

**REPOSITIONING OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL FOR
SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES IN RIVERS STATE**

¹Barisoma Maxwell Brown & ²Dr. Obioma Wisdom Nwaokokorom
Accounting Education Department, School of Business Education,
Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku,
Rivers State, PMB 11, Omoku, Rivers State, Nigeria

Email: dorcasharry83@gmail.com, obiwisys@fcetomoku.edu.ng

ABSTRACTS

The comprehensive objective of this study was to empirically examine the repositioning of Entrepreneurship development as a tool for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The study was guided by two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and a total of 100 graduates, both male and female, were sampled. Data were collected using a 10-item structured questionnaire developed by the researcher to address the research questions. The instrument was validated by two experts, one in Business Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Collected data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while the z-test was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The findings indicated that fostering creativity, innovation, and effective curriculum implementation are key factors for repositioning entrepreneurship development to enhance sustainable employment among Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship development initiatives. The study recommends among others that the government should support entrepreneurship education through adequate funding.

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

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has gained unprecedented importance in contemporary times, especially amidst global financial challenges and economic uncertainties. Beyond the economy, societies face complex global issues that demand innovative solutions. Entrepreneurship and innovation have emerged as critical instruments for addressing these 21st-century challenges by fostering sustainable development, creating employment, stimulating economic growth, and enhancing human welfare (OECD, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020). Entrepreneurship encompasses diverse forms, from launching new ventures to driving innovation in large corporations, the public sector, academia, and non-profit organizations. In today's rapidly changing environment, there is an urgent need for individuals across all sectors to adopt creative, solution-oriented mindsets that enable them to identify and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for societal transformation. While not everyone may pursue entrepreneurship as a career, cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset is essential for all members of society. Both public and private sectors, alongside academia and civil society, have roles in fostering ecosystems that support innovation and enterprise creation (Igbokwe et al., 2024). Encouraging entrepreneurial thinking and behavior requires nurturing environments that motivate individuals to embrace risk, creativity, and problem-solving. Research indicates that entrepreneurship significantly contributes to economic development and the alleviation of poverty, emphasizing the need for human capital development across diverse regions and cultural contexts (Nwaokokorom 2025; Adeoye & Elegunde, 2021). By leveraging local opportunities, individuals can adapt entrepreneurial approaches to their unique environments, enhancing personal and community prosperity.

Entrepreneurship is also a key mechanism for achieving personal fulfillment while addressing unemployment, poverty, and underdevelopment. Its economic significance extends to individuals, families, and broader society. Fundamentally, entrepreneurship is a mindset focused on identifying profitable ideas and transforming them into viable ventures. Entrepreneurs are innovative, goal-oriented, and visionary individuals or teams committed to creating and sustaining businesses (Hisrich et al., 2020). In practical terms, entrepreneurship involves developing, organizing, and managing ventures while assuming financial risk. Entrepreneurship development entails equipping individuals with relevant skills and knowledge through structured training programs, mentorship, and capacity-building initiatives, thereby increasing the pool of competent entrepreneurs (Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022).

Education plays a central role in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for contemporary entrepreneurship. It encompasses the holistic development of mental, emotional, psychological, and social capabilities (Otamiri, 2014). High-quality education fosters experiential learning, enabling students to apply knowledge meaningfully while addressing personal and societal needs. Business education, as offered in Nigerian higher institutions, bridges theory and practice by combining general education with specialized areas such as Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, and Office Management (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020; 2022).

