (Achebe & Nwankwo, 2020; Obiagwu, 2021; Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023). This misalignment leaves many graduates insufficiently prepared for real-world venture creation and informal market participation, thereby reinforcing graduate unemployment and underemployment amid persistent labour market constraints (Olokundun et al., 2021; Agu, Nwaigburu, & Okoli, 2023; Williams & Shahid, 2023).

1.5.3 Persistent Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

South-Eastern Nigeria continues to face persistent youth unemployment and economic vulnerability, pushing many young people into necessity-driven rather than opportunity-based entrepreneurship (Fatoki, 2020; Fredström et al., 2021; Udoeye, 2022; World Bank, 2024). This form of survival entrepreneurship is typically informal, weakly scalable, and unsustainable, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and economic precarity. Recent national data revealed a paradox: although Nigeria's unemployment rate declined from 5.3% to 4.3% in the second quarter of 2024, the poverty rate increased from 36.9% to 38.3% during the same period (NESG, 2024; World Bank, 2024; NBS, 2024). This divergence indicates the prevalence of underemployment and low-quality entrepreneurial and wage activities that fail to improve living standards. Against this backdrop, the present study will examine how education pathways, skills acquisition systems, and institutional conditions will shape youth entrepreneurial outcomes in South-Eastern Nigeria.

1.5.4 High Levels of Informality and Limited Business Formalisation

A large share of youth-owned enterprises in Nigeria operates informally, often avoiding registration, taxation, and regulatory compliance (Hagin & Caesar, 2021; Krasniqi & Williams, 2020; Williams & Shahid, 2023; OECD, 2023). While informality may offer short-term flexibility, it limits access to formal finance, government support, and regulated markets, thereby constraining SME growth and legitimacy (Williams & Shahid, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Persistent informality also weakens public revenue mobilisation and policy effectiveness (OECD, 2023; NBS, 2024). Recent studies indicate that formalisation decisions are influenced not only by cost–benefit calculations

but also by educational attainment, institutional trust, regulatory enforcement, and the availability of support systems (Hagin & Caesar, 2022; Godfrey et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study will examine how education and institutional conditions shape youth entrepreneurs' formalisation choices in South-Eastern Nigeria.

1.5.5 Inadequate and Poorly Targeted Policy Interventions

Existing youth entrepreneurship and empowerment policies in Nigeria often lack regional specificity and fail to reflect the unique socio-cultural, institutional, and infrastructural realities of South-Eastern Nigeria (Oduwole & Fadeyi, 2020; Azeez & Ojeaga, 2025). Evaluations of major initiatives—including YouWiN, N-Power, and the NYSC Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme—highlight persistent challenges such as political interference in beneficiary selection, limited post-programme support, irregular stipend disbursement, short implementation timelines, weak follow-up mechanisms, inadequate practical training, and misalignment between acquired skills and market demand (Oduwole & Fadeyi, 2020; Deebom & Daerego, 2020; Umar et al., 2022; Ogunmodede et al., 2020; Azeez & Ojeaga, 2025).

Consequently, Eze, (2021) provided that many interventions yield limited and unsustainable outcomes within the region. This study will address this policy gap by generating context-specific evidence to inform more responsive and locally grounded youth entrepreneurship and SME development strategies in South-Eastern Nigeria.

1.5.6 Underutilisation of Indigenous Knowledge and Social Capital

Indigenous entrepreneurial systems—most notably the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS)—have long underpinned skill transfer, wealth creation, and enterprise continuity in South-Eastern Nigeria (Achebe & Nwankwo, 2020 and Obiagwu, 2021). However, despite their proven effectiveness, these systems remain largely under-recognised and poorly integrated into formal entrepreneurship and policy frameworks creating underutilisation of indigenous social capital, experiential learning, and community-based support structures, (Ugwu & Mbah, 2022; Okolie et al., 2021; Abba, Ani & Ndubuisi,

2023). Addressing this gap, the present study foregrounds the relevance of indigenous entrepreneurial knowledge in strengthening contemporary youth entrepreneurship development (Meagher, 2020; Abba, Ani, & Ndubuisi, 2023; Ugwu & Mbah, 2022).

