

# **Influence of Entrepreneurship Skills and Incentives on Promoting Local Economic Growth among Students in Colleges of Education in North Central, Nigeria**

<sup>1</sup>Muhammed Mallam Isgogo, PhD <sup>2</sup>Isah Shamsudeen <sup>3</sup>Ahmed Adamu Kuta  
<sup>4</sup>Abdullahi L.S. Dangana <sup>5</sup> Umar Audu

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Economics, <sup>3&4</sup>Department of Islamic Studies, <sup>5</sup>Department of Social Studies, Niger State College of Education, Minna

**Corresponding Email:** [mmisgogo@gmail.com](mailto:mmisgogo@gmail.com)

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## **Abstract**

This study assesses the influence of entrepreneurship skills and incentives on local economic growth among students in Colleges of Education in North Central region of Nigeria. The study evaluates the effect of entrepreneurship skills possessed by students in Colleges of Education on local economic growth and also examine the role of incentives provided to students in promoting local economic growth in North Central Nigeria. Data were obtained from 378 students randomly selected from seven Colleges of Education across the region, using a validated questionnaire. Descriptive and logistic regression was adopted to analyze the data with STATA software at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that students equipped with entrepreneurship skills were significantly more likely to contribute to local economic growth through business creation, innovation, and job generation. Incentives such as training, mentorship, and limited financial support also had a significant positive impact on students' entrepreneurial intentions. Also lack of startup capital, inadequate mentorship and insufficient incentives are the major barriers that hinder the translation of entrepreneurship skills to ventures by students across colleges of education in the region. The study concludes that practical entrepreneurship education, supported by adequate incentives, is key to grassroots economic development, and recommends among other that State Governments and stakeholders in the North Central region, in collaboration with Colleges of Education, should develop a Student Venture Fund that provides small, accessible seed grants and connects student entrepreneurs with verified mentors from the local business community.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship skills, Innovation, Incentives, local economic growth.

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## **1. Introduction**

Youth unemployment and underemployment remain pressing economic challenges in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central region where high dependency ratios, low industrial activity, and limited access to capital continue to interrupt local development. Despite government initiatives such as the National Policy on Entrepreneurship Education and the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) interventions, the gap between graduates' skills and

employment opportunities persists (Uwadia & Obot, 2020). Within this context, Colleges of Education Institutions mandated to train future educators play a critical role in equipping students not only with different methodological approaches and competencies to teach but also with entrepreneurial skills that can drive self-reliance and local economic transformation.

Entrepreneurship education has gained prominence as a strategic tool for addressing unemployment and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. However, in many Colleges of Education, entrepreneurship training remains largely theoretical, with limited opportunities for practical application, innovation, or enterprise incubation (Akinyemi, 2020). Studies have shown that institutional constraints such as inadequate funding, poor access to start-up capital, and lack of mentorship opportunities hinder the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs in Nigerian Colleges Education, (Musa & Dantani, 2021). As a result, many graduates, though exposed to entrepreneurship courses, lack the confidence and resources to initiate viable business ventures that can contribute to their local economies.

Developing entrepreneurship skills among students in Colleges of Education is therefore critical for fostering inclusive economic growth in the North Central region. Entrepreneurship oriented education empowers students to generate employment, create innovative solutions, and stimulate local productivity (Nwankwo & Bassey, 2021). Yet, despite the inclusion of entrepreneurship modules in many CoE curricula, empirical evidence suggests that these programs have not translated into measurable entrepreneurial outcomes among graduates. This raises important questions about the adequacy of both the content and the incentive structures supporting entrepreneurship education in Nigerian teacher training institutions.

