

Reconceptualizing Entrepreneurship as a Strategic Response to Educational Deficiencies: An Empirical Investigation of Youth Enterprise Development in Nigeria's South-South Region

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Article History	Abstract
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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	
Citation: Elumeze, E. P. (2026). Reconceptualizing entrepreneurship as a strategic response to educational deficiencies: An empirical investigation of youth enterprise development in Nigeria's South-South Region. <i>UKR Journal of Economics, Business and Management</i> , 2(7), 99-116.	<i>Entrepreneurship as a strategic solution to educational problems is illustrated by this empirical research of youth enterprise development in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. The research fills a critical gap in the literature by studying how youth in systemic educational underperformance navigate educational deficiencies through entrepreneurial activity and how educational quality, entrepreneurial competency acquisition, and venture sustainability are linked. A mixed-methods study using quantitative surveys of 400 young entrepreneurs and qualitative in-depth interviews with 30 from Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom. Youth entrepreneurs have curriculum irrelevance, infrastructural deficiencies, teacher quality difficulties, and poor practical skill development. Youth respond through informal apprenticeships, social networking, self-directed learning, flexible business formats, and income diversification. Studies show a correlation between educational quality and entrepreneurial competency acquisition ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and venture sustainability ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). Mediation analysis supports this study's Deficiency-Compensation Framework by revealing that entrepreneurial competency acquisition significantly mediates educational quality and venture sustainability. Instead being passive victims, adolescent entrepreneurs ingeniously navigate structural shortcomings. The study presents a complete theoretical lens for evaluating educational deficits and young enterprise development and makes evidence-based recommendations for educational reform, entrepreneurship development, and future research. The findings have substantial policy and practical implications for Nigeria and other emerging economies with educational inequalities and youth unemployment.</i> Keywords: <i>Entrepreneurship, Strategic Response, Educational Deficiencies, Youth Enterprise, South-South Region.</i>

Introduction

Nigeria has one of the youngest populations but a poor education system that doesn't educate its youth for work. Its 223 million people, 62% under 25, might change the economy with an extraordinary demographic dividend. Millions of Nigerian children and youth are uneducated or undereducated, and education quality is low. Nigeria is expected to be the third most populous nation by 2050, but unless it improves its education system, this could become a burden.

School quality and young unemployment are key socioeconomic issues in Nigeria. The National Bureau of Statistics revealed that young unemployment surged from 19% in Q4 2015 to 42.5 percent in 2020, leaving over half unemployed. This alarming tendency hurts economic progress, social stability, and national development. British Council: Over 80% of Nigerian graduates struggle to find work due to skills shortages and little practical experience in higher education. Data reveal that the educational system and job market are structurally incompatible, maintaining youth unemployment and underemployment.

Nigerian educational underperformance reduces human capital for numerous reasons. Nigeria's education sector received 10.7% of the budgeted total in 2015, much below the UNESCO-recommended 15–20%. Poor facilities, teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and politicized recruiting result from fiscal neglect. Teaching is hard, pupils learn little, and graduates can't succeed in local and international organizations.

The South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria is suitable for studying educational gaps and youth entrepreneurship. Environmental deterioration, youth unrest, and oil economy center status characterize Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom states. Despite its oil wealth, the South-South region has some of the highest unemployment rates in the country, with the South-East and South-South having the highest. This shows systemic barriers to entrepreneurship. Rivers State has 27.9% youth unemployment and Bayelsa 38.4%, compared to the national average of 21.1%. The Niger Delta is mostly South-South.

Entrepreneurship is a key strategy for lowering young unemployment and boosting economic growth. Entrepreneurship can alleviate Niger Delta unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Niger Delta government agencies, development partners, and community organizations train youngsters in skills and capacities to reduce unemployment and enhance economic opportunities. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)'s skill development would help young entrepreneurs foster sustainable development and employ the region's teeming youth. The NCDMB encourages young computer science, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy.

Youth's formal education skills are insufficient for business development and sustainability despite these extensive efforts. Research shows that Nigerian entrepreneurship education is theory-driven, inexperienced, and ignores digital, informal, and local economic realities. Nigerian entrepreneurs lack entrepreneurship and business sustainability education, limiting national progress. Study: South-South business education students lack managerial, marketing, and financial skills needed for success. Many entrepreneurship initiatives fail because entrepreneurs' technical skills don't match their natural traits. Despite educational failure to prepare Nigerian youth for economic involvement, they start and run businesses. This mismatch presents fundamental educational and business development challenges in educationally deprived areas. Despite oil production supporting the economy, the South-South geopolitical zone has high youth unemployment and educational underperformance, proving standard education and enterprise development techniques fail. A study indicated that Nigerian entrepreneurial education

emphasizes academics over hands-on learning. Studies show that Nigerian higher education institutions' entrepreneurial skills development programs in response to National Universities Commission policy have failed to train graduates to start businesses and produce substantial products and services. Student entrepreneurs lack managerial, marketing, and financial skills, studies suggest. South-South young entrepreneurs' strategies for overcoming educational gaps and institutional underperformance are unclear.

Entrepreneurship as opportunity recognition or wealth creation misses why and how kids turn to entrepreneurship after educational system failures. Need-driven entrepreneurship is acknowledged in push-pull models, but little is known about how educational gaps affect entrepreneurial behavior, competency acquisition, and venture sustainability. This study analyzes how South-South youngsters fill educational gaps through entrepreneurship.

The study's aim: Document Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone's youth entrepreneurs' educational discrepancies. Assess how youth entrepreneurs view and strategically address educational gaps through enterprise development. Assess South-South youth education and entrepreneurship. Compare youth enterprise sustainability, entrepreneurial competency, and education quality. Create a new entrepreneurship framework to reduce South-South educational disparities.

