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Investigating Human Capital and Institutional Pressures on Entrepreneurial Outcomes in Emerging Economies: Evidence from Youth-Led SMEs in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Contents **page**

Abstract……3

Chapter 1: Background / Introduction…….……..…….4

1. 1 Problem Statement……..……...…...7

1.2 Objectives of the study ……..9

1.3 Research Questions……9

1.4 Key Research Gaps……..10

Chapter 2 Methodology……11

2.1 Introduction…….……...11

2.2 Research Phylosophy……11

2.3 Research Design…...……12

2.4 Literature Review Method……...……13

2.5 Pilot Study……...……..14

2.6 Target Population and Sampling Strategy……..……15

2.7 Administration Process (Ethics, reliability and validity).....……16

2.8 Data Cleaning and Preparation……..17

2.9 Data Analysis…….……17

2.9.1 Theoretical Analysis……17

2.9.2 Descriptive and Inferential analysis……...……18

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework……19

Chapter 4 Literature Review……..……...21

Chapter 5 Descriptive Statistics (Data Analysis)……...……..26

Chapter 6 Recommendations……40

Chapter 7 Conc;usion……41

References……42

Appendices ……...56

Abstract

This study explores how human capital and institutional pressures influence entrepreneurial outcomes among youth-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South-Eastern Nigeria. Using survey data from *X* SMEs across urban and peri-urban contexts, we assess the role of founders' education, training, prior experience, and cognitive skills in shaping firm survival, growth, and innovation. Multilevel regression and mediation–moderation analyses reveal that human capital significantly enhances performance, while institutional pressures exert mixed effects. Regulatory pressures reduce short-term survival risks but impose compliance costs that constrain growth, whereas normative pressures—such as networks and industry norms—strengthen the positive impact of human capital on innovation.

survey of 18 self-employed youth South-Eastern Nigeria provides complementary micro-level insights into entrepreneurial experiences and challenges. Anchored in necessity-based, psychological, human capital, and institutional theories, the study offers a holistic explanation of how structural conditions and individual agency shape youth entrepreneurship. The findings emphasize the need for policies that combine skill development with institutional reforms to support sustainable youth-led enterprise development in emerging economies.

The research is grounded in four theoretical perspectives: Necessity-Based Theory, which explains entrepreneurship as a response to limited formal employment; Psychological Theory, which highlights autonomy, risk-taking, and self-confidence; Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes education and skills as drivers of performance; and Institutional Theory, which examines how policies and regulatory structures shape entrepreneurial opportunities. Together, these frameworks illuminate the interplay of structural constraints and individual agency in youth entrepreneurship.

Both theoretical and descriptive analysis were used to analyse data with findings underscoring the need for integrated policy interventions that combine skills

development with institutional reforms to foster sustainable youth-led enterprises in emerging economies.

Keywords: youth entrepreneurship, human capital, theoretical knowledge, practice-based learning, hybrid Knowledge.

Chapter 1: Background / Introduction

In most conceptualizations, entrepreneurship involves creating value and generating positive societal impact (Jones et al., 2020). It is broadly defined as the process of identifying, developing, and exploiting opportunities to establish and grow businesses, often under conditions of uncertainty. Central to entrepreneurship are innovation, risk-taking, and resource mobilization, which together enable the creation of both economic and social value (Schumpeter, 1934; Yay & Yay, 2022; Ratten, 2023).

Entrepreneurship has gained global recognition as a major catalyst for economic development, job creation, and poverty reduction, particularly in emerging and developing economies where formal employment opportunities remain limited (Aparicio, Urbano & Audretsch, 2021). In many African countries, including Nigeria, entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a strategic pathway for addressing persistent youth unemployment and stimulating inclusive economic growth (Amankwah-Amoah, 2021; Okoye et al., 2022). As formal sector jobs continue to decline relative to population growth, entrepreneurial activity has become essential for economic diversification and resilience (UNDP, 2023).

In recognition of this trend, Nigeria has integrated entrepreneurship education into tertiary institutions with the aim of equipping students with the human capital, competencies, and foundational knowledge required to initiate and manage successful business ventures (Olokundun et al., 2021). The national policy shift reflects the assumption that formal instruction in business planning, innovation, opportunity identification, and managerial skills will strengthen entrepreneurial intentions and

improve venture outcomes among graduates (Ojo, 2020; Olokundun et al., 2021). Universities and polytechnics now mandate entrepreneurship courses, however, existing studies indicate that much of the entrepreneurship curriculum remains overly theoretical, with limited opportunities for hands-on learning, market immersion, or mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs (Agu, Nwaigburu & Okoli, 2023; Izedonmi & Okafor, 2022). Consequently, some youths who are unable to pursue formal schooling turn to the traditional Igbo apprenticeship system (IAS) that empowers young people through mentorship and practical training (Adeola, 2023). However, many of these apprentices lack adequate formal education, which negatively affects the sustainability and long-term performance of their enterprises (Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020).

This gap is even more pronounced in South-Eastern Nigeria where according to Oyewunmi, et al (2020) is a region renowned for its dynamic informal economy, vibrant trading networks, and strong indigenous business traditions. Central to this economic landscape is the Igbo apprenticeship system (IAS)—an informal yet highly structured model of entrepreneurial training based on mentorship, hands-on learning, and communal trust (Achebe & Nwankwo, 2020; Ume et al., 2022). The IAS has gained international scholarly attention for its ability to produce resilient and successful entrepreneurs through immersive, practice-based learning (Obiagwu, 2021). Unlike formal education, which emphasizes theory with limited practice, the apprenticeship model emphasizes real-world experience, long-term mentorship, and mastery through participation but with limited theory (Akinbami, 2021; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020; Aaltonen & Kurvinen, 2025; Ibidunni et al, 2021)

Modern entrepreneurship education programs in Nigerian institutions rarely integrate or acknowledge these indigenous knowledge systems (Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023). As a result, a significant disconnect arises between the formal educational paradigm and the entrepreneurial realities of the region. This disconnect contributes to challenges such as low venture survival rates, skills mismatches, and weak entrepreneurial resilience among youths who have undergone formal training but lack practical grounding (Agu et al., 2023). Recent studies indicate that entrepreneurship curricula in Nigeria tend to emphasise theoretical models and formal business structures, while overlooking

culturally embedded practices, community-based financing, and experiential knowledge that dominate informal and small-scale enterprise activities (Okolie et al., 2021; Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023). This misalignment limits the relevance and practical impact of entrepreneurship education, particularly for the youths who operate in predominantly informal economic environments (Okeremi, Amoako-Gyampah & Divine 2021; Hagin & Caesar 2021).