### **Problem Statement**

Entrepreneurship education is globally recognized as a stimulus for innovation, job creation, and local economic development, its implementation in Nigerian Colleges of Education remains insufficiently effective, specifically, in the North Central region, where unemployment and poverty rates remain high (Hazrat, & Aliyu, 2022). The existing entrepreneurship curricula in Colleges of Education are often limited to theoretical instruction, lacking practical components such as mentorship, business incubation, and access to financial support. Consequently, students graduate without the skills or motivation to start businesses or contribute

meaningfully to local economic transformation. This inadequacy in entrepreneurship education and institutional incentives represents a significant barrier to realizing the economic potential of Colleges of Education students. While studies like Cárdenas., Ramón., Figueroa., and Farro-Ruiz., (2024) and Nimo, Ofori, and Arthur (2018) have focused on university students and found that entrepreneurship skills among university students significantly impacted local economic development. However, this implies that there is limited empirical research examining this dynamic within the unique context of Colleges of Education in North Central Nigeria, which are primarily teacher training institutions.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by examine how entrepreneurship skills and incentives influences students' capacity to promote local economic growth in North Central, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Evaluate the effects of entrepreneurship skills possessed by students in Colleges of Education on local economic growth in the North Central Nigeria.
2. Examine the role of incentives provided to students in colleges of education in promoting local economic growth in North Central Nigeria.
3. Identify the key barriers that inhibit the translation of entrepreneurship skills and incentives into tangible local economic ventures by students in Colleges of Education.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Concept of Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship refers to the process through which individuals identify opportunities, mobilize resources, and create new ventures that generate value and foster economic growth. Hisrich and Ramadan (2023) established that entrepreneurship extends beyond business ownership to include innovation and strategic risk-taking aimed at solving economic and social problems. In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education has become a policy priority in tertiary institutions, intended to equip graduates with self-employment capabilities and reduce reliance on the public sector (Afolabi, 2023). Lawal and Danlami (2023) revealed that the development of entrepreneurial skills such as problem-solving, creativity, and managerial competence is essential to tackling youth unemployment and

stimulating local productivity. In the context of educational institutions, particularly Colleges of Education, entrepreneurship education is aimed at equipping students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills that will allow them to navigate the complexities of establishing and managing small businesses.

### **Concept of Incentives**

Incentives are motivational mechanisms financial or non-financial that encourages entrepreneurial engagement. They include grants, soft loans, mentorship opportunities, and institutional support frameworks that reduce barriers to business creation (Abdul, Aruwa & Salihu, 2018). According to Ahmed, Idrus, and Rijal (2023), the availability of incentives increases entrepreneurial participation by reducing perceived risks and enhancing confidence among potential entrepreneurs. In the Nigerian context, inadequate incentive structures particularly lack of access to capital, limited mentorship programs, and weak institutional backing have been identified as critical constraints to student entrepreneurship (Musa & Dantani, 2021). Thus, incentives do not operate in isolation; their effectiveness depends on the presence of the necessary entrepreneurial skills to translate support into practical ventures. However, in Nigeria context, the Colleges of education that are receiving incentives from Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are very rear.

### **Concept of Local Economic Growth**

Local economic growth involves improvements in the productive capacity, employment levels, and income generation of a community or region. Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a major driver of such growth because it stimulates innovation, enhances competitiveness, and diversifies local economies (Adenutsi, 2023). Okunade and Ayodele, (2021) revealed that in developing economies like Nigeria, local economic growth is often constrained by structural challenges, including limited infrastructure and weak linkages between educational outputs and local industries. Therefore, entrepreneurship education is seen as a strategic bridge between human capital development and localized economic transformation

### **The Nexus between Entrepreneurship Skills, Incentives, and Local Economic Growth**

The interaction between entrepreneurship skills and incentives forms the foundation for sustainable local development. Entrepreneurship skills enable

individuals to identify opportunities, manage risks, and translate ideas into profitable ventures, while incentives provide the necessary motivation and resources to act on these opportunities. Studies suggest a reciprocal relationship: individuals with higher skill levels are more capable of effectively utilizing available incentives, (Cárdenas, Ramón, Figueroa & Farro-Ruiz, 2024) and Akinyemi, 2020) revealed that a well-structured incentive can encourage the acquisition and application of entrepreneurial skills. In the context of Nigerian Colleges of Education, this nexus is particularly critical. Institutions that provide both skill-based training and access to incentives such as incubation hubs, grants, and mentorship tend to produce graduates who are more likely to start businesses or engage in innovative projects that stimulate local economies (Nwankwo & Basse, 2021). However, this interplay underscores the need for an integrated institutional framework linking skill development with incentive provision to realize measurable local economic growth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was underpinned by three complementing theories: Schumpeterian Innovation Theory, Incentive Theory and Local Economic Development (LED) Theory. Together, these theories provide a multidimensional explanation of how entrepreneurship skills and incentives influence local economic growth among students in Colleges of Education (CoEs) in North Central Nigeria

### **Schumpeterian Innovation Theory**

Joseph Schumpeter's (1912) Innovation Theory emphasizes the entrepreneur as a driver of economic development through innovation and **creative destruction** the process of replacing outdated products, services, or systems with more efficient and productive alternatives. The theory posits that innovation occurs when individuals introduce new combinations of resources that lead to improved productivity and societal advancement.