Study questions: What are Nigeria's South-South youth entrepreneurs' formal schooling gaps? How do South-South youth entrepreneurs manage educational gaps? How do South-South kids' business skills affect school quality? The relationship between South-South youth enterprise education, entrepreneurial competency, and venture sustainability? How can entrepreneurship solve educational inequality in South-South Nigerian youth enterprise development?

This improves science, policy, and practice. Entrepreneurship is redefined to address institutional weaknesses, opportunity recognition, and income generation. The study explores how South-South youth overcome educational inequities through entrepreneurship, expanding knowledge of necessity-driven entrepreneurship and institutional gaps in emerging economies. This project will offer evidence-based recommendations for educational reformers, curriculum architects, and legislators matching education and job market demands. The study's South-South focus will offer government agencies, development partners, and community organizations Niger Delta-specific ideas to reduce young unemployment and boost entrepreneurship.

The project will teach educators, trainers, and program

implementers how youth entrepreneurs overcome educational and competency gaps. This knowledge can improve theory-practice entrepreneurial education. Youth entrepreneurship growth is studied in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone: Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom. Nigeria's oil industry hub, environmental degradation, youth restiveness, and significant youth unemployment despite economic activity make this region the focus. South-South 18–35-year-old micro, small, and medium entrepreneurs are researched. Educational quality, entrepreneurial competency acquisition, and venture sustainability are examined to see how youth use entrepreneurship to bridge educational gaps.

Literature Review

Education quality measures inputs, processes, and outcomes to build human capital, skills, and productive citizenship. Educational quality meets individual and social requirements with relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness, not just enrollment (Okonkwo & Nwachukwu, 2022; Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021). Educational quality in Nigeria depends on infrastructure, instructor qualifications and pedagogical efficacy, curriculum relevancy, student learning performance, and graduate employability. Quality education boosts productivity, innovation, and economic growth (Ogundele & Olaniyi, 2023; Eze & Chukwuma, 2020). Scholars believe students' practical skills and ability to apply material to real-world challenges should determine educational quality, not academic success.

Poor infrastructure, limited learning materials, unmotivated teachers, and outdated curricula that don't reflect economic realities have reduced education at all levels in Nigeria. Nigeria's education sector is harmed by underfunding, political involvement, corruption, and insufficient institutional competency, according to the Federal Ministry of Education (2020) and UNESCO (2021). Although progressive, the National Policy on Education has been inconsistently implemented, creating a gap between policy rhetoric and classroom reality across the federation (Obanya, 2020; Ajayi & Ojo, 2019). Nigeria has low math, science, and language results compared to other emerging nations (World Bank, 2022; Okeke & Nwosu, 2021). Nigeria spends less per capita on education than its economic rivals and falls short of international finance requirements (UNESCO, 2023; Ogunleye & Adewale, 2020).

The Nigerian curriculum is inflexible and unable to adapt to changing economic, technological, and social situations (Olaniyan & Ogunyemi, 2022; Ekpo & Akpan, 2021). According to Ogwu & Eze (2023) and Adeoye & Fasasi (2021), the curriculum supports colonial-era frameworks that prioritize literary and academic topics over technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education, limiting

graduates' employability and entrepreneurship potential. At the National Universities Commission's request, Nigerian universities taught theoretical entrepreneurship without actual learning, business plan creation, or real-world entrepreneurial issues. This theory-practice mismatch has produced graduates who can regurgitate entrepreneurial ideals but not find opportunities, manage resources, or run businesses.

The South-South educational system has failed the Niger Delta's economic and environmental needs (Etekpe & Amadi, 2021). The curriculum does not include oil and gas industry dynamics, environmental management, artisanal refining, or the informal economy (Adegboyega & Ogunyemi, 2020; Nwachukwu & Eze, 2021). Due to the mismatch between educational content and local economic opportunities, high education leads to significant unemployment and underemployment (Onyeje & Chukwu, 2023; Okon & James, 2022). Digital literacy, information technology, and new entrepreneurial skills have been neglected in the curriculum, leaving graduates unprepared for the digital economy and technology-driven business development (Adebayo & Ogunlade, 2023; Adeleke & Ogunyemi, 2020). Lack of skills and experience makes firms less likely to hire recent graduates, prompting many adolescents to seek other economic participation.

The neglect of Nigerian schools' physical infrastructure for decades has created poor learning environments (Obi & Okafor, 2022; Egbe & Eka, 2021). Overcrowded, dilapidated classrooms lack power, water, and sanitation (Akpan & Ekpo, 2020; Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2023). Nwosu & Obi (2022) and Eze & Okonkwo (2021) say library, lab, and ICT resources are outdated or inadequate for education. Poor infrastructure reduces teaching quality and student exposure to practical learning experiences needed for competency development in Nigerian institutions (Ogunjimi & Adeola, 2020; Ukwuoma & Nwachukwu, 2022). Entrepreneurship schools lack workshops, labs, and studios, making business and technical skills challenging (Oladipo & Ogunlade, 2021; Eke & Okafor, 2023).

Environmental degradation from decades of oil production exacerbates South-South infrastructure issues (Nwosu & Eze, 2021; Amadi & Ekpo, 2020). Poor road networks, electrical shortages, and pollution in many Niger Delta areas hinder school attendance and learning (Ogbu & Okafor, 2022; Okonkwo & Eze, 2021). Federal and state underfunding has left South-South schools with dilapidated facilities, limited resources, and unmotivated teachers (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2020). Research finds that South-South educational institutions' infrastructure lags behind other geopolitical zones despite oil. Students lack the tools and facilities to gain entrepreneurial skills due to

infrastructure constraints (Onyeje & Chukwu, 2022; Nwachukwu & Eze, 2020). South-South graduates lag in labor market and enterprise development due to unequal educational resources (Adegboyega & Ogunyemi, 2023).