Business education aims to prepare graduates to function effectively in diverse professional settings, including as teachers, administrators, and entrepreneurs. It equips students with skills to navigate and contribute to the business environment while fostering creativity, critical thinking, and awareness of career opportunities (Ikpeama & Nwaokokorom, 2017). Some perspectives emphasize that business education primarily prepares teachers for secondary and post-secondary institutions. Proponents argue that it is a specialized professional discipline within technical and vocational education, designed to impart business competencies and skills to students (Abdullahi et al., 2021). The objectives of business education extend beyond classroom instruction to include vocational preparation, skill enhancement, career exploration, economic literacy, consumer awareness, personal financial management, and college readiness (Adewole, 2022). Graduates are expected to embody entrepreneurial spirit, demonstrate vocational competence, and actively contribute to the workforce or engage in self-employment. Consequently, entrepreneurship forms an integral part of business education, offering graduates the knowledge and skills necessary to create and sustain employment opportunities. This study, therefore, explores how entrepreneurship development can be strategically repositioned to enhance sustainable employment for business education graduates in Rivers State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite efforts to promote entrepreneurship development among business education graduates, many face severe obstacles when trying to build sustainable self-employment. These challenges include: burdensome taxation, limited government support, bureaucratic difficulties in business registration, constrained access to financing, restrictive regulations, and high inflation. Infrastructure deficiencies such as erratic power supply and poor transport networks, also drive-up operating costs (Nkwo & Eneiga, 2024; Sheyin, 2024). In addition, regulatory authorities sometimes intimidate entrepreneurs through extortion and over-policing, undermining business profitability (Umenzekwe, Onyekachi, & Ezenwafor, 2025). Moreover, insufficient encouragement and mentorship from academic institutions have weakened students' confidence and willingness to pursue entrepreneurship (Aladejebi & Amao-Taiwo, 2023). These issues suggest that current entrepreneurship programs may not be adequately positioning business education graduates for long-term employment. Hence, this study examines the role of repositioning entrepreneurship development in fostering sustainable employment, identifies the key barriers business education graduates face in Rivers State, and proposes strategies for improvement.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which repositioning entrepreneurship development can enhance sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1 Examine the viability of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State.
- 2 Examine the challenges of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

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

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were used to guide the study:

- Ho₁**; There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the viability of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.
- Ho₂**; There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the challenges of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored on the Human Capital Theory, originally proposed by Schultz (1961) and later expanded by Becker (1964) in his work, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*. The theory emerged in the 1960s in response to the need to explain income growth and the economic value of investing in people. Early contributors to the concepts underlying human capital included Karl Marx, Alfred Marshall, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus.

Human Capital Theory posits that individuals invest in themselves with the expectation of enhancing their productivity and improving their standard of living. It emphasizes that competence, knowledge, and personal attributes embodied in a person's abilities constitute economic value. Such attributes, acquired through education and experience, enable individuals to generate income and contribute meaningfully to economic activities. The theory likens investment in human capital to investment in physical capital: expenditures today are justified if they yield future economic benefits (Adeyemo, 2021). The theory frames individuals as key assets, and concepts such as innovation, productivity, technological advancement, and competitiveness are closely tied to human capital development.

CONCEPT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship refers to the willingness and ability of individuals to identify investment opportunities, establish ventures, and manage them successfully (Francis & Agum, 2019). It involves creating and running businesses, arranging commercial transactions, and taking calculated risks to generate profit, often leveraging skills acquired through education and training (Omolayo & Baba, 2020). The entrepreneurial spirit is a key prerequisite for fostering an entrepreneurial culture, which is essential for the overall economic growth of nations, particularly developing countries like Nigeria (Nwangu & Ojeifo, 2021).

Entrepreneurship also entails recognizing environmental changes and exploiting opportunities to produce goods and services for public consumption (Nwangu & Ojeifo, 2021; Paul & Ossai, 2020). Central to entrepreneurship is the acceptance of risk, creation of new ventures, and generation of wealth through innovative practices. Successful entrepreneurs share a commitment to innovation and possess talent, knowledge, diligence, and focus necessary to implement new ideas (Paul & Ossai, 2020).

Moreover, entrepreneurship requires the ability to combine various factors of production such as labor, capital, and resources to deliver goods and services (Aruwa, 2020). Effective entrepreneurship depends not only on the entrepreneur's skills and initiative but also on an enabling environment that supports business activities (Ayatse, 2021). Entrepreneurs, whether individuals or groups, play a vital role in mobilizing resources to generate output and profit, thereby contributing significantly to the development of emerging economies (Aderounmu, 2020).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES

Entrepreneurship has long been a vital aspect of societal development. A country's diverse resources, culture, and socio-economic environment often create opportunities for entrepreneurship education (Nwaokokorom et al., 2025). Viewed academically, entrepreneurship education is a specialized body of knowledge that equips learners with the skills to take calculated risks, innovate, identify and exploit market opportunities, and coordinate factors of production to create goods and services that satisfy economic needs (Kanothi, 2020; Francis & Agum, 2019). Scholars define entrepreneurship in terms of ability, innovation, and risk management. Entrepreneurship education is therefore both a process of learning and a human resource development strategy.