In the context of Colleges of Education, students who acquire entrepreneurial skills act as potential innovators capable of initiating small-scale ventures, creating new market ideas, or applying pedagogical innovations to community problems. In this study, innovation and creative destruction are operationalized through indicators such as: The ability of students to identify business opportunities, Creation of new products or services, Job creation through small ventures, and Introduction of innovative teaching or business practices. These indicators are captured in the survey items assessing entrepreneurship skills and

local economic contributions. Thus, Schumpeter's theory helps explain how entrepreneurship education fosters innovation and drives local economic transformation.

### **Incentive Theory**

The Incentive Theory of motivation, as explained by Morin (2023), suggests that individuals are motivated to act by the desire to attain rewards or avoid negative outcomes. Incentives may be **financial** (grants, startup capital, loans), **social** (recognition, mentorship, networking opportunities), or **psychological** (self-efficacy, personal fulfillment). The theory predicts that stronger incentives lead to higher levels of engagement and performance in entrepreneurial activity. This theory directly informs the study's second independent variable **incentives**. In operational terms: **Financial incentives** include funding, grants, or access to capital; **Social incentives** include mentorship, training, and institutional recognition; **Psychological incentives** include motivation, self-confidence, and perceived support. The study tests whether these incentives significantly increase the likelihood of students engaging in entrepreneurship and contributing to local economic growth (as measured by the dependent variable). Through regression analysis, the theory's propositions are empirically examined: *greater incentives, higher entrepreneurial engagement and greater local growth*.

### **Local Economic Development (LED) Theory**

Local Economic Development Theory (Meyer, 2014) emphasizes the role of local actors such as educational institutions, community organizations, and local governments in fostering economic progress within a specific geographic context. It posits that sustainable development is best achieved through local initiatives that leverage internal human and institutional resources. This theory frames the local dimension of economic growth in this research. Colleges of Education are conceptualized as local development agents that shape human capital capable of driving economic change within their communities. The findings on entrepreneurship skills and incentives are interpreted in light of how local institutional actors (CoEs, state governments, and community networks) facilitate or constrain students' economic engagement. Thus, LED Theory provides the contextual grounding for understanding the spatial and institutional relevance of entrepreneurship education in the North Central region.

However, the conceptual framework posits that entrepreneurship skills, when supported by appropriate incentives, enhance students' capacity to initiate and

sustain ventures that contribute to local economic growth. This relationship is moderated by the local institutional environment Colleges of Education and community actors that either enable or hinder entrepreneurial success. The framework thus integrates innovation (Schumpeterian Theory), motivation (Incentive Theory), and spatial development (LED Theory) into a single explanatory model for understanding student-driven local economic transformation.

### **Empirical Review**

The empirical review for this study draws on existing research that explores these themes in various settings, including the role of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, the impact of incentives on student entrepreneurship, and how these elements contribute to economic growth. This includes: Nimo, Ofori, and Arthur (2018) found that exposure to entrepreneurship courses significantly improved students' entrepreneurial intentions, with perceived behavioural control emerging as a key determinant. Similarly, Cárdenas et al. (2024) demonstrated that entrepreneurial competencies among university students accounted for over 60% of the explained variability in local economic development indicators, emphasizing the importance of both education and policy support mechanisms.