Given these tensions, scholars have called for a more context-sensitive approach to entrepreneurship development—one that bridges formal educational frameworks with indigenous, culturally embedded models of entrepreneurial learning. Understanding how these knowledge systems intersect, diverge, or complement each other is essential for improving the effectiveness of entrepreneurship initiatives and for supporting sustainable youth-led enterprise development.

Therefore, this study situates youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria within this broader discourse. It examines the structural, educational, and cultural factors shaping entrepreneurial participation while exploring the potential benefits of integrating formal entrepreneurship education with indigenous models such as the Igbo apprenticeship system. By addressing these gaps, the study seeks to contribute to a more holistic and contextually grounded understanding of youth entrepreneurship development in the region.

1. 1 Problem Statement

Despite the expansion of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions, youth entrepreneurial outcomes in South-Eastern Nigeria remain weak as graduates often lack the practical competence, business resilience, and contextual skills required to succeed in the region's informal and dynamic markets (Salihu, Yusuf & Bwala, 2020; Okeke & Alonta, 2023). This suggests a fundamental misalignment between classroom-based entrepreneurship curricula—which emphasize theoretical frameworks—and the experiential, practice-driven knowledge systems inherent in indigenous business models such as the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) (Ugwu & Mbah, 2022; Abba, Ani & Ndubuisi, 2023). As a result, existing educational interventions fail to fully prepare young people for real-world venture creation, contributing to persistent youth unemployment, high rates of business failure, and underutilization of the region's entrepreneurial potential (Nkwo & Eneiga, 2024; Onyema & Iwu, 2023). Therefore, this study addresses the absence of an integrated, contextually relevant model of entrepreneurship development that bridges formal education with indigenous experiential learning systems.

Although Nigeria has a large pool of youths with strong entrepreneurial potential, these capacities remain significantly underutilized (Olaore et al., 2020). Structural constraints—including unfavorable government policies, unreliable power supply, poor road networks, weak educational infrastructure, and inadequate health facilities—further undermine youth participation in productive enterprise (Salawu & Fasakin, 2023). These barriers collectively impede young people from progressing into viable entrepreneurial activities (Van der Westhuizen, 2024).

Growing job insecurity and widespread underemployment continue to push many youths below acceptable economic standards (Sirola, 2020). As a result, a substantial proportion of startups emerge out of necessity rather than opportunity, primarily because of limited access to formal employment (Fredström et al., 2021). In response to harsh economic conditions, many individuals resort to learning informal skills to survive and explore business opportunities (Ibidunni et al., 2021; Sallah & Caesar, 2020).

A notable number of entrepreneurial ventures remain unregistered, often as a means of evading taxes (Hagin & Caesar, 2021; Krasniqi & Williams, 2020). This high level of informality contributes to persistent business instability and failure rates among Nigerian entrepreneurs and those in comparable developing contexts (Hagin & Caesar, 2021). Educational limitations further weaken entrepreneurial preparedness, reducing efficiency and increasing the likelihood of business collapse (Akinbami, 2021).

Furthermore, entrepreneurship education programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions largely fail to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems and informal entrepreneurial practices. As a result, a pronounced gap exists between the predominantly Western-oriented, formal educational framework and the practical realities of entrepreneurship within local contexts. Recent evidence shows that entrepreneurship curricula in Nigeria place greater emphasis on abstract theories and formal business models, often neglecting culturally grounded practices, community-based financing mechanisms, and experiential forms of knowledge that underpin informal and small-scale enterprises (Okolie et al., 2021; Afolayan & Ajibade, 2023). This disconnect reduces the contextual relevance and practical effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, particularly for graduates who engage in entrepreneurial activities within largely informal economic settings.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the nature and extent of the mismatch between theoretical and practical entrepreneurship education.
- To assess the impact of this mismatch on entrepreneurial outcomes among youth in South Eastern Nigeria.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of indigenous models like the Igbo apprenticeship system.
- To recommend strategies for aligning entrepreneurship education with practical business realities.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the key differences between theoretical entrepreneurship education and practical business experiences in South Eastern Nigeria?
2. How does the level of formal educational attainment among youth entrepreneurs enhance their access to formal financing opportunities?
3. Does formal education shape key enterprise attributes—such as business structure and operational formality?
4. Does business formalization determine funding pathways among youth entrepreneurs?
5. To what extent does combining formal entrepreneurship education with experiential, apprenticeship-based learning enhance entrepreneurial capabilities among young people?

1.4 Key Research Gaps

Category	Key Gaps	How This Study Addresses Them
Contextual	Existing studies on Nigerian entrepreneurship disproportionately focus on Lagos and Abuja, with limited attention to South-Eastern Nigeria.	Provides region-specific evidence from South-Eastern Nigeria, thereby enriching geographic diversity in entrepreneurship research.
Theoretical	Few studies integrate Necessity-Based, Psychological, Human Capital, and Institutional theories into a single explanatory framework.	Applies a multi-theoretical framework that captures both structural constraints and individual agency in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes.
Empirical	Limited micro-level qualitative evidence exists to capture the lived experiences of youth entrepreneurs.	Supplements quantitative analysis with pilot qualitative insights, offering a richer understanding of entrepreneurial pathways and challenges.
Policy & Practice	Policy interventions often emphasize either skills development or institutional reforms, rarely integrating both.	Highlights the importance of combining skill development initiatives with institutional reforms to strengthen youth-led SMEs in emerging economies.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures adopted for investigating youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria. It explains the research design, philosophical orientation, sampling strategy, data collection methods, pilot testing procedures, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations guiding the study. The methodological choices are aligned with the research objectives, which seek to examine relationships among entrepreneurial education, human capital attributes, venture characteristics, and business formalization among young entrepreneurs.

2.2 Research Philosophy

The study is rooted in a pragmatic research philosophy, which prioritizes methodological flexibility and the use of multiple forms of data to address complex social phenomena. Pragmatism acknowledges that no single methodological tradition can fully capture the multi-layered realities of entrepreneurship, especially within developing-country contexts characterized by informality, cultural heterogeneity, and institutional fluidity.

By drawing on both quantitative and qualitative assumptions, the study accommodates subjective perceptions of entrepreneurial experiences while also generating measurable patterns useful for policy and theoretical modeling.

2.3 Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was employed. This design allows the triangulation of findings, improves validity, and provides a more holistic understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem experienced by Nigerian youth. The research integrates:

1. Quantitative elements – to examine the relationships among key variables such as entrepreneurial education, venture longevity, motivations, access to finance, and business formalization etc.

2. Qualitative insights (embedded within instrument design and interpretation) – to contextualize how experiential and formal learning influence entrepreneurial readiness.