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodological procedures adopted to investigate youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria. It explains the research design, philosophical orientation, sampling strategy, data collection methods, pilot study, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations that will be employed to guide the study. These methodological choices will be aligned with the research objectives, which seek to examine the relationships among entrepreneurship education, human capital attributes, venture characteristics, and business formalisation among young entrepreneurs.

2.2 Research Philosophy

The study will be grounded in a pragmatic research philosophy, which prioritises methodological flexibility and the use of multiple forms of data to address complex social phenomena. Pragmatism recognises that no single methodological tradition can adequately capture the multi-layered realities of entrepreneurship, particularly in developing-country contexts characterised by informality, cultural heterogeneity, and institutional fluidity.

By drawing on both quantitative and qualitative assumptions, the study will accommodate subjective interpretations of entrepreneurial experiences while also generating measurable patterns that are useful for policy formulation and theoretical modelling.

2.3 Target Population

The target population will comprise of youth entrepreneurs operating small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in South-Eastern Nigeria which include young business owners who acquired entrepreneurial skills through formal tertiary education,

as well as those trained via indigenous apprenticeship systems, notably the Igbo Apprenticeship System. The population also encompassed SME mentors or owners involved in training and supervising youths, government agencies, educators, financial institutions thereby capturing a broad spectrum of entrepreneurial pathways, experiences, and institutional engagements within the region's SME ecosystem.

2.4 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique will be used to select information-rich participants with formal educational exposure and active entrepreneurial experience through both entrepreneurship education and the Igbo Apprenticeship System, ensuring direct alignment with the study's objectives. This approach is widely recommended for qualitative and exploratory research where targeted insight is required (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024), and it offers a pragmatic balance between rigor and feasibility in contexts where probability sampling is unsuitable (Stratton, 2024; Memon et al., 2025). By deliberately targeting individuals with the requisite characteristics, this method enhanced the validity of the study's findings while maintaining efficiency in data collection.

2.5 Literature Review Method

A comprehensive literature review will be conducted prior to data collection to achieve three key objectives:

2.5.1 Mapping Existing Knowledge

The review will examine contemporary studies on entrepreneurship education, informal-sector entrepreneurship, indigenous apprenticeship systems, youth labour markets, and venture sustainability in developing economies. This process will enable the identification of theoretical gaps and empirical inconsistencies that the present study aims to address.

2.5.2 Theoretical Foundations

This study will be grounded in a multi-theoretical framework drawing on Human Capital Theory, Institutional Theory, Psychological Theory (Theory of Planned Behaviour), and Necessity Entrepreneurship, as established through the secondary data and literature review. These theoretical perspectives collectively explain how education, skills, institutional environments, motivations, and economic constraints shape youth entrepreneurial behaviour and outcomes in developing economies. Below is the theoretical framework that builds this study:

Theory

Theoretical Framework	Role of Theory in This Research
• Human Capital Theory – education & skills improve productivity.	• Knowledge forms part of the intangible category of resources important to the growth and survival of businesses. (Omeje et al, 2020)
• Institutional Theory	• Emphasis on laws, policies, regulations, and informal norms like cultural beliefs, customs and social practices of a given society either enable or constrain entrepreneurial activities (Adike et al, 2022)
• Psychological/Theory of Planned	• Krueger, (2021) stated to explore how personal traits, motivations, perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making processes drive the choice to start and sustain a business
• Necessity-Based Theory	• some individuals start businesses primarily because they have no better employment alternatives (Okechukwu & Nwekwo, 2020).