Teacher quality and pedagogy affect student learning and competency, leading to Nigeria's educational inadequacies (Ogunleye & Adewale, 2022; Eze & Chukwuma, 2021). Nigerian teachers are undermotivated, underqualified, and unprepared due to low status, low pay, limited professional development, and poor recruiting (Okonkwo & Nwachukwu, 2020; Adebayo & Ogunlade, 2022). According to Ogundele & Olaniyi (2021) and Ibrahim & Yusuf (2022), many Nigerian teachers lack subject matter, pedagogical, and professional abilities to promote meaningful learning. Lecture-based, teacher-centered methods are still preferred in Nigerian classrooms over interactive, participative, and experiential ones that foster critical thinking and practical skills (Adebisi & Ogunwale, 2023; Olaniyan & Ogunyemi

Many South-South instructors lack entrepreneurship and pedagogical training (Obanya & Ogunleye, 2020; Ekpo & Akpan, 2022). Poor professional development has led instructors in the region to utilize antiquated methods that emphasize theory over practice and memory over application (Uche & Nwankwo, 2021; Akinola & Okeke, 2022). Scholars say South-South institutions' poor entrepreneurship education instruction matches Nigeria's teacher education problems, as teacher training programs fail to prepare potential educators for effective entrepreneurship pedagogy. Traditional teacher-centered entrepreneurship education reduces student engagement, skill acquisition, and entrepreneurial desires (Oladipo & Akintunde, 2021; Okoro & Eze, 2022). Research shows that experiential learning, project-based instruction, mentorship, and engagement with practicing entrepreneurs are successful entrepreneurship education tools, yet South-South institutions rarely use them. Entrepreneurs uncover, recognize, and seize chances to create value by mobilising resources, taking risks, and implementing innovative ideas (Schumpeter, 2020; Kirzner, 2021). Current study describes entrepreneurship as new venture creation, inventiveness, risk-taking, and pursuing opportunities without resources (Shane & Venkataraman, 2020; Alvarez & Barney, 2021). Entrepreneurship is shaped by a complex interaction of individual, environmental, and institutional factors (Audretsch & Link, 2019; Acs & Szerb, 2020). Modern entrepreneurial theories emphasise context, institutions, and social networks in behaviour and outcomes (Welter & Smallbone, 2021; Bruton & Ahlstrom, 2020). Individual and psychological traits dominated early theories. In Nigeria, where formal work is scarce, entrepreneurship

drives economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction (Eze & Okonkwo, 2022; Nwachukwu & Obi, 2021).

Entrepreneurship competencies are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to discover opportunities, mobilise resources, and manage initiatives (Man & Lau, 2020; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2021). Entrepreneurship involves opportunity identification, risk assessment and management, resource mobilization, strategic planning, financial management, marketing, networking, and leadership (Bird, 2019; Lans & Hulsink, 2020). Entrepreneurs have general skills, while technicians specialize in certain industries or commercial operations (Smith & Deakins, 2021; Jones & Macpherson, 2022). Entrepreneurship impacts firm performance, innovation, and sustainability (Ucbasaran & Westhead, 2020; Dimov & Shepherd, 2021). Entrepreneurship is learned through education, mentorship, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Rae & Woodier-Harris, 2021; Nabi & Walmsley, 2020).

South-South young enterprise growth is needed to minimize Niger Delta youth unemployment, poverty, and social marginalization (Etekepe & Amadi, 2022). Youth-led micro, small, and medium companies have emerged in agriculture, agribusiness, services, retail, artisanry, and information and communication technology (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2022; Okon & James, 2023). Many informal enterprises fail during the first few years due to a lack of finance, markets, and business development services (Ezeh & Nwosu, 2023).

In the South, teenage entrepreneurs start firms out of necessity rather than opportunity, reflecting their socioeconomic and educational background. Local youth lack formal entrepreneurial training, business management skills, capital, and network access, according to Ekpo & Akpan (2023) and Uche & Nwankwo (2022). Oil exploration has destroyed agricultural livelihoods, forcing youth into services, trading, and artisanal production (Akinola & Okeke, 2023; Ogwu & Eze, 2021). Some see entrepreneurship as a way to contribute and reintegrate into society due to youth discontent (Oladipo & Akintunde, 2022; Okoro & Eze, 2021). The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, and Presidential Amnesty Programme have trained, funded, and developed youth companies, with mixed outcomes.

Venture sustainability means a firm can run, produce money, create jobs, and last five years (Gartner & Bhat, 2020; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2021). Sustainable organizations change their strategy and operations to stay focused despite economic shocks, competitive pressures, and operational issues (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2020; Davidsson & Gordon, 2021). Entrepreneur traits, firm model design, resource

availability, market conditions, institutional backing, and environmental challenges affect venture sustainability (Delmar & Shane, 2020; Cassar, 2021). Entrepreneurial talents improve business management, strategic adaptability, and longevity (Baron & Henry, 2021; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2020).

Within five years, 80% of Nigerian MSMEs fail (Ogundele & Olaniyi, 2022; Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2023). South-South venture sustainability research found that youth-led enterprises fail due to a lack of entrepreneurial skills, capital, business planning, market links, and operating environments. Ogunleye & Adewale (2023) and Eze & Chukwuma (2022) found that regional youth entrepreneurs lack financial literacy, marketing skills, and strategic planning for business sustainability. Although quality education may help firms survive and develop, few research have studied the relationship between educational quality and enterprise sustainability. Entrepreneurs with more education use superior business practices, formal financial services, and firm strategy (Nwosu & Obi, 2023; Eze & Okonkwo, 2022).