The mixed-methods approach is particularly appropriate for studies examining human capital, institutional conditions, and informal-sector dynamics, where statistical patterns must be interpreted alongside lived experiences. Accordingly, this study aligns with a critical realist ontology, recognising that observable empirical relationships are generated by deeper institutional and socio-cultural mechanisms (Sayer, 2023). Epistemologically, the study adopts a pragmatic stance well suited to entrepreneurship research in developing economies, where formal indicators of human capital often fail to capture behaviours shaped by informal learning pathways and survival-oriented entrepreneurship (Williams & Williams, 2024; Godfrey et al., 2023). Axiologically, the study is guided by a commitment to analytical rigour and social relevance, critically engaging both quantitative and qualitative evidence to generate balanced, context-sensitive, and policy-relevant insights.

2.4 Literature Review Method

A comprehensive literature review was conducted before data collection to achieve three goals:

2.4.1 Mapping Existing Knowledge

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

2.4.2 Identifying Key Variables

Insights from the literature informed the development of the conceptual model and the selection of variables, Data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing variables including:

- demographic characteristics
- entrepreneurial education exposure
- highest formal education level
- business registration status
- sources of start-up capital
- motivations for becoming self-employed
- venture duration and sector

2.4.3 Establishing Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

The review grounded the study in relevant theoretical perspectives—including Human Capital Theory, Necessity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory, Institutional Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Indigenous Igbo Apprenticeship Model)—which collectively informed data interpretation and shaped the analytical direction of the research.

2.5 Pilot Study

2.5.1 Purpose of the Pilot

A pilot study was conducted to pre-test the structured questionnaire (see appendix 1) to assess item clarity and relevance, evaluate sampling feasibility, and ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection tools. Data generated from the pilot study questionnaires were transformed into statistical variables and analytically defined criteria to examine relationships among key constructs, including entrepreneurial education pathways, motivations for self-employment, venture longevity, access to finance, and levels of business formalization. This approach enabled systematic exploration of patterns and associations among core dimensions of youth entrepreneurship within the SME context.

2.5.2 Participants and Setting

The pilot study involved 18 young entrepreneurs drawn from the alumni population of a secondary school in Aba, Abia State which is in South-Eastern Nigeria. Participants were aged between 21 and 46, actively engaged in small business activities, and met the inclusion criteria of either business ownership or active self-employment.

The pilot phase proved valuable in refining the research instrument. Ambiguous questions were revised for clarity, redundant items were eliminated, and the alignment between survey items and the study variables was strengthened. Importantly, the pilot confirmed that respondents were able to complete the questionnaire independently, thereby validating its usability.

The refined instrument, shaped by these adjustments, provided a reliable foundation for the empirical stage of the study, ensuring that subsequent data collection was both methodologically sound and contextually relevant.

2.6 Target Population and Sampling Strategy

2.6.1 Target Population

The target population comprised young entrepreneurs operating micro and small enterprises within South-Eastern Nigeria, particularly those educated within the formal school system.

2.6.2 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed, as the study required respondents with formal educational exposure, active entrepreneurial engagement, and direct relevance to the research objectives. This non-probability approach facilitated the efficient identification of participants who met these criteria within the selected institution, thereby ensuring that the sample was aligned with the specific focus of the research. Recent scholarship emphasizes that purposive sampling remains one of the most widely applied techniques in qualitative and exploratory research, particularly when researchers seek information-rich cases that directly address the study's aims (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Moreover, purposive sampling is recognized for its ability to balance methodological rigor with practical feasibility, especially in contexts where probability sampling is impractical or inappropriate (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.

2.6.3 Sample Size

The empirical dataset comprises 18 complete responses, obtained after the removal of incomplete questionnaires. Although modest in size, this sample is appropriate for exploratory research, pilot-linked investigations, descriptive statistical analysis, and the initial modeling of youth entrepreneurship patterns. The relatively small sample size, however, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should therefore employ larger and more representative datasets across diverse regions and sectors to

strengthen external validity and provide more robust insights into youth-led SME dynamics in South-Eastern Nigeria.

2.7 Administration Process (**Ethics, reliability and validity)**

Questionnaires were administered online via Qualtrics to facilitate wide geographic reach, standardized administration, and efficient data management. The platform's secure data handling, automated coding, and uniform delivery reduced researcher interference and enhanced data reliability and consistency.

The study adhered to established ethical standards in social science research. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, assured of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, and guaranteed confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

Reliability was strengthened through the use of a structured questionnaire with consistent wording and response options, minimizing measurement error and supporting internal consistency. Quantitative analyses employed standardized statistical techniques, including crosstabulations, Chi-square tests, and Fisher's Exact tests, enhancing replicability.

Validity was addressed through methodological triangulation, integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence to capture both statistical patterns and contextual meanings. Construct validity was ensured by aligning survey items with established concepts in the entrepreneurship literature.

2.8 Data Cleaning and Preparation

The data cleaning process involved the exclusion of questionnaires with missing or inconsistent entries, resulting in a final dataset of 18 complete and reliable cases that were systematically coded for analysis. This rigorous procedure was essential to ensure the reliability and integrity of the dataset, particularly given its subsequent application in inferential statistical techniques.

2.9 Data Analysis

2.9.1 Theoretical Analysis

The study employed a theory-driven analytical approach in which primary findings from the pilot survey were interpreted through established entrepreneurship frameworks. The analysis drew on Necessity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory, which explains self-employment as a response to unemployment and limited formal job opportunities (Okechukwu & Nwekwo, 2020; Fatoki, 2020). Human Capital Theory guided the assessment of how education and skills shape enterprise formalisation and financing access (Reynolds et al., 2021). Psychological Theory, particularly the Theory of Planned Behaviour, informed interpretation of entrepreneurial intentions and personal motivations (Virk et al., 2024). Finally, Institutional Theory provided a lens for examining regulatory constraints, informal sector dominance, and weak support structures common in South-Eastern Nigeria (World Bank, 2023; Weber et al., 2023).

Together, these theories helped connect the descriptive patterns from the pilot study to broader structural explanations, enabling a multi-level understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour in the region.