Author, 2025

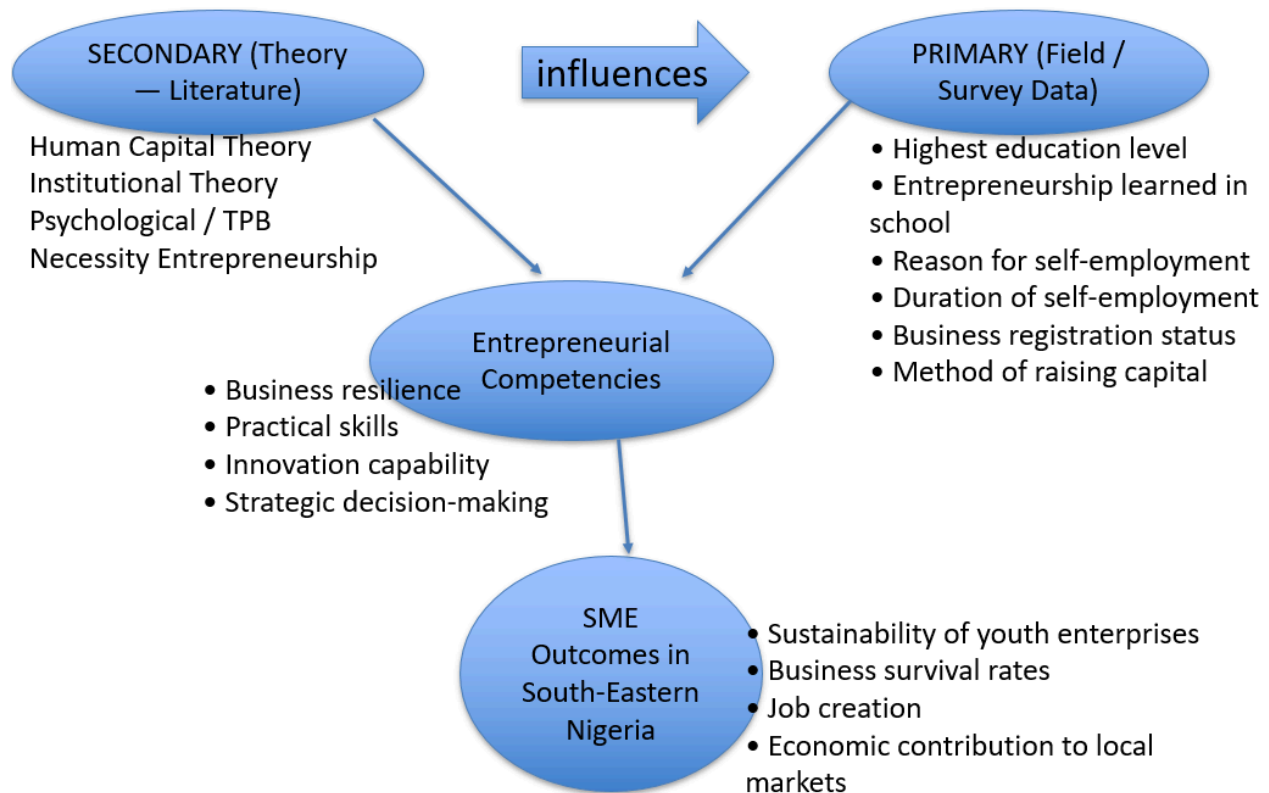
Guided by these theories, the study examines key entrepreneurial background and institutional variables obtained from primary data (pilot survey), including: highest level of education, exposure to entrepreneurship education in school, mode of skill acquisition (formal education or apprenticeship), reasons for entering self-employment (opportunity-driven or necessity-driven), duration of self-employment, business registration status, and methods of capital mobilization.

These factors are hypothesised to influence the development of entrepreneurial competencies, specifically business resilience, practical and operational skills, innovation capability, and strategic decision-making ability. These competencies represent the mediating mechanisms through which education, experience, and institutional conditions translate into entrepreneurial performance.