Contrary to common belief, entrepreneurship is not confined to small-scale businesses; many ventures that begin on a small scale can grow into large enterprises, providing broader opportunities for economic empowerment. Entrepreneurship education enables prospective entrepreneurs to pursue opportunities, fulfill societal needs, and innovate while managing associated risks (Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT CREATION

Employment can be understood as the engagement of individuals, typically aged 15 years and above, in economic activities that contribute to national output and generate income (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Employment encompasses participation in the production of goods and services, contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and earning remuneration for such activities.

Entrepreneurship development refers to structured programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing individuals' entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and capabilities, thereby increasing the number of competent entrepreneurs in society (Rashmiranjan & Amitava, 2020; Adeyemo, 2021). The ultimate goal of entrepreneurship development is to accelerate the creation of new ventures, promote innovation, and generate employment opportunities, which, in turn, foster economic growth. It focuses on individuals seeking to start or expand businesses, with attention to their growth potential, creativity, and innovative capacity (Igbokwe et al. 2024).

Entrepreneurship plays a critical role in the growth and development of national economies, particularly in regions where entrepreneurial culture is underdeveloped. Studies show a positive correlation between education and individuals' inclination to become entrepreneurs, as well as the success of their entrepreneurial endeavors (Aladejebi & Amao-Taiwo, 2023). Therefore, promoting entrepreneurship education is essential to nurturing a skilled, innovative, and self-reliant workforce capable of driving sustainable employment and economic development.

CHALLENGES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria faces several challenges that impede its effectiveness. According to recent studies, major obstacles include curriculum inadequacies, poor implementation,

delayed introduction of programs, shortage of qualified lecturers, and insufficient funding (Nwaokokorom, 2025; Igbokwe et al., 2024).

The review of related literature reveals that entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in equipping graduates with skills for self-employment, innovation, and economic development. Contemporary studies consistently show that well-structured entrepreneurship programs enhance students' ability to create employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and contribute positively to national development (Onuma, 2020; Akhuemoukhan et al., 2021; Nwaokokorom, 2023). Scholars also emphasize that entrepreneurship education is most effective when it integrates practical experience, mentorship, and continuous learning, allowing graduates to adapt their skills to changing economic environments (Mania, 2021; Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022).

Despite the demonstrated benefits, several challenges persist. These include inadequate curriculum content, poor implementation of entrepreneurship programs, late introduction of courses, lack of competent instructors, and insufficient funding (Igbokwe; Nwaokokorom et al., 2025). Such limitations hinder the full realization of entrepreneurship education's potential to promote sustainable employment among business education graduates. Furthermore, while existing research highlights the importance of entrepreneurship education for self-employment and job creation, there is a lack of focused empirical studies examining how repositioning entrepreneurship development specifically affects sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State.

This gap underscores the need for the present study, which aims to explore the viability, challenges, and strategies for repositioning entrepreneurship development to enhance sustainable employment opportunities for business education graduates in Rivers State. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to knowledge, policy formulation, and practical strategies for improving entrepreneurship education and graduate employability.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine the role of repositioning entrepreneurship development in enhancing sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. The population comprised 180 graduates from selected institutions. From this population, a sample of 100 graduates was drawn using a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal opportunity for selection. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled *Repositioning Entrepreneurship Development for Sustainable Employment of Business Education Graduates in Rivers State Questionnaire (REDSEBEG)*. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first gathered demographic information, while the second addressed issues relating to repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates. The instrument employed a four-point Likert scale with the response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), scored 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. To ensure validity, the instrument was reviewed by two research experts; one from Business Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation. Observations and feedback from this process were used to refine the final draft. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the assistance of a trained research assistant who was briefed on the distribution and retrieval procedures. Out of the 100 copies administered, 98 were successfully retrieved, a rate deemed manageable for analysis. Reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using the z-test at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What is the viability of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean scores of male and female students (respondents) on the viability of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	MALE		FEMALE		XX	RANK	REMARK
		N	X	N	X			
1.	Self-employed and self-reliant	58	3.34	40	3.20	3.27	3 rd	Agreed
2.	Creative and innovative	58	3.40	40	3.18	3.29	1 st	Agreed
3.	Acquisition of skills	58	2.00	40	2.11	2.06	5 th	Disagreed
4.	Entrepreneurial empowerment	58	2.46	40	2.34	2.40	4 th	Disagreed
5.	Stimulates and develops the individuals	58	3.57	40	3.01	3.29	1 st	Agreed