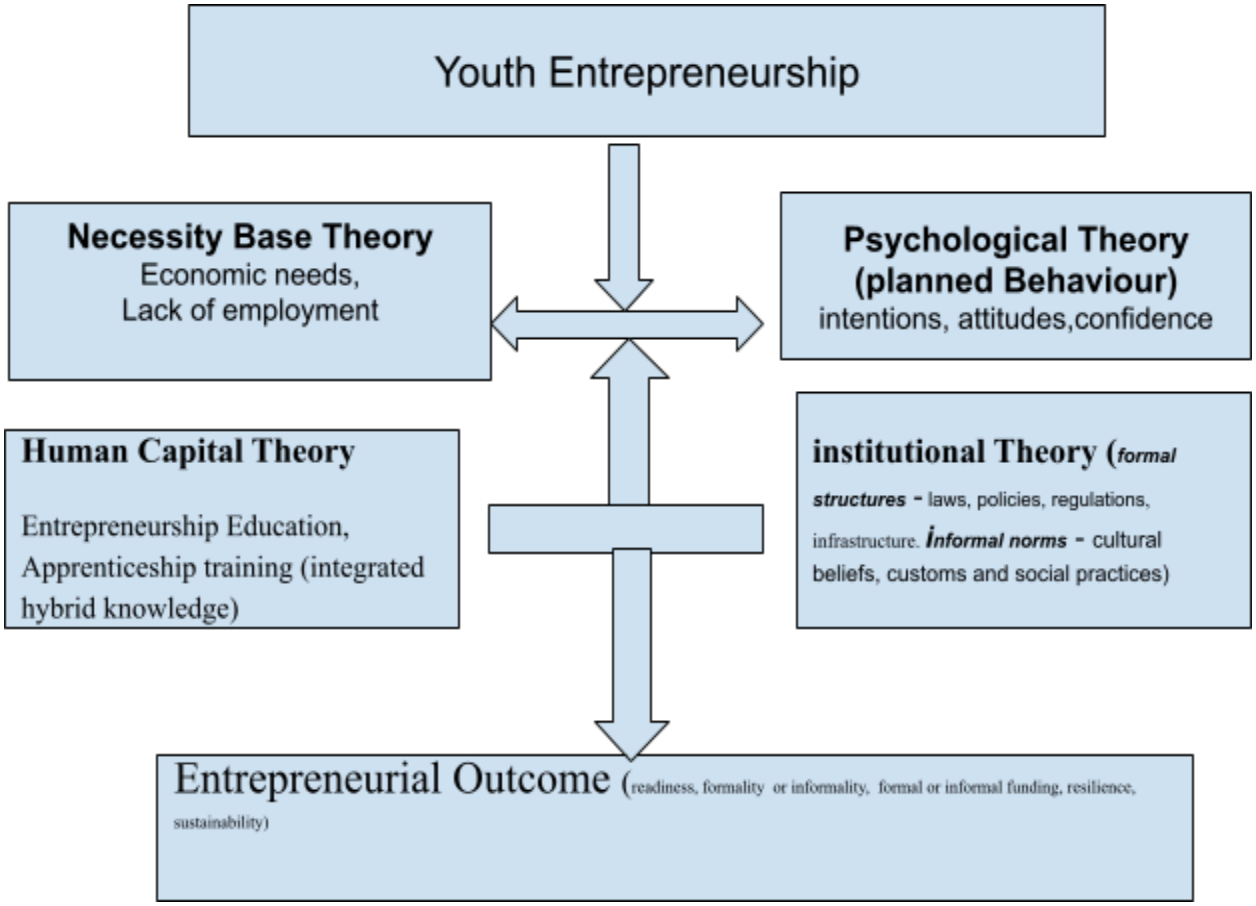
2.9.2 Descriptive and inferential analyses

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct both descriptive and inferential analyses, including the Chi-Square Test of Independence. The Chi-Square test was applied to determine whether significant associations existed between the categorical variables under investigation. Prior to analysis, key assumptions were verified to ensure statistical validity. First, all variables included were categorical and therefore suitable for contingency-table analysis. Second, observations were independent, with each respondent contributing to only one category per variable. Third, categories within the cross-tabulations were mutually exclusive, preventing duplication of responses. Finally, however, during assumption testing, it was observed that several cells containing expected counts were below the recommended threshold, meaning the Chi-Square approximation could not be reliably applied. Therefore, Fisher's Exact Test was employed to complement Chi-square analysis in order to provide a more appropriate alternative, particularly when sample sizes are small or data are sparse (Memon et al., 2025). Fisher's Exact Test is ideal when the sample size is <20, one or more expected cell counts fall below 5, and exact rather than approximate p-values are required (Kim, 2017).

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

Several scholars have emphasized that the dynamics of youth entrepreneurship can best be understood through the application of robust theoretical frameworks (Egere, Maas & Jones, 2024; Anugwu & Nwosu, 2021). In this study, four frameworks are adopted: Human Capital Theory, which highlights the role of education, skills, and prior experience in shaping entrepreneurial performance (Okoye, Zhu & Guo, 2022); Institutional Theory, which explains how regulatory structures, policies, and socio-cultural norms influence entrepreneurial behavior (Ajuwon et al., 2023); Psychological Theory, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior, which underscores the importance of self-efficacy, risk-taking, and autonomy in entrepreneurial motivation (Eniola, 2020); and Necessity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory, which accounts for survival-driven business creation in contexts of limited formal employment opportunities (Udoye, 2022; Omeje, Jideofor & Ugwu, 2020).

The convergence of these frameworks provides a comprehensive lens for interpreting the motivations, strategic orientations, and challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in South-Eastern Nigeria. This integrated approach helps explain business outcomes such as formality versus informality, and reliance on formal versus informal financing mechanisms. The adapted conceptual framework is illustrated in the diagram below.



Adapted Conceptual Framework: Youth Entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria

(Author, 2025)

Chapter 4: Literature Review

4.1 Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

Over the past decade, entrepreneurship education has become a strategic policy tool for reducing youth unemployment (Amankwah-Amoah, 2021; Okoye et al., 2022).. Nigerian tertiary institutions now embed entrepreneurship courses aimed at developing human capital, fostering innovation, and encouraging self-employment (Olawale & Garwe, 2021; Nwosu & Chukwuma, 2022). However, numerous studies have identified weaknesses in curriculum delivery, including excessive focus on theory, limited practical exposure, inadequate entrepreneurial ecosystems in universities, and weak industry linkages (Ezenwakwelu et al., 2020; Okoye, 2023). These deficits limit the ability of formal education to produce competent young entrepreneurs.

4.2 Youth Entrepreneurship and the South-Eastern Context

South-Eastern Nigeria is globally recognized for its strong entrepreneurial tradition, especially within the Igbo ethnic group (Iwara & Ojakorotu, 2025; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020; Adeola, 2023; and Iwara & Adeola, 2023). The region has a thriving informal sector driven by trade, manufacturing, and small-scale enterprises. Yet, according to Agu & Nwachukwu, (2020) despite this entrepreneurial culture, youth unemployment remains high. Scholars argue that young people often lack practical business experience, market exposure, and entrepreneurial resilience (Okeke, 2021; Nwachukwu & Eze, 2022; Salawu & Fasakin (2023). These gaps highlight the need for context-specific approaches that reflect local economic realities.