2.5.3 Conceptual framework

The framework will link entrepreneurial competencies to SME outcomes, measured by the sustainability of youth-owned enterprises, business survival rates, job creation capacity, and contributions to local economic activity. The framework therefore illustrates how individual capabilities, shaped by education, motivation, and institutional context, jointly determine the performance and sustainability of youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework



Author, 2025

2.6 Research Paradigm

This study will adopt an interpretivist paradigm, which is appropriate for exploring how youth entrepreneurs in South-Eastern Nigeria construct meaning around their entrepreneurial experiences. The interpretivist stance will enable an in-depth examination of participants' perceptions, motivations, learning pathways, and interactions with institutional and socio-cultural environments—dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through purely positivist approaches.

2.7 Research Design/Data Collection Methods

The study will adopt a pragmatic epistemology and critical realist ontology, recognising that youth entrepreneurship exists as both measurable outcomes and lived experience shaped by deeper institutional mechanisms. This philosophical stance justifies the mixed-methods design, enabling integration of quantitative patterns (e.g. education–formalisation links) with qualitative insights (e.g. survival strategies, informal learning). This enhances explanatory depth and contextual validity.

Quantitative components will be used to examine relationships among key variables, including entrepreneurship education, venture longevity, entrepreneurial motivation, access to start-up finance, and business formalisation.

Qualitative insights, embedded within instrument design and data interpretation, will be utilised to contextualise how formal education and experiential learning influence entrepreneurial readiness and decision-making.

The mixed-methods approach will be particularly suitable for research addressing human capital development, institutional conditions, and informal-sector dynamics, where statistical relationships and lived entrepreneurial experiences must be interpreted in conjunction to generate meaningful and policy-relevant insights.

2.7.1 Primary data Sources

Primary data will be collected through structured pilot-study questionnaires designed to systematically capture information on respondents' entrepreneurial backgrounds, education and training pathways, business characteristics, levels of institutional engagement, and key operational challenges confronting youth-owned SMEs. The questionnaires will complement qualitative insights by enabling consistent and comparable data capture across cases.

A pilot study will be administered using Qualtrics, distributed via secure web links and QR codes, to engage youth entrepreneurs, apprentices, and SME mentors/owners operating within Ariaria International Market, Aba Shopping Centre, and the Aba

Chamber of Commerce. Participants will be purposely selected to ensure variation in educational and training backgrounds, specifically capturing both individuals with formal tertiary entrepreneurship education and those developed through indigenous apprenticeship systems. This approach enables comparative insights into how differing learning pathways influence entrepreneurial competencies, business formalization, and enterprise sustainability. Participants will be aged between 21 and 46 years and will be actively engaged in small business activities, meeting the inclusion criteria of either business ownership or active self-employment. This approach will ensure alignment with the research objectives and facilitate meaningful comparison across entrepreneurial pathways.

2.7.2 Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data will be drawn from government reports, educational institutions, financial institutions in Nigeria and peer-reviewed academic literature on youth entrepreneurship, SME development, and entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. These sources will provide institutional and policy context, support data triangulation, and enhance the robustness of the study's analytical framework.

Accordingly, the figure below maps the key stakeholder groups involved in the study, outlining their respective roles, the insights expected from each group, the methods of data collection employed, and the contexts in which they are situated.

Stakeholders

Stakeholder Group	Role in Study	Expected Insights/ method of data collection	stakeholder group to visit
Youth Entrepreneurs	Primary respondents	Challenges, skills, resilience/ Primary data	Ariaria Market (Aba)
Apprentices	Emerging entrepreneurs	Learning & mentorship/ Primary Data	Aba shopping centre (tailoring, hairdressing, workshops)
SME Owners/Mentors	Secondary mentors	Business and training dynamics/ Primary data	Aba chambers of commerce
Government Agencies	Policy actors	Program effectiveness/ Secondary data	NYSC-SAED State office, Corporate Affairs Commission.
Educators/Trainers	Implementers	Curriculum relevance / Secondary data	Abia Poly, ABSU
Financial Institutions	Enablers	Access to finance/ Secondary data	FCMB, UBA

Author, 2025

2.8 Administration Process

Questionnaires will be administered online through Qualtrics to ensure efficient distribution, ease of access for respondents across diverse locations, and standardized data collection procedures. The use of Qualtrics further enhanced methodological rigor by providing secure data storage, automated coding of responses, and reduced researcher bias in administration. These features not only improved response reliability and validity but also facilitated streamlined data management, thereby strengthening the overall quality of the empirical evidence.