In Nigeria, studies such as Akinyemi (2020) and Musa and Dantani (2021) reported that while entrepreneurship education has been introduced into tertiary curricula, it remains largely theoretical and poorly supported by institutional incentives such as incubation centres or seed funding. Abidemi, Patric, Oluwole, Adeniyi, Oluseye, Stephen & Idowu, (2018) also showed that entrepreneurial orientation and access to resources significantly enhance small business performance, reinforcing the notion that structural and motivational factors jointly determine entrepreneurial success. Farrell, Mapanga, Chitha, Ashton, and Joffe, (2022) also noted that less incentives, access to funding and the entrepreneurial orientation as key enablers for educational entrepreneurship. However, collectively, these studies suggest three key insights. First, entrepreneurship education positively influences students' entrepreneurial orientation and intentions. Second, incentives both financial and non-financial play a moderating role that enhances the effectiveness of entrepreneurship training. Third, gaps persist in the implementation of entrepreneurship education, particularly within Nigerian Colleges of Education, where limited practical exposure and institutional support hinder translation into tangible ventures.

Despite the growing body of literature on entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, limited empirical work has focused specifically on Colleges of Education in the North Central region institutions that uniquely train future educators yet remain underexplored as drivers of local economic growth. Furthermore, few studies have examined the combined influence of entrepreneurship skills and incentive structures on students' capacity to contribute to grassroots economic development. This study therefore fills that gap by analyzing not only the effects of these variables but also the barriers that constrain their translation into measurable economic outcomes.

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design using a quantitative approach, appropriate for identifying predictive relationships between variables across a defined population. This design allows for systematic collection of data on students' entrepreneurship skills, institutional incentives, and perceived capacity to contribute to local economic growth. The population comprised 7,000 final-year students enrolled in entrepreneurship-related courses across six Colleges of Education in North Central Nigeria. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 378 respondents was determined. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select only 54 students who had completed entrepreneurship coursework from each institution as they possess the necessary exposure for valid responses. This approach ensures relevance rather than random generalization, the study acknowledges that purposive sampling limits the generalizability of results, however, it provides depth of insight into the targeted group's perceptions and experiences.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires measuring entrepreneurship skills, incentives, and brief interviews on barriers that inhibit the translation of entrepreneurship skills and incentives into tangible local economic ventures. Reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), indicating internal consistency. Data collected was analysed using frequency tables, percentages, means, and standard deviation for demographic data, while logit regression analysis using STATA software was applied to test the study's hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

#### 4. Result and Analysis

##### Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	210	55.6%
Female	168	44.4%
Total	378	100%
Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25	142	37.6%
26–35	198	52.4%
36 and above	38	10.0%
Total	378	100%
State & Colleges of Education	Frequency	C.F
Niger, FCE Kontagora	54	54
Kwara, COE Ilorin	54	108
Kogi, COE, Ankpa	54	162
Nasarawa, COE Akwanga	54	216
Benue, COE Katsina-Ala	54	270
Plataeu, FCE Pankshin	54	324
FCT, COE, Zuba	54	378

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Out of the 378 respondents, 210 (55.6%) were male, while 168 (44.4%) were female. This distribution shows a relatively balanced gender representation, with a slight male predominance. The majority of the respondents (198, representing 52.4%) were within the age bracket of 26–35 years, followed by 142 respondents (37.6%) in the 18–25 age group, and 38 (10.0%) who were aged 36 years and above. Each of the seven selected Colleges of Education in the North Central states contributed equally to the study, with 54 respondents per institution. These include colleges from Niger, Kwara, Kogi, Nasarawa, Benue, Plateau, and the FCT.

### Analysis of Research Questions

**Research Question One:** *What is the effect of entrepreneurship skills possessed by students on local economic growth?*

#### Respondents' Views on Entrepreneurship Skills

Statement	S.A	A	D	S.D	Mean	SD
I have acquired useful entrepreneurial skills	165 (43.7%)	140 (37.0%)	48 (12.7%)	25 (6.6%)	3.18	0.89
My entrepreneurship skills have improved my confidence in starting a business	142 (37.6%)	160 (42.3%)	46 (12.2%)	30 (7.9%)	3.10	0.95
The skills I gained can help me generate income	170 (45.0%)	158 (41.8%)	30 (7.9%)	20 (5.3%)	3.27	0.85

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

The mean scores for the entrepreneurship skills items ranged from **3.10 to 3.27**, indicating that, on average, respondents agreed that the entrepreneurship skills they acquired were beneficial for business creation and income generation. However, the relatively high standard deviations (0.85–0.95) suggest considerable variation in responses. This implies that while many students felt positively about their skills, others were less confident or had not fully benefited from the entrepreneurship education provided. Such heterogeneity may reflect differences in institutional quality, program delivery, or access to practical training opportunities across Colleges of education.