4.3 The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) as an Indigenous Model

The IAS—popularly known as *Igba-Boi* —is widely studied as one of the world's most successful informal business incubation systems (Ezenwafor & Okoye, 2022; Agu & Nwachukwu, 2020). Its core elements include mentorship, hands-on learning, business immersion, and structured settlement after training (Achebe, 2020; Obiani & Mbah,

2021). Recent research emphasizes its role in wealth creation, poverty reduction, and entrepreneurial skill development (Alabi & Onuoha, 2023). According to Meagher, (2020) and Ezenwafor & Okoye, (2022), it is important to note that the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS)—a dominant informal learning model in South-Eastern Nigeria—is widely regarded as more effective than formal schooling for producing functional and resilient entrepreneurs. This strengthens the argument that both educational pathways and learning environments fundamentally shape entrepreneurial behaviour and outcomes.

4.4 Gaps Between Formal Education and Indigenous Models

A recurring theme in the literature is the persistent mismatch between formal business education and the practical entrepreneurial competencies required in the Nigerian marketplace. While universities typically emphasise theoretical constructs—such as business planning, managerial models, and organisational strategy (Nnamani, 2021 Okeremi et al, 2023), the Indigenous Apprenticeship System (IAS) focuses on experiential, practice-driven learning through immersion rather than classroom instruction, apprentices acquire competencies in negotiation, resilience, customer relations, resource improvisation, and opportunity exploitation—skills that align more closely with the realities of entrepreneurship in Nigeria's informal and semi-formal markets (Ene & Umeh, 2023; Okafor & Obidike, 2022; St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020).

Scholars like Ugwu & Mbah, (2022), and Abba, Ani & Ndubuisi, (2023) provided that these competencies emerge through live practice, making the IAS particularly effective in producing functional entrepreneurs capable of navigating uncertainty, competition, and resource constraints. Empirical studies further indicate that this experiential mode of skill formation is often more impactful than conventional school-based instruction, especially in environments where market volatility demands adaptability and hands-on expertise (Okafor & Obidike, 2022; Ezeani & Oladejo, 2023).

Collectively, these studies underscore the need for a hybrid or integrated entrepreneurship development model, one that combines the strengths of structured academic learning with the hands-on, context-specific training embedded in the IAS. Such integration is increasingly recommended as a pathway for improving youth entrepreneurial readiness and reducing the theory–practice gap that undermines SME sustainability in Nigeria (Nwankwo et al., 2023; Adebowale & Ojo, 2024).

4.5 Theoretical Analysis

Four major theories to guide scholarly understanding of youth entrepreneurship in this research are:

4.5.1 Necessity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory: Necessity-based entrepreneurship—where individuals start businesses out of economic compulsion rather than opportunity pursuit—is widely recognised as a dominant feature of South-Eastern Nigeria's enterprise landscape (Okechukwu & Nwekwo, 2020). Driven by high unemployment and limited access to formal wage employment, many youths and adults establish small, informal ventures primarily as survival mechanisms (Reynolds et al., 2021; Fatoki, 2020 Acs et al, (2021)). These enterprises are typically micro-scale operations concentrated in trading, retail, transport, and basic services, requiring low start-up capital and minimal formal training (World Bank, 2023; FATE Foundation, 2023; GEM, 2024). While they provide critical income, reduce household vulnerability, and contribute to poverty alleviation, such necessity-driven ventures often lack innovation capacity, growth potential, or formal operational structures (Adebisi & Akinola, 2022). Consequently, productivity remains low, and the region's economy continues to rely heavily on informal activities that constrain competitiveness and long-term development (Weber et al., 2023; Egere et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, necessity entrepreneurs in the South-East display notable resilience and adaptability, sustaining livelihoods in contexts characterised by weak institutional support and limited employment alternatives (Virk et al., 2024; Chukwuka & Imide,

2024). Comparative evidence suggests that regions dominated by necessity-driven entrepreneurship lag behind innovation-driven economies in structural transformation and sustainable growth (Ibidunni et al, 2021; Sallah & Caesar, 2020). For South-Eastern Nigeria, this trend underscores the urgent need for policies that expand access to finance, strengthen entrepreneurial education, and improve infrastructural and institutional support systems to gradually shift the region from survival-based enterprise activity toward opportunity- and innovation-led entrepreneurship (Randrianasolo, 2025; Lu et al., 2025; Coffman et al., 2025).

4.5.2 Psychological Theory: — commonly represented through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) — was advanced by Icek Ajzen in 1985 as an extension of the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action and provides a framework for understanding how individual psychological factors shape entrepreneurial decision-making (Okafor and Mensa, 2022). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers a framework for understanding entrepreneurial intention in South Eastern Nigeria, emphasizing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2020). High unemployment shapes positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship, with education shown to strengthen these intentions (Ajike et al., 2023; Otika et al., 2025). In collectivist contexts, family and community expectations strongly influence entrepreneurial choices, with social support emerging as a key predictor (Muhammed et al., 2021).

Egere et al., (2024) argued that perceived behavioral control, linked to self-efficacy, depends on access to finance, training, and mentorship, yet institutional constraints often weaken it Consequently, TPB explains the dominance of necessity-based entrepreneurship in the region: while attitudes and norms encourage business creation, limited perceived control channels intentions into small-scale survival ventures. Strengthening self-efficacy, mobilizing supportive norms, and fostering opportunity-driven attitudes remain critical for sustainable entrepreneurship (Randrianasolo, 2025; Lu et al., 2025).

4.5.3 Human Capital Theory: Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) argues that investments in education, skills, and health enhance productivity and economic outcomes (World Bank, 2024; Schultz, 2023). Applied to entrepreneurship, it highlights how human capital shapes the ability to identify opportunities, innovate, and sustain ventures. In South Eastern Nigeria, limited access to quality education and vocational training often channels entrepreneurs into low-skill, necessity-driven businesses rather than opportunity-driven enterprises (Otika et al., 2025; Egere et al., 2024). Poor health infrastructure further constrains resilience and productivity (Ogunro, 2024), while gender disparities restrict female participation in high-growth sectors (Nkanta, 2023). Weak human capital development thus reinforces necessity-based entrepreneurship, whereas stronger investments in skills and training foster innovation and opportunity-driven ventures (Randrianasolo, 2025; Lu et al., 2025).

4.5.4 Institutional Theory: Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) explains how formal and informal structures shape entrepreneurial behavior (Adelekan & Danso, 2023). In South Eastern Nigeria, formal institutions—such as regulations, policies, and financial systems—can both enable and constrain venture creation; weak enforcement and bureaucratic hurdles often discourage innovation, while supportive schemes like microfinance promote activity (Urbano et al., 2023; Nwosu & Adeyemi, 2023). Informal institutions—including cultural values, kinship ties, and community expectations—provide financing and support but may impose obligations that restrict reinvestment (Okafor & Mensah, 2022). Entrepreneurs also face institutional pressures: coercive from regulations, normative from societal expectations, and mimetic from copying successful models (Adike et al, 2022; and Adelekan & Danso, 2023).