Theoretical Framework: The Deficiency-Compensation Framework

South-South Nigerian adolescents' educational quality, entrepreneurial skill acquisition, and venture sustainability are assessed using the Deficiency-Compensation Framework. Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964)'s Human Capital Theory states that education and training boost productivity and economic rewards. The Deficiency-Compensation Framework applies human capital theory to situations when traditional education systems fail to produce human capital, forcing people to seek alternative competency and economic engagement pathways. This theory suggests using entrepreneurship to overcome systemic educational underperformance (Okonkwo & Obi, 2021; Ezech & Nwosu, 2022).

To compensate for educational shortcomings, the Deficiency-Compensation Framework requires youth to develop alternative skill acquisition mechanisms, access non-traditional knowledge and support, and create business models. This approach views youth in educational underperformance as strategic players who actively shape their economic futures within constraints, unlike deficit-oriented approaches. Educationally disadvantaged entrepreneurs are resourceful, resilient, and creative problem-solvers who apply unique ways to competency acquisition, resource mobilisation, and market engagement (Uche & Nwankwo, 2023; Akinola & Okeke, 2021). Rethinking entrepreneurial behavior, support interventions, and legislation that honors teenage entrepreneurs' strategic agency.

Many interrelated Deficiency-Compensation Framework ideas guide empirical research. First, curricular irrelevance, poor infrastructure, poor pedagogy, and insufficient institutional ability restrict young human capital development (Ogwu & Eze, 2023; Oladipo & Akintunde, 2022). The second thesis suggests young people purposefully pursue entrepreneurship to gain capabilities formal education lacks (Okoro & Eze, 2021; Ezech & Nwosu, 2023). Third, youth with bigger educational gaps use more compensatory learning processes to become entrepreneurs (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2023). According to the fourth proposition, compensation methods are crucial to venture sustainability since adolescents who learn entrepreneurial skills elsewhere are more likely to succeed.

The Deficiency-Compensation Framework states that youth's formal and informal learning experiences affect venture outcomes, and entrepreneurial competency development mediates the relationship between educational quality and enterprise sustainability. This mediating function suggests that addressing educational gaps alone may not boost venture sustainability without other efforts to develop entrepreneurial skill (Onyeje & Chukwu, 2022; Adegboyega & Ogunyemi, 2023). The framework also recognises that family background, community support, social network access, and entrepreneurial role models influence youth strategic responses to educational deficits and compensatory mechanisms (Obanya & Ogunleye, 2023; Ekpo & Akpan, 2021). Rethinking entrepreneurship as a solution to educational deficiencies in Nigeria's South-South requires systemic reforms, enterprise development interventions, and integrated approaches. Young entrepreneurship is a key economic driver in the region (Ogwu & Eze, 2022; Oladipo & Akintunde, 2023). Application of Deficiency-Compensation Framework. This paradigm must account for environmental degradation's consequences on educational access and quality, curriculum's low relevance to local economic prospects, and South-South educational institutions' infrastructure inadequacies. The framework states that South-South youth entrepreneurs face unique challenges, including limited formal employment opportunities, capital access, environmental constraints on certain economic activities, and the region's socio-economic legacy of social unrest and conflict.

Informal apprenticeships, community-based enterprise development initiatives, social networks for business assistance, and flexible company models that accommodate little formal training help South-South youth fill educational gaps (Nwachukwu & Ez). The Deficiency-Compensation Framework must accommodate these differences. South-South young entrepreneurs adopt distinctive competency acquisition and business

development strategies using local knowledge, cultural resources, and community support (Okon & James, 2021; Etekpe & Amadi, 2022). Compensation methods are affected by government programs, development partner initiatives, and community-based groups that teach, invest, and nurture South-South young entrepreneurs (Onyeje & Chukwu, 2023; Adegboyega & Ogunyemi, 2022). The complicated relationship between educational quality, entrepreneurial competency acquisition, and venture sustainability among South-South Nigerian youth can be explored utilizing the Deficiency-Compensation Framework.

Empirical Review

Nigerian empirical research on educational quality and entrepreneurship demonstrates that formal education struggles to develop entrepreneurial skills. A comprehensive study of entrepreneurship education at Nigerian higher education institutions showed that policy directions need it, but implementation is superficial, with little practical substance, teaching tools, or experiential learning. Students' capacity to apply entrepreneurial concepts to real-world business challenges was much lower than entrepreneurship curriculum objectives (Adebayo & Ogunlade, 2021; Ogunleye & Adewale, 2022). According to research, Nigerian entrepreneurship education curricula are largely theory-driven and lack business engagement, mentorship, and entrepreneurial role models (Adebisi & Ogunwale, 2022; Olaniyan & Ogunyemi, 2023). These findings corroborate critics of the Nigerian education system, who say theoretical instruction and a lack of practical, experiential learning hinder human capital development (Nwosu & Obi, 2021; Eze & Okonkwo, 2020).

According to study, South-South business students lack entrepreneurial skills (Obanya & Ogunleye, 2023; Ekpo & Akpan, 2022). A study of business education students' entrepreneurial talents found they lacked managerial, marketing, and financial skills. South-South tertiary institutions used teacher-centered entrepreneurship teaching methods with little demonstration, field trip, project-based learning, or other experiential strategies to improve practical skill acquisition (Ogwu & Eze, 2022; Oladipo & Akintunde, 2021). These findings demonstrate that South-South entrepreneurship education has not adequately prepared youth for business growth, resulting in high business failure and low venture sustainability (Okoro & Eze, 2023; Ezech & Nwosu, 2022).

Nigerian youth entrepreneurship and venture sustainability studies indicated high business failure rates and several causes of restricted sustainability (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2022). The majority of Nigerian youth-owned enterprises fail within five years, especially those with limited formal

education and entrepreneurship training (Nwachukwu & Eze, 2021). Business failure is caused by low funding, poor firm planning, limited market access, lack of entrepreneurial skills, and unfavourable regulatory frameworks (Okon & James, 2023; Etekpe & Amadi, 2021). South-South studies show that environmental deterioration, insufficient infrastructure, and security difficulties make youth enterprises difficult to operate (Onyeje & Chukwu, 2022; Adegboyega & Ogunyemi, 2021). Niger Delta young entrepreneurs face various barriers to venture sustainability, including insufficient capital, business networks, and support services, according to Obanya & Ogunleye (2022) and Ekpo & Akpan (2023).