2.8.1 Data Cleaning and Preparation

The data cleaning process will involve the exclusion of questionnaires with missing or inconsistent entries. This procedure is essential to ensure the reliability and integrity of the data, particularly given its subsequent application in data analysis.

2.8.2 Data Analysis

Level 1: Descriptive Interpretation

This level will involve a systematic description of participants' lived experiences, business practices, and the key challenges encountered in their entrepreneurial activities.

Level 2: Analytical Interpretation

At this stage, the analysis will move beyond description to examine underlying motivations, constraints, and patterns shaping youth entrepreneurial behaviour and outcomes.

Level 3: Theoretical Interpretation

The study will employ a theory-driven analytical approach in which findings from the pilot survey will be interpreted through established entrepreneurship frameworks. Necessity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory will be used to explain self-employment as a response to unemployment and limited formal job opportunities (Okechukwu & Nwekwo, 2020; Fatoki, 2020). Human Capital Theory will guide the assessment of how education and skills influence enterprise formalisation and access to finance (Reynolds et al., 2021). Psychological Theory, particularly the Theory of Planned Behaviour, will inform the interpretation of entrepreneurial intentions and personal motivations (Virk et al., 2024). In addition, Institutional Theory will provide a lens for examining regulatory constraints, informal sector dominance, and weak support structures prevalent in South-Eastern Nigeria (World Bank, 2023; Weber et al., 2023).

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives will enable the study to link descriptive patterns from the pilot data to broader structural and behavioural explanations, thereby supporting a multi-level understanding of youth entrepreneurial behaviour within the regional context.

2.9 Limitations and Challenges of the Study

This study is limited to South-Eastern Nigeria, which may constrain the wider generalisability of its findings. Reliance on self-reported data introduces the risk of recall and social desirability bias, particularly on sensitive issues such as informality and taxation, while limited access to disaggregated government data restricts triangulation. Time constraints may also affect participation, given the demanding nature of youth entrepreneurial activities.

2.10 Mitigation Strategies

To address limitations related to geographical scope, the study will emphasise theoretical and contextual interpretation rather than broad statistical generalisation, situating findings within established entrepreneurship frameworks applicable to similar settings. The use of carefully designed, neutral survey items and cross-check questions will help minimise recall and response bias associated with self-reported data.

To reduce social desirability bias, anonymity and confidentiality will be clearly communicated to participants, and online questionnaire administration will be used to encourage honest disclosure. Time constraints will be mitigated through the use of brief, mobile-friendly surveys that allow respondents to participate at their convenience. Finally, limitations arising from restricted access to official data will be addressed by triangulating primary findings with relevant policy documents, development reports, and peer-reviewed literature.

2.11 Managing Ethical Considerations and Research Biases

This study will adhere to established ethical research standards to ensure voluntary participation, credibility, integrity, and respect for participants. Anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained through the exclusion of personal identifiers and the secure storage of all research data, thereby safeguarding participants from potential social, economic, or legal risks.

To minimise research bias, neutral and clearly worded data collection instruments will be employed to avoid leading or loaded questions. Data collection will follow a standardised procedure to ensure consistency across respondents, while data analysis will be conducted using established analytical techniques to reduce subjective interpretation. Researcher bias will be further mitigated through reliance on empirical evidence. Collectively, these measures will enhance the ethical rigour, reliability, and validity of the study's findings.

2.11 Original Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis will make four key contributions. First, it will provide region-specific empirical evidence on youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria, a context underrepresented in existing literature. Second, it will advance theory by integrating formal entrepreneurship education with indigenous apprenticeship systems within a unified analytical framework. Third, it will strengthen methodology by applying a mixed-methods approach suited to entrepreneurship research in informal and hybrid economies. Finally, it will offer policy-relevant insights that inform more context-sensitive SME and youth entrepreneurship interventions.