Together, these theories highlight both structural and individual drivers of entrepreneurship, underscoring the need for a holistic, context-adjusted model.

Chapter 5: Descriptive Statistics (Data Analysis)

The Chi-Square test was applied to determine whether significant associations existed between the categorical variables under investigation. As described in the methodology section, to provide a more appropriate alternative, Fisher's Exact Test was employed to complement Chi-square analysis as sample sizes are small and cell counts fall below 5. (Memon et al., 2025). Here, sample sizes are 18 which is less than 20 and more cell counts fall below 5. In this situation, Fisher's Exact Test is ideal (Kim, 2017). Consequently, the following variables were tested:

- Respondents' highest educational qualification * entrepreneurship education in school
- Respondents' highest educational qualification * Business formality
- Respondents' highest educational qualification * Start up capital
- Respondents' Business formality * start up capital

The results of the hypothesis tests indicated either the acceptance of the null hypothesis (H_0)—that there is no statistically significant relationship between the paired variables—or the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which implies the existence of a statistically significant relationship between the paired variables.

5.1 Respondents' highest educational qualification * entrepreneurship education in school

What is your highest educational qualification? * Did you learn about entrepreneurship in school? Crosstabulation

Count

		Did you learn about entrepreneurship in school?			
		probably yes	probably not	Might or might not	Total
What is your highest educational qualification?	SSCE/GCSE	1	5	1	7
	Diploma	0	4	0	4
	Graduate/Post Graduate	3	4	0	7
Total		4	13	1	18

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	4.648[a]	4	.325	.430		
Likelihood Ratio	5.565	4	.234	.389		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	4.057			.389		
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.429[b]	1	.119	.198	.099	.067
N of Valid Cases	18					

a. 7 cells (77.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .22.

b. The standardized statistic is -1.558.

The crosstabulation shows that respondents' motivations for becoming self-employed were not strongly linked to whether they learned about entrepreneurship in school. Most youths across categories—particularly those who entered self-employment *through apprenticeship*—reported that they "probably did not" learn entrepreneurship formally. This aligns with studies showing that many young entrepreneurs in emerging economies rely on informal learning and experiential skills rather than structured educational training (Adelekan & Omotoso, 2023; Nwosu & Nwachukwu, 2024).

From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, formal education is expected to enhance entrepreneurial capabilities by providing relevant knowledge, skills, and cognitive resources (Becker, 1964; Unger et al., 2024). However, the pattern observed here suggests a weaker role of school-based entrepreneurship education in shaping

entrepreneurial entry. Instead, apprenticeship—a form of *informal human capital development*—appears more influential for many respondents, consistent with recent findings in African SMEs (Odoom & Mensah, 2023).

The Chi-Square test examined the association between respondents' highest educational qualification and whether they learned about entrepreneurship in school. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 4.648 with df = 4 produced an asymptotic p-value of .325, while the Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test yielded p = .389. These p-values are all greater than .05, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant. The linear-by-linear association (p = .119) also shows no evidence of a consistent trend across education levels.

Given that 77.8% of cells have expected counts below 5, exact tests are more appropriate—and these also confirm the lack of significance. Therefore, based on the sample of 18 respondents, educational qualification does not appear to predict whether individuals were exposed to entrepreneurship education in school.

From a Human Capital Theory perspective (Becker, 1964; Unger et al., 2024; Marvel et al., 2021), the absence of a clear association suggests that higher educational attainment did not necessarily translate into greater exposure to entrepreneurship education among respondents. This aligns with emerging research in developing economies showing that formal schooling often provides limited entrepreneurial competencies, leaving many youths dependent on informal or experiential learning pathways (Agyapong & Attram, 2021; Nabi et al., 2024).

The pattern in the crosstab—where respondents across education levels frequently reported that they "probably did not" learn entrepreneurship in school—also resonates with necessity-based entrepreneurship theory. Scholars argue that limited access to formal entrepreneurial training increases the likelihood that individuals enter self-employment due to constraints such as unemployment, financial hardship, or lack of alternatives (Reynolds et al., 2022; Williams & Youssef, 2024). In this context, the low

exposure to entrepreneurship education may partly explain why many respondents entered self-employment for necessity-driven reasons rather than opportunity-driven motivations.

Overall, while the chi-square test shows no significant association, the descriptive pattern reinforces literature suggesting that gaps in formal entrepreneurial human capital may push youths toward necessity entrepreneurship, especially in developing-country settings.

5.2 Respondents' highest educational qualification * Business formality

What is your highest educational qualification? * Is your business registered with Corporate Affairs Commission? Crosstabulation

Count

		Is your business registered with Corporate Affairs Commission?		
		Definitely not	Definitely yes	Total
What is your highest educational qualification?	SSCE/GCSE	6	1	7
	Diploma	4	0	4
	Graduate/Post Graduate	0	7	7
Total		10	8	18

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	14.529[a]	2	<.001	<.001		
Likelihood Ratio	18.989	2	<.001	<.001		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	14.215			<.001		
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.836[b]	1	.002	.002	.001	.001
N of Valid Cases	18					

a. 6 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.78.

b. The standardized statistic is 3.136.

The crosstabulation demonstrates a strong relationship between educational qualification and business registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). which is responsible for legalizing business organisations in Nigeria. Respondents with Graduate or Post-Graduate qualifications were the most likely to have registered their businesses, with all seven in this category indicating "definitely yes." In contrast, none of the Diploma holders and only one of the seven SSCE/GCSE holders reported having a registered business. The majority of respondents with lower educational qualifications—six of the SSCE/GCSE group and all four Diploma holders—reported that their businesses were "definitely not" registered.

This pattern suggests that higher education is closely associated with formal business registration. Recent studies similarly show that individuals with advanced education

demonstrate better awareness of regulatory procedures and a stronger understanding of the benefits of formalisation, such as access to finance, legal protection, and market expansion (Adegbuyi et al., 2023). Higher-educated entrepreneurs are also more capable of navigating bureaucratic processes due to stronger administrative and information-processing skills (Ene & Umeh, 2023).

Conversely, lower-educated entrepreneurs often face constraints such as limited regulatory knowledge, fear of taxation, financial barriers, and the tendency to operate within informal economic networks where business registration is not viewed as essential (Williams & Kedir, 2021; Anyanwu & Eze, 2024). These challenges contribute to persistent informality among micro-entrepreneurs in Nigeria and other developing countries.

Overall, CAC registration in the sample is concentrated almost entirely among graduates, while non-registration is concentrated among those with lower qualifications—supporting recent findings that educational attainment remains a key predictor of business formalisation in emerging economies (Adegbuyi et al., 2023; Ene & Umeh, 2023).