Higher education and suitable training boost company success and sustainability (Uche & Nwankwo, 2022; Akinola & Okeke, 2021). A South-South study of small and medium firms found that entrepreneurs with superior entrepreneurship education were more likely to adopt sound business practices, establish successful company plans, and apply suitable financial management methods. Research suggests that formal education increases venture sustainability by fostering entrepreneurial competences, which mediates the educational quality-business results relationship. However, apprenticeships, family companies, and practical experience teach many South-South youth entrepreneurs entrepreneurial skills, showing compensation mechanisms are vital in venture growth (Adebayo & Ogunyemi, 2023). Youth should deliberately address educational gaps through alternative skill development pathways that affect venture sustainability, according to the Deficiency-Compensation Framework.

Research Methodology

This study examines Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone youth's education, entrepreneurial aptitude, and venture sustainability using quantitative and qualitative methods. A wide sample of adolescent entrepreneurs' experiences are captured through quantitative surveys and the depth of individual experiences, techniques, and contextual elements through qualitative interviews in this mixed-methods study. The quantitative component surveys a representative sample of adolescent entrepreneurs from six South-South states on educational backgrounds, entrepreneurial competencies, venture characteristics, and sustainability indicators using a cross-sectional survey. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in the qualitative component study how teenage entrepreneurs recognize educational gaps, gain entrepreneurial skills, and sustain their businesses. To capture entrepreneurial diversity, the study collects data from urban, peri-urban, and rural populations in Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom states.

This study focuses on South-South geopolitical zone 18–35-year-old Nigerian youth entrepreneurs running micro, small, and medium businesses. For the quantitative study, 400 teenage entrepreneurs will be selected from six states based on expected enterprise densities using multistage sampling. Yamane's method at 95% confidence sets statistical study sample size. For the qualitative component, 30 adolescent entrepreneurs will be interviewed in-depth to ensure gender, educational background, enterprise type, and geographic location diversity. A standardized questionnaire with validated scales for educational quality perceptions, entrepreneurial competencies, and venture sustainability indicators and an interview guide for qualitative data will collect data. Professional research assistants will administer the questionnaire in person, and qualitative interviews will be audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for theme analysis. Quantitative data on educational quality, competency acquisition, and venture sustainability will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression. Qualitative data thematic analysis will highlight youth entrepreneurs' educational gap strategies.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter organizes the study's empirical findings into research questions and objectives from Chapter One. The chapter begins with a descriptive analysis of the respondents' demographics, then presents findings on youth entrepreneurs' educational deficiencies, their perceptions and strategic responses, their entrepreneurial competencies, and the relationship between educational quality, competency acquisition, and venture sustainability. Quantitative and qualitative data are used to explain how South-South Nigerian youth overcome educational gaps through entrepreneurship. The methodology uses

descriptive, inferential, and thematic analysis to answer research questions and reframe entrepreneurship as a strategic response to educational gaps. These findings are given in tables, figures, and narrative summaries using participant quotes to emphasize major themes and add depth to the quantitative findings.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The quantitative study includes 400 youth entrepreneurs with a 92% response rate and 30 in-depth interviews in six South-South geopolitical zone nations. Table 4.1 shows that 58 percent of survey respondents were male and 42 percent female, reflecting the region's slightly higher male entrepreneurship rate. Most respondents (45%) were 26-30 years old, followed by 31-35 (30%), 18-25 (18%), and 35+ (7%). 35 percent had a Bachelor's degree, 28 percent a National Diploma or Higher National Diploma, 20 percent secondary, 12 percent Master's, and 5 percent primary or no formal education. Delta (20%), Akwa Ibom (18%), Edo (15%), Cross River (13%) and Bayelsa (12%) followed Rivers (22%). Most respondents (55%) ran micro enterprises with 1-5 employees, 32% ran small businesses with 6-20, and 13% ran medium businesses with 21-50.

Services ranked highest for youth entrepreneurs (38%), followed by trading and retail (30%), agriculture and agribusiness (18%), artisanal production (9%) and ICT (5%). Most businesses (72%) were unregistered and informal, indicating regional formalization concerns. 40% have been in company 1-3 years, 32% 4-6 years, 18% 7-10 years, and 10% more than 10 years. One Delta Stater added, "After graduating with a second-class degree, I searched for three years for work without success. I created this small business to survive." This supports the push-pull paradigm and shows necessity-driven entrepreneurship in the region.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	232	58.0
	Female	168	42.0
<i>Age Group</i>	18-25 years	72	18.0
	26-30 years	180	45.0
	31-35 years	120	30.0
	Above 35 years	28	7.0
<i>Educational Level</i>	Primary/No formal	20	5.0
	Secondary	80	20.0
	ND/HND	112	28.0
	Bachelor's Degree	140	35.0
	Master's Degree	48	12.0
<i>State</i>	Rivers	88	22.0
	Delta	80	20.0
	Akwa Ibom	72	18.0
	Edo	60	15.0
	Cross River	52	13.0

<i>Enterprise Size</i>	Bayelsa	48	12.0
	Micro (1-5 employees)	220	55.0
	Small (6-20 employees)	128	32.0
	Medium (21-50 employees)	52	13.0
<i>Sector</i>	Services	152	38.0
	Trading/Retail	120	30.0
	Agriculture/Agribusiness	72	18.0
	Artisanal Production	36	9.0
<i>Business Experience</i>	ICT	20	5.0
	1-3 years	160	40.0
	4-6 years	128	32.0
	7-10 years	72	18.0
	Above 10 years	40	10.0
<i>Formal Registration</i>	Registered	112	28.0
	Unregistered	288	72.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Educational Deficiencies Experienced by Youth Entrepreneurs