The results presented in Table 1 show that both male and female respondents agreed that being creative and innovative reflects the viability of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State, with a mean score of 3.29.

Research Question Two: What are the challenges of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State?

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

S/N	Items	Male		Female		XX	RANK	REMARK
		N	X	N	X			
6.	Curriculum content	58	2.87	40	2.52	2.70	2 nd	Agreed
7.	Ineffective implementation	58	2.52	40	3.87	3.20	1 st	Agreed
8.	Lateness in starting entrepreneurship education	58	2.64	40	2.36	2.41	3 rd	Disagreed
9.	Lack of competent lecturers	58	2.33	40	1.56	1.95	4 th	Disagreed
10.	Poor funding	58	1.83	40	1.05	1.44	5 th	Disagreed

The results presented in Table 2 show that respondents agreed that ineffective implementation is a key challenge to repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State, with a mean score of 3.20.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

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

Table 3: Z-TEST results for male and female of the repositioning entrepreneurship development for suitable employment of business education graduates.

S/N		N	MEAN	SD	DF	z-cal	z-tab	REMARK
	MALE	58	2.95	0.36	98	0.91	1.96	Agreed
	FEMALE	40	2.77	0.11				

Table 3 presents the results of the test for statistical significance regarding the responses of male and female students on the viability of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. The table shows that the calculated Z-value of 0.91 is less than the critical Z-value of 1.96, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference between the opinions of male and female students on this issue.

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

Table 4: Z-TEST results on the challenges of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of easiness education graduates.

S/N		N	MEAN	SD	DF	z-cal	z-tab	REMARK
	MALE	58	2.44	0.22	98	-1.71	1.96	Agreed
	FEMALE	40	2.27	0.17				

Table 4 presents the results of the statistical significance test on the challenges of repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates in Rivers State. The table indicates that the calculated Z-value of -1.71 is less than the critical Z-value of 1.96, showing that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students regarding these challenges.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Viability of Repositioning Entrepreneurship Development for Sustainable Employment of Business Education Graduates in Rivers State: The findings show that repositioning entrepreneurship development enhances sustainable employment for Business Education graduates through creativity, innovation, self-reliance, empowerment, skill acquisition, and personal development. Male and female students shared similar views, with no significant difference. This supports recent studies indicating that entrepreneurship education builds creativity, innovation, risk-taking, resourcefulness, and confidence (Onuma, 2020; Mania, 2021). Such competencies enable graduates to identify opportunities and achieve sustainable self-employment (Akhuemoukhan et al., 2021; Ogunleye & Akinola, 2022).

Challenges of Repositioning Entrepreneurship Development for Sustainable Employment of Business Education Graduates in Rivers State: The study found that key challenges to repositioning entrepreneurship development include inadequate curriculum content, poor implementation, late introduction of entrepreneurship education, unqualified lecturers, and insufficient funding. No significant difference existed between male and female students' responses. Recent studies show that weak programme implementation and limited institutional support hinder entrepreneurship outcomes and graduates' readiness for self-employment (Igbokwe, 2024; Nwaokokorom, 2025). Strengthening curriculum design, providing skilled instructors, and ensuring adequate funding are crucial to addressing these challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that if repositioning entrepreneurship development for sustainable employment of business education graduates is not effectively implemented, graduate unemployment will remain high. Additionally, government support, particularly through funding, policy backing, and inclusion in national programs such as the NYSC, is critical to enhancing the impact of entrepreneurship development on graduate self-employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. Efforts should be made to fully implement repositioning entrepreneurship development programs, as they play a vital role in reducing unemployment among business education graduates.
2. The government should support entrepreneurship education through adequate funding and by embedding it effectively in the school curriculum.

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