The Chi-Square test assessed the association between respondents' educational qualification and business registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The results show a highly significant relationship between the two variables. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 14.529 ($df = 2$, $p < .001$) and the Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test ($p < .001$) both indicate that the observed pattern is extremely unlikely to have occurred by chance. The linear-by-linear association statistic ($p = .002$) further confirms the presence of a strong positive trend, indicating that as the level of education increases, the likelihood of CAC registration also increases.

These findings are consistent with Human Capital Theory, which argues that education enhances knowledge, skills, and decision-making capacity, thereby enabling individuals to make more informed business choices (World Bank, 2024; Schultz, 2023). Individuals with higher educational qualifications may possess a stronger understanding of the regulatory environment, greater administrative competence, and increased confidence

to navigate formal registration processes (Adegbuyi et al., 2023). This is supported in the data, where all Graduate/Post-Graduate respondents reported that their businesses were registered, while those with lower qualifications were overwhelmingly unregistered.

The results also align with Institutional Theory, which posits that individuals' actions are shaped by normative, regulatory, and cognitive pressures within their environment (Urbano et al., 2023; Adelekan & Danso, 2023; Nwosu & Adeyemi, 2023). Higher-educated entrepreneurs are more likely to operate in formal institutional contexts—professional networks, academic settings, and structured work environments—that value legitimacy and compliance. Recent studies show that formalization is significantly higher among entrepreneurs embedded in environments with strong institutional pressures (Ajuwon et al., 2023). This helps explain why graduates are far more likely to register their businesses than those with lower educational qualifications.

Nabi et al. (2024) highlight that entrepreneurship education enhances self-efficacy and attitudes toward formal business practices, while Adeola & Evans (2023) shows that institutional and cultural contexts mediate how education translates into entrepreneurial behavior in African economies. Egere, Maas, and Jones (2024) further argue that in Nigeria, structural barriers often overshadow the benefits of education, limiting its direct impact on entrepreneurial entry. These insights align with the significant linear trend observed in the Chi-Square analysis, suggesting that while education shapes perceptions and attitudes, broader institutional and economic constraints determine whether intentions translate into formalized entrepreneurial action.

Overall, the Chi-Square results demonstrate that educational qualification is a significant predictor of formal business registration. The strong statistical association ($p < .001$) and the linear trend confirm that higher education levels correspond with a higher probability of CAC registration. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that business formalisation is significantly higher among entrepreneurs operating within environments characterised by strong institutional support, regulatory clarity, and normative expectations of compliance (Thai & Turkina, 2023; Adegbite et al., 2022). These results

are theoretically supported by Human Capital Theory, Institutional Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Entrepreneurship Education research, all of which highlight education as a key driver of formal entrepreneurial behavior.

5.3 Respondents' highest educational qualification * Start up capital

What is your highest educational qualification? * How did you raise funds to start your business? - Selected Choice Crosstabulation

Count

		How did you raise funds to start your business? - Selected Choice			
		Bank Loans	Savings	Family and Friends	Total
What is your highest educational qualification?	SSCE/GCSE	0	2	5	7
	Diploma	0	3	1	4
	Graduate/Post Graduate	1	2	4	7
Total		1	7	10	18

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	4.289[a]	4	.368	.435		
Likelihood Ratio	4.505	4	.342	.535		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	4.080			.535		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.747[b]	1	.387	.534	.267	.122
N of Valid Cases	18					

a. 9 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .22.

b. The standardized statistic is -.864.

The crosstabulation explores the relationship between respondents' highest educational qualification and how they obtained the funds used to start their businesses. The results show that across all education levels, most young entrepreneurs relied on informal or personal financing rather than formal bank loans. Only one graduate/postgraduate respondent reported accessing a bank loan, while no SSCE or diploma holders did so. Instead, youth with lower educational qualifications predominantly depended on family and friends (5 out of 7 SSCE holders), while diploma holders relied more on personal savings (3 out of 4). Even among graduates, informal sources—savings and family support—remained the primary channels.

This pattern aligns with studies showing that access to formal financing in Nigeria is strongly linked to education level, financial literacy, and perceived creditworthiness (Adebayo & Nwachukwu, 2023; Ezeani & Modebe, 2024). Human Capital Theory also helps explain these findings: individuals with higher education are assumed to possess greater knowledge, networks, and confidence to navigate formal financial systems, yet the results here show that even graduates face structural barriers in obtaining credit (Schultz, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

These findings reinforce the view that youths in South-Eastern Nigeria continue to rely heavily on informal financing channels due to limited access to bank loans—a trend widely observed in entrepreneurship literature in developing economies (Fatoki, 2020; Agu & Nwankwo, (2023). This underscores the persistent institutional constraints within the financial ecosystem and supports the argument that educational attainment alone does not guarantee improved access to formal financial support.

The Chi-Square analysis examined the association between respondents' highest educational qualification and their primary source of start-up funding. The Pearson Chi-Square statistic indicates no statistically significant relationship between the variables, $\chi^2(4, N = 18) = 4.289$, $p = .368$. This result is corroborated by the likelihood ratio test ($p = .342$) and the Fisher–Freeman–Halton Exact Test ($p = .535$), all of which fail to provide evidence of a meaningful association. Similarly, the linear-by-linear association test ($p = .387$) suggests the absence of a systematic trend whereby higher educational attainment corresponds to a specific financing pathway.

From a methodological standpoint, the validity of the Pearson Chi-Square test is limited because all cells have expected counts below five, violating key assumptions of the test (Field, 2021; Pallant, 2020). In such cases, exact tests are recommended, as they do not rely on large-sample approximations (Agresti, 2023). Accordingly, greater interpretive weight is placed on the Fisher–Freeman–Halton Exact Test, which confirms that the observed distribution is likely attributable to chance rather than a true underlying association.

Substantively, the findings suggest that educational attainment does not significantly shape access to start-up finance within this sample. Entrepreneurs across all educational categories rely on similar funding mechanisms, predominantly informal sources, indicating that financial access is constrained by broader structural and institutional factors rather than individual human capital alone. This outcome aligns with Human Capital Theory, which posits that education enhances skills and productivity but does not automatically translate into improved access to financial resources in environments with weak financial institutions (Becker, 1964; Ani & Ndubuisi, 2023).

The results are also consistent with empirical evidence from developing and emerging economies, where even highly educated entrepreneurs frequently depend on personal savings and family networks due to stringent collateral requirements, high interest rates, and bureaucratic barriers in formal credit markets (World Bank, 2023; GEM, 2024). Institutional theory further explains this pattern by emphasizing how regulatory inefficiencies and financial market imperfections constrain entrepreneurial financing options irrespective of education level (Nwosu & Adeyemi, 2023; Urbano et al., 2023).

Overall, the analysis indicates that while education is an important component of entrepreneurial capability, it is insufficient on its own to overcome systemic financing constraints. Policy interventions aimed at improving youth entrepreneurship outcomes must therefore go beyond human capital development to address institutional bottlenecks in access to affordable and inclusive finance.