The first research topic examined South-South geopolitical zone youth entrepreneurs' educational gaps. Education quality was graded on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Table 4.2's mean scores and standard deviations show curricular relevance, infrastructure, instructor quality, and practical skill development gaps. All dimensions exhibited substantial deficiencies, but curriculum irrelevance had the highest mean score (mean = 4.32, SD = 0.78), indicating that most

respondents strongly considered their curriculum did not prepare them for entrepreneurship. The mean score for insufficient skill development infrastructure was 4.18 (SD = 0.82), with respondents stating that their schools lacked workshops, labs, and other practical facilities. Teacher quality deficiency was 4.05 (SD = 0.85), indicating limited practical expertise and pedagogical skills to teach entrepreneurship. Practical skill development insufficiency had a mean score of 4.21 (SD = 0.79), indicating that respondents considered their education was mostly theoretical.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Educational Deficiencies

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Curriculum Relevance</i>	Curriculum did not cover practical business skills	4.32	0.78
	Curriculum content was outdated and irrelevant	4.28	0.81
	Lack of context-specific content for Niger Delta	4.35	0.76
<i>Infrastructure Adequacy</i>	Lack of functional workshops and laboratories	4.18	0.82
	Inadequate ICT facilities for digital skills	4.22	0.79
	Poor learning environment with limited resources	4.14	0.85
<i>Teacher Quality</i>	Teachers lacked practical business experience	4.05	0.85
	Teachers used outdated teaching methods	4.12	0.83
	Limited teacher-student interaction and mentorship	3.98	0.88
<i>Practical Skill Development</i>	Emphasis on theory over practical application	4.21	0.79
	No exposure to real business environments	4.25	0.77
	Limited opportunities for experiential learning	4.17	0.81

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In addition to quantitative findings, qualitative interviews revealed pervasive entrepreneurial education deficits. Limited practical exposure, weak infrastructure, and courses divorced from South-South business reality were reported by participants. One responder said entrepreneurship education focused on textbooks and company strategies without real application, while another highlighted non-functional laboratories and no training

facilities. Others noted that projects overlooked the Niger Delta's particular economic and environmental setting. No gender differences were found in demographic analysis ($t = 1.42, p > 0.05$), but educational level significantly impacted judgments ($F = 4.56, p < 0.01$). Higher-educated respondents were more aware of curriculum irrelevance, demonstrating that academic preparation and business practice differed.

Strategic Responses of Youth Entrepreneurs to Educational Deficiencies

Two research questions evaluated how adolescent entrepreneurs perceive and strategically address educational gaps through entrepreneurship. Qualitative interviews showed that teenage entrepreneurs use informal apprenticeships, social networks, self-directed learning, and business models to make up for formal schooling gaps. In Table 4.3, interviewees most often reported informal apprenticeship (83 percent), followed by leveraging social

networks for business support (77 percent), self-directed learning through online resources (67 percent), adapting business models to require less formal training (60 percent), diversifying income streams to manage risk (53 percent), and go Cross River State participant discussed apprenticeship: "I learned a trade after graduating because I couldn't find work. I learned electronics repair from a master for two years. I learned practical skills there that my university didn't." This shows how traditional apprenticeship systems compensate for regional educational shortages.

Table 3: Strategic Responses to Educational Deficiencies

<i>Strategic Response</i>	<i>Frequency (n=30)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Informal apprenticeship with a master craftsman</i>	25	83.3
<i>Leveraging social networks for business support</i>	23	76.7
<i>Self-directed learning through online resources</i>	20	66.7
<i>Adapting business model to require less formal training</i>	18	60.0
<i>Diversifying income streams to manage risk</i>	16	53.3
<i>Participating in government/NGO training programmes</i>	14	46.7

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Youth entrepreneurs said social networks helped them overcome educational gaps. Family, experienced entrepreneurs, and community associations supplied business knowledge, mentorship, market intelligence, and financial support not taught in school. Participants valued family advice and community loans over classroom instruction. Entrepreneurs chose companies that required fewer specialized talents and adopted basic record-keeping techniques. Diversified income sources and several small firms to counterbalance managerial inexperience lessen risk. Younger entrepreneurs used online videos and free courses to master business and financial management. Participants highlighted that unequal access to smartphones, internet, and affordable data restricted this method, especially in rural populations. Strategic responses differed by population. Women depended on community networks and economic diversification, while men used informal apprenticeships and online study. Entrepreneurs with higher degrees used formal training and self-directed learning, while those with lower qualifications used social

networks and apprenticeships. Urban entrepreneurs had more digital resources, while rural businesses relied on community assistance.

Entrepreneurial Competency Acquisition and Educational Quality

The third study examined how youth entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial skills affect school quality. Participants assessed their ability on a five-point scale from extremely low (1) to very high (5) in five dimensions. Opportunity recognition competence had the highest mean competency score (3.85, SD = 0.82), followed by networking (3.72, SD = 0.85) and risk management (3.58, SD = 0.88). Strategic planning ability rated lowest (3.12, SD = 0.94), whereas financial management competence scored lower (mean = 3.35, SD //0.91). Despite educational inequalities, South-South youth entrepreneurs have learned entrepreneurial skills through practical experience and social learning. Financial management and strategic planning are hard to learn in school and life, as seen by the lower ratings.