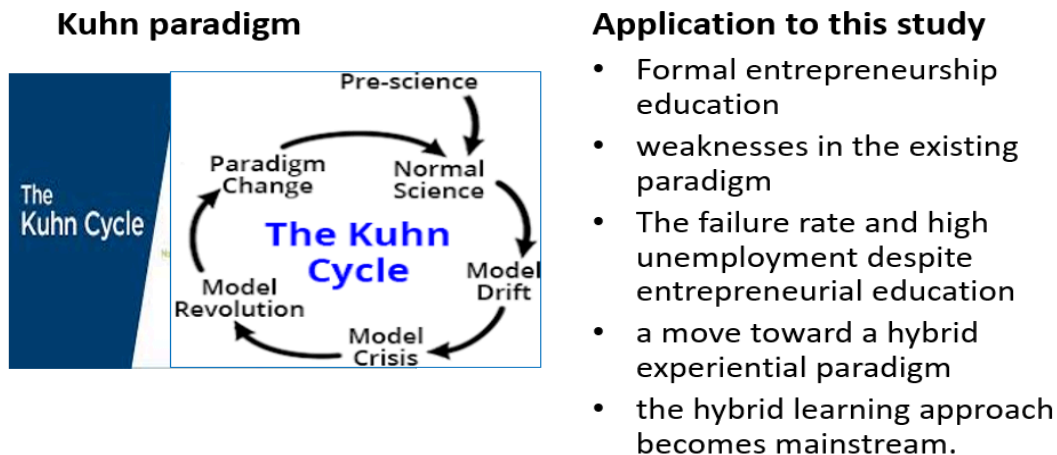
2.12 Conclusion and Synthesis

The concluding element synthesises findings across theoretical, empirical, and policy dimensions, reaffirming that youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria is shaped by necessity, informality, and institutional constraints, but also by resilient indigenous systems. It positions the study as a reference point for future entrepreneurship research in developing countries.

Chapter 3: Analysing the study through Kuhn's Paradigm (The Kuhn Cycle)

Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific development conceptualises knowledge advancement as a cyclical process involving *normal science*, the emergence of *anomalies*, *crisis*, *paradigm shift*, and the establishment of a new phase of *normal science* (Kuhn, 1962). This framework provides a valuable lens for situating the present study within ongoing shifts in entrepreneurship research in developing economies, particularly the move from universal, formalised models toward context-sensitive and interpretivist approaches. Adapted Kuhn's cycle linking to this study is shown below:

Kuhn Paradigm and applications



(Author, 2025)

3.1 Application and Relevance of Kuhn's Paradigm (The Kuhn Cycle) to the Context of This Study

Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific development conceptualises knowledge advancement as a cyclical process involving *normal science*, *anomaly*, *crisis*, *paradigm shift*, and *new normal science* (Kuhn, 1962). This framework provides a powerful analytical lens for situating this study within the evolving landscape of entrepreneurship research in developing economies, where dominant models increasingly struggle to explain lived realities (Urbano et al., 2023; Weber et al., 2023).

- **Normal Science: Dominance of Formal Entrepreneurship Education**

Within the phase of *normal science*, entrepreneurship development in Nigeria has largely been framed through a Western-oriented, formal academic paradigm. This dominant model emphasises classroom-based instruction, business plan development, managerial theory, and formalised venture creation processes within tertiary institutions. Policymakers and educators have widely assumed that exposure to entrepreneurship courses at universities and polytechnics is sufficient to equip youths with the competencies required for successful enterprise creation (Fatoki, 2020; Nabi et al., 2024; Adebayo & Nwachukwu, 2023). Consequently, this paradigm has shaped curriculum design, funding priorities, and national youth entrepreneurship programmes.