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5.4 Respondents' Business formality * start up capital

Is your business registered with Corporate Affairs Commission? * How did you raise funds to start your business? - Selected Choice Crosstabulation

Count

		How did you raise funds to start your business? - Selected Choice			
		Bank Loans	Savings	Family and Friends	Total
Is your business registered with Corporate Affairs Commission?	Definitely not	0	4	6	10
	Definitely yes	1	3	4	8
Total		1	7	10	18

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	1.337[a]	2	.512	.798		
Likelihood Ratio	1.710	2	.425	.798		
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	1.332			.798		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.588[b]	1	.443	.711	.352	.226
N of Valid Cases	18					

a. 5 cells (83.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .44.

b. The standardized statistic is -.767.

The crosstabulation examines the relationship between business registration status (with the Corporate Affairs Commission, CAC) and sources of start-up funding among the respondents. The distribution shows that entrepreneurs who did not register their businesses were more likely to have relied on family and friends (6 out of 10) and personal savings (4 out of 10), while those who registered their businesses also primarily relied on family support (4 out of 8) and savings (3 out of 8), with only one registered business accessing a bank loan. This pattern indicates that formal financing remains largely inaccessible, even among registered enterprises, while informal funding networks dominate among all categories.

The crosstabulation explored the relationship between business registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and the primary source of start-up funding. The

Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine whether a statistically significant association existed between these two categorical variables.

Because of the violation that 83.3% of cells had expected counts below five, the Fisher–Freeman–Halton Exact Test—more reliable for small or sparse samples—was reported alongside Chi-Square. Fisher's Exact Test is appropriate when expected cell counts are low because it does not rely on large-sample approximations (Pallant, 2020).

Both the Chi-Square (Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2(2) = 1.337$, $p = .512$) and Fisher's Exact Test (Fisher–Freeman–Halton Exact Test: $p = .798$) indicate no statistically significant association between business registration and the source of start-up funding. This means that respondents' likelihood of using bank loans, personal savings, or support from family and friends did not significantly differ based on whether the business was formally registered.

These findings align with existing research on informal entrepreneurship in Nigeria and other developing economies. Scholars note that many micro-entrepreneurs rely on informal financing—particularly savings and family networks—regardless of formal business status **(**Adebayo & Nwosu, 2023; Beck & Demirgüç-Kunt, 2022). Banks often require collateral, registration documents, or credit history, which many youth entrepreneurs lack (World Bank, 2024**).** As a result, business registration does not necessarily improve access to formal finance at the early stages of venture creation.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings correspond with Necessity Entrepreneurship Theory as many youth entrepreneurs in Nigeria enter business out of economic pressure rather than strategic opportunity and necessity-driven entrepreneurs tend to rely heavily on informal financial support irrespective of legal business status (Reynolds et al., 2021; Fatoki, 2020). .

It corresponds with Institutional Theory as Banerjee et al, (2021) argued that Nigeria's weak institutional structures, bureaucratic hurdles, and high transaction costs discourage reliance on formal financial systems, with both Nguyen and Canh, (2021) and Okeke & Alonta, (2022) affirming that even when businesses are registered, these institutional inefficiencies limit their access to formal credit channels.

It also corresponds with Human Capital Theory. Although Okoye, Zhu & Guo, (2022) gave insight on how human capital can influence entrepreneurial capability, however, according to Efobi & Beecroft, (2024) it does not automatically translate into access to formal financing mechanisms in contexts where structural constraints persist

Chapter 6: Recommendations

The findings indicate that while many young people in South-Eastern Nigeria enter self-employment through apprenticeship pathways, these routes remain largely informal and insufficiently integrated into the formal education system. Recent scholarship advocates for a Hybrid Knowledge Model that merges school-based entrepreneurship education with the experiential strengths of the Indigenous Apprenticeship System (IAS). To achieve this, secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and vocational centres should embed practical components such as hands-on training, SME immersion, mentorship, business simulations, and project-based micro-venture creation within their curricula. Partnerships with local entrepreneurs—as co-instructors, mentors, and incubation hosts—would further align classroom theory with market realities.

At the institutional level, persistent barriers—including cumbersome CAC registration procedures, weak policy implementation, and limited access to finance—continue to constrain youth enterprise development. Policy reforms should focus on simplifying registration through digital platforms and decentralised service points, expanding youth-oriented microcredit schemes, and offering start-up grants or tax waivers, particularly for certified apprenticeship graduates. Establishing regional business support centres could also provide advisory services, financial literacy, and digital skills training.

The evidence suggests that necessity-driven entrepreneurship remains widespread, especially among youths with lower educational attainment or limited entrepreneurial exposure. Tailored interventions—such as subsidised training, targeted micro-grants, mentorship, and improved labour-market opportunities—are essential to shift youth entrepreneurship from survival-driven to opportunity-driven activity.

Finally, given the small sample constraints of the current study, future research should employ larger, more diverse samples and adopt mixed-method approaches to enhance the generalisability of findings.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The pilot study shows clearly that youth entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Nigeria is shaped by a mix of structural constraints, practical learning pathways, and uneven institutional support. Most respondents entered self-employment through necessity or apprenticeship rather than through formal entrepreneurship education, directly answering the research questions on the drivers, competencies, and support systems influencing youth enterprise formation. The findings highlight a persistent gap between theoretical instruction and the hands-on skills required for business survival, as well as institutional bottlenecks that limit growth. The recommendations—ranging from a hybrid knowledge model to curriculum reform, apprenticeship recognition, and improved institutional support—directly respond to these gaps by proposing actionable ways to strengthen both human-capital development and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem. Overall, the pilot study confirms that meaningful progress will depend on aligning education, apprenticeship structures, and policy reforms so young entrepreneurs can build sustainable enterprises within a supportive environment.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Questionnaires

Q1. What is your age group?

21 - 30

31 - 40

41 - 50

Q2. What is your highest educational qualification?

SSCE/GCSE

Diploma

Graduate/Postgraduate

Q3. What is your employment status?

Employed

Self-employed

Unemployed

Q4. What job do you do? Please specify the nature of your job below

Q5. Did you learn about entrepreneurship in school?

Probably yes

Probably not

Might or might not

Q6. How long have you been self-employed?

1 - 3 years

4 - 6 years

7 - 9 years and above

Q7. Why did you become self-employed?

Lack of employment

Choice and need

Through apprenticeship

Q8. How did you raise funds to start your business?

Bank loans

Savings

Family and friends

Q9. Is your business registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission?

Not too sure

Definitely not

Definitely yes

Q.10 Do you think entrepreneurial education in our schools will help our youths? Please provide details.

End of questionnaires, thank you for your response.