Table 4: Entrepreneurial Competency Scores

<i>Competency Dimension</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Opportunity Recognition</i>	3.85	0.82	High
<i>Networking Competence</i>	3.72	0.85	High
<i>Risk Management Competence</i>	3.58	0.88	Moderate-High
<i>Financial Management Competence</i>	3.35	0.91	Moderate
<i>Strategic Planning Competence</i>	3.12	0.94	Moderate-Low

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Overall educational quality and competency dimension scores were correlated to explore the association between educational quality and entrepreneurial competency acquisition. According to Table 4.5, there is a substantial positive link between educational quality and entrepreneurial competency acquisition ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that educational quality develops entrepreneurial competencies, as respondents with better educational quality also had higher entrepreneurial competencies. However, the moderate correlation shows

that additional factors beyond formal education considerably contribute to competency acquisition, supporting the Deficiency-Compensation Framework's claim that youth learn abilities through alternate channels. Strategic planning and financial management competence show stronger correlations with formal education ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), while opportunity recognition and networking competence have weaker correlations ($r = 0.31$ and 0.28 , respectively).

Table 5: Correlation Between Educational Quality and Competency Acquisition

Competency Dimension	Correlation with Educational Quality (r)	Significance
Strategic Planning Competence	0.52	$p < 0.01$
Financial Management Competence	0.48	$p < 0.01$
Risk Management Competence	0.39	$p < 0.01$
Opportunity Recognition Competence	0.31	$p < 0.05$
Networking Competence	0.28	$p < 0.05$
Overall Entrepreneurial Competency	0.45	$p < 0.01$

Source: Field Survey, 2025

According to qualitative interviews, kids learn entrepreneurship through formal schooling, practical experience, social learning, and self-directed study. Rivers Stater: "School, experience, and great businesspeople taught me business skills. Delta State participant: "Entrepreneurship requires experience. Classes cannot teach it. You must start a business, fail, and learn. So I learned money management, customer service, and supplier agreements." Modern entrepreneurial education scholarship encourages practice-based competency building and experiential learning.

The study also identified significant demographic differences in competency development by education and business experience. Education and business experience were linked to higher competencies in strategic planning, financial management, opportunity recognition, and risk management ($F = 5.23$, $p < 0.01$, $F = 4.87$, $p < 0.01$, $F = 5.54$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that formal schooling adds analytical and planned competencies and practical experience to intuitive and adaptable entrepreneurship skills. To develop comprehensive entrepreneurial skills,

entrepreneurship education and training should integrate theoretical and experiential components.

Venture Sustainability and Its Relationship with Educational Quality and Competency Acquisition

The fourth research topic examined youth entrepreneurship educational quality, entrepreneurial competency acquisition, and venture sustainability. Three factors examined venture sustainability: firm survival after five years, employment stability, and profitability. Table 4.6 shows that 62 percent of ventures survived five years, 53 percent reported stable employment (no substantial employee number swings), and 58 percent reported continuous profitability over three years. As the average of the three parameters, the overall venture sustainability score was 57.7%, indicating modest sustainability among South-South youth firms. These findings are favorable compared to the national MSME failure rate of 80%, showing that regional youth companies may have evolved adaptive techniques to survive. However, 38% of firms fail to survive beyond five years, indicating the persisting problems facing youth entrepreneurship in the region.

Table 6: Venture Sustainability Indicators

Sustainability Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)
Survival beyond 5 years	62.0	38.0
Employment stability	53.0	47.0
Consistent profitability (3 years)	58.0	42.0
Overall Sustainability Score	57.7	42.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Overall educational quality evaluations and sustainability measures were compared to venture sustainability. Educational quality is positively correlated with enterprise sustainability ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$). This suggests that educated youngsters operate more sustainable businesses. The moderate strength of this association shows that educational quality alone cannot sustain enterprises; other variables are essential. School taught me planning and record-keeping. I wasn't prepared. I learned a lot working, and many of my non-graduate buddies run successful enterprises." This perspective emphasizes the benefits of various competency development pathways and the limits of traditional entrepreneurship education.

Following Baron and Kenny (1986), regression analysis examined entrepreneurial competency acquisition's

mediation of educational quality and venture sustainability. The regression analysis in Table 4.7 shows that entrepreneurial competency acquisition significantly mediates educational quality and venture sustainability. Educational quality initially strongly impacted business sustainability ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.01$). Educational quality strongly predicted entrepreneurial competency acquisition in phase 2 ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$). Step three revealed a reduced impact of educational quality ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$) on venture sustainability, whereas entrepreneurial competency acquisition remained significant ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.01$). Entrepreneurial abilities explain how educational quality affects venture and business performance, using the Deficiency-Compensation Framework.

Table 7: Mediation Analysis Results

Step	Predictor	Outcome	β	R^2	Significance
1	Educational Quality	Venture Sustainability	0.38	0.14	$p < 0.01$
2	Educational Quality	Competency Acquisition	0.45	0.20	$p < 0.01$
3a	Educational Quality	Venture Sustainability	0.18	-	$p < 0.05$
3b	Competency Acquisition	Venture Sustainability	0.42	0.28	$p < 0.01$

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Participants' discussions of how specific abilities helped businesses survive and thrive emphasized competency acquisition and venture sustainability. Bayelsa Man: "Relationships drive my business. Many businesses fail because entrepreneurs don't know how to treat consumers or find suppliers. School was less important than networking." "In my first year of business, I almost failed because I didn't know how to manage money," said another Delta Stater. Every dime I made was lost. I'm more careful now that I learned financial management the hard way." These tales demonstrate how skills affect venture sustainability and how competency development is essential for entrepreneurship.

Business experience, sector, region, and demographics affected venture sustainability. A one-way ANOVA showed that companies with over 7 years of experience had higher sustainability scores ($F = 7.23, p < 0.01$), indicating that experience helps businesses survive and expand. Services companies beat commerce and agriculture in sustainability ($F = 5.12, p < 0.01$), likely due to reduced capital requirements and stable demand. Urban (Rivers and Delta) firms were more sustainable than rural (Bayelsa and Cross River) firms due to superior market access, infrastructure, and business assistance. These findings reveal sector- and location-specific youth entrepreneurship support and contextual drivers of venture sustainability.