- **Anomalies: Persistent Weak Outcomes Despite Educational Expansion**

Despite the expansion of entrepreneurship education, persistent *anomalies* have emerged. Youth unemployment, underemployment, and business failure rates remain high, while many graduates struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into viable enterprises—particularly within informal, resource-constrained markets typical of South-Eastern Nigeria (World Bank, 2023; Nwankwo et al., 2023). In contrast, indigenous systems such as the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) continue to produce resilient and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs outside formal education structures (Meagher, 2020; Abba, Ani & Ndubuisi, 2023). These outcomes contradict the expectations of the prevailing paradigm and reveal its contextual limitations.

- **Crisis: Questioning the Sufficiency of Formal Models**

The accumulation of these anomalies has generated a *crisis* in the legitimacy of purely formal entrepreneurship education as a standalone solution. Scholars increasingly question the relevance, practicality, and contextual fit of existing curricula in environments characterised by informality, weak institutions, and necessity-driven enterprise (Williams & Shahid, 2023; Urbano & Guerrero, 2022). Policy debates and empirical studies now highlight the disconnect between formal training and actual entrepreneurial practice, signalling a breakdown in explanatory power within the dominant framework.

- **Paradigm Shift: Emergence of a Hybrid Experiential Model**

In response, a *paradigm shift* is emerging that reconceptualises entrepreneurship as a socially embedded, context-specific process rather than a universally transferable set of formal skills. This emerging paradigm advocates the integration of formal education with indigenous experiential learning systems, institutional support mechanisms, and psychological and necessity-based motivations (Ene & Umeh, 2023; Okafor & Obi, 2023; Urbano et al., 2023). The present study contributes to this shift by empirically examining how human capital, institutional pressures, psychological factors, and necessity entrepreneurship jointly shape youth entrepreneurial outcomes in South-Eastern Nigeria.

- **New Normal Science: Institutionalising Hybrid Entrepreneurship Knowledge**

The study ultimately points toward a *new normal science* in entrepreneurship research—one that embraces pluralistic knowledge systems and values both formal and informal pathways to enterprise development. By bridging Western academic frameworks with indigenous apprenticeship models and institutional realities, this research advances a more contextually grounded and policy-relevant understanding of youth entrepreneurship (Weber et al., 2023; GEM, 2024). This aligns with Kuhn's

assertion that scientific progress occurs not through incremental refinement alone, but through paradigm reconfiguration that better explains observed realities (Kuhn, 1964).

3.2 Expected Challenges in Implementing the New Paradigm and their mitigations

Despite its promise, the institutionalisation of this hybrid paradigm may face five notable challenges. These challenges according to Adelekan & Danso, (2023), Williams & Kedir, (2022), Meagher, (2020) and Nkwo & Eneiga, (2024) are detailed below together with how they will be mitigated

	Challenge Areas	Key Mitigations
1	Resistance to curriculum reform	involve teachers in the design process and ensure transparent communication of benefits
2	Limited policy recognition of informal learning	Establish clear processes to validate and certify non-formal learning outcomes and align these standards with national qualifications frameworks.
3	Regulatory barriers for informal enterprises	Simplify business registration, and improve access to tailored financial products (e.g., microfinance)
4	Coordination gaps among government agencies	Create formal platforms for joint planning across sectors, align funding and resources toward shared goals
5	Epistemological concern with indigenous knowledge	Design flexible and modular curriculums, adopt culturally responsive teaching methods, involve indigenous experts in design and assessment.

3.3 Concluding Insight

This study will demonstrate that youth entrepreneurship research in South-Eastern Nigeria is undergoing a paradigmatic transition. Guided by Kuhn's (1962) paradigm framework, the dominant formal education-centred model is increasingly insufficient for explaining entrepreneurial outcomes in contexts shaped by informality and necessity-driven enterprise. In response, the study advances an integrated paradigm that combines formal education, indigenous apprenticeship systems, experiential learning, and institutional support, offering a more inclusive and contextually valid explanation of youth entrepreneurship. However, embedding this new paradigm will require deliberate policy reform, stakeholder collaboration, and methodological innovation.

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