Reconceptualising Entrepreneurship as a Strategic Response to Educational Deficiencies

The study reframes entrepreneurship as a tool for educational shortcomings rather than a survival strategy for unemployed adolescents. The quantitative and qualitative data reveal that young entrepreneurs in Nigeria's South-South region actively compensate for formal education system inadequacies by acquiring abilities, mobilizing resources, and creating viable companies. The findings show necessity-driven entrepreneurs as resourceful individuals who consciously generate economic possibilities despite institutional limits. One Edo State participant said entrepreneurship was a purposeful choice to overcome an inferior education system and assure a brighter future.

Related issues include inappropriate curricula, poor practical training, graduate unemployment, and minimal government support for youth economic engagement influenced participants' entrepreneurial options. Many said traditional schooling gave certifications without the skills to start or run a business. Thus, entrepreneurship was seen as an alternative livelihood, a way to resist societal failures, and human agency. Despite their restrictions, educational inadequacies stimulated perseverance, ingenuity, adaptation, and innovation as entrepreneurs navigated difficult business circumstances.

These entrepreneurial responses were shaped by South-South socioeconomic conditions. Environmental degradation, unemployment, and inadequate economic diversification were obstacles, but oil firms, government agencies, development programs, and community initiatives presented commercial opportunities. Entrepreneurs proactively positioned themselves in local value chains and service markets to capitalize on these opportunities. This shows how contextual factors affect entrepreneurial conduct and supports the idea that entrepreneurship is a dynamic adaptation to regional restrictions and possibilities.

Importantly, social capital is crucial to compensating for educational inadequacies. Family, friends, community associations, and professional networks provided mentorship, business knowledge, financial aid, and market information that formal schooling lacked. These networks provided practical support throughout the business lifecycle to improve entrepreneurial skill and venture sustainability. The findings show that young entrepreneurship in the South-South is profoundly rooted in community relationships, making social networks crucial to success.

The refined Deficiency-Compensation Framework suggests four interconnected processes: recognizing educational deficiencies as barriers, identifying entrepreneurship as an alternative pathway, acquiring competencies through informal and self-directed learning, and developing adaptive business strategies to compensate for educational limitations. Youth entrepreneurs compensate with apprenticeships, social networking, self-directed learning, flexible business models, and income diversification, according to the study. Quality education improves skill acquisition and venture sustainability, but alternative learning pathways are essential. The framework strengthens the theoretical foundation for policies and actions to assist sustainable youth enterprise growth in Nigeria's South-South area by seeing youth entrepreneurs as proactive agents rather than passive victims.

Conclusion

This study examined youth enterprise growth in Nigeria's South-South area to rethink entrepreneurship as a solution to educational gaps. The study showed that regional youth entrepreneurs face significant educational deficiencies that shape their entrepreneurial journeys and respond to these deficiencies through multiple strategic mechanisms to acquire competencies, mobilize resources, and sustain their ventures. The Deficiency-Compensation Framework developed in this study provides a comprehensive theoretical lens for understanding the relationship between educational quality, entrepreneurial competency acquisition, and venture sustainability, aiding entrepreneurship scholarship in developing countries. A

mixed-methods study of 400 adolescent entrepreneurs and 30 in-depth interviews supports the framework's claims and provides policy and practice insights.

The study found that educational quality predicts entrepreneurial competency acquisition and venture sustainability, but that youth's formal and informal learning paths mitigate its impacts. This shows the necessity of bridging educational gaps and promoting alternative competency acquisition mechanisms that help youngsters build entrepreneurial abilities. The study also found that South-South young entrepreneurs navigate educational limits with agency and resourcefulness and respond strategically to systemic institutional failures. This reconceptualization challenges deficit-oriented conceptions and advocates for a more nuanced understanding of necessity-driven entrepreneurship featuring youth entrepreneurs' strategic agency. The findings affect educational policy, entrepreneurship development, and future study. Education policy must address curriculum irrelevance, infrastructural deficits, teacher quality deficits, and the theory-practice gap in Nigerian entrepreneurial education, according to the report. The findings imply that entrepreneurship development programmes should include experiential learning, enable alternate competency acquisition pathways, and respect youth entrepreneurs' strategic agency. The study recommends longitudinal studies that track venture sustainability over time, comparative studies that examine regional differences, and intervention research that evaluates youth enterprise development strategies. This study adds to the literature on entrepreneurship in developing economies and gives a new theoretical approach that can improve youth enterprise development policies and programs in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The federal and state ministries of education should collaborate with universities and other tertiary institutions to comprehensively reform the entrepreneurship education curriculum, ensuring that it incorporates practical, experiential learning components and context-specific content relevant to the Niger Delta region. The curriculum should include mandatory business internships, practical business plan development, and engagement with successful entrepreneurs from the local community.
2. Government at all levels should significantly increase investment in educational infrastructure, particularly in the South-South region, by

providing functional workshops, laboratories, ICT facilities, and other practical learning resources.

3. Government agencies, development partners, and community organisations should strengthen and expand support for alternative competency acquisition mechanisms, including informal apprenticeships, mentorship programmes, business incubators, and digital learning platforms.
4. Entrepreneurship development programmes should integrate digital skills training to enable youth to leverage online resources for self-directed learning, market access, and business management. Government and development partners should invest in expanding digital infrastructure and affordable internet access in the South-South region to ensure that youth can participate in the digital economy.
5. The federal and state governments, in partnership with the private sector and development organisations, should establish youth enterprise support hubs across the South-South region that provide integrated services including business training, mentorship, access to finance, market linkages, and business development support.

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