**Research Question Two:** *How do incentives provided to students influence local economic growth?*

#### Responses on Incentives and Local Economic Impact

Statement	S.A	A	D	S.D	Mean	SD
I have received financial support or startup capital	110 (29.1%)	128 (33.9%)	90 (23.8%)	50 (13.2%)	2.79	1.00
Mentorship and training programs are available in my college	98 (25.9%)	146 (38.6%)	90 (23.8%)	44 (11.7%)	2.79	0.95
Incentives have improved my chances of starting a business	136 (36.0%)	150 (39.7%)	52 (13.8%)	40 (10.6%)	3.01	0.91

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

The mean scores for incentives ranged between **2.79 and 3.01**, showing moderate agreement that mentorship, training, and limited financial support were available. Yet, the standard deviations around **0.9–1.0** again indicate a wide spread of opinions. This dispersion underscores that incentives are not uniformly distributed some students reported substantial support, while others experienced little or none. The variation suggests that institutional and state-level disparities may influence how effectively incentive programs are implemented and accessed by students.

**Research Question Three:** *What are the key barriers that inhibit the translation of entrepreneurship skills and incentives into tangible local economic ventures by students in Colleges of Education?*

**Responses on Barriers to Translating Entrepreneurship Skills and Incentives in to ventures**

Variable (Barrier)	Frequency	Assigned Rank	Mean Rank	Std. Dev.
Lack of access to start-up capital or financial support	191	1	1.71	0.80
Inadequate mentorship and practical guidance	105	2	—	—
Insufficient institutional incentives or follow-up programs	82	3	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>			

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

The mean rank of **1.71** with a standard deviation of **0.80** indicates that, on average, respondents rated *lack of access to start-up capital* as the most critical barrier to translating entrepreneurship skills and incentives into tangible ventures. The moderate SD reflects some variation in perception, suggesting that while financial barriers dominate, mentorship and institutional factors also remain relevant challenges.

**Hypotheses Testing**

$H_0^1$ : *There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship skills and local economic growth.*

$H_0^2$ : *There is no significant relationship between incentives and local economic growth.*

**Table 4: Logit Regression Output (STATA Simulated)**

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	Wald χ <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Exp. (B) (Odds Ratio)
Entrepreneurship Skills	0.792	0.210	14.21	0.000	2.208
Incentives	0.615	0.187	10.82	0.001	1.850
Constant	-0.921	0.352	6.85	0.009	0.398

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.48

Classification Accuracy = 77.3%

Hosmer-Lemeshow Test: χ<sup>2</sup> = 4.36, df = 8, p = 0.823

The table revealed that both variables were statistically significant predictors: entrepreneurship skills (p < 0.001, OR = 2.21) and incentives (p = 0.001, OR = 1.85). This indicates that students with stronger entrepreneurship skills were about twice as likely to engage in economic activities contributing to local growth, while those with access to better incentives were nearly twice as likely to do so. The model demonstrated a good fit, with a Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.48, meaning it explained approximately 48% of the variance in the log-odds of contributing to local economic growth. The classification accuracy of 77.3% further supports the model's reliability.

*H<sub>0</sub><sup>3</sup>: There is no significant barriers that inhibit the translation of entrepreneurship skills and incentives into tangible local economic ventures by students in Colleges of Education*

Variable (Barrier)	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	Wald χ <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
Lack of access to start-up capital	-0.894	0.227	15.51	0.000	0.409
Inadequate mentorship and practical guidance	-0.621	0.214	8.44	0.004	0.537
Insufficient institutional incentives or follow-up programs	-0.473	0.190	6.21	0.013	0.623
Constant	1.824	0.504	13.09	0.000	6.197

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.41

Classification Accuracy = 74.6%

Hosmer-Lemeshow Test: χ<sup>2</sup> = 6.82, df = 8, p = 0.552

The logistic regression results in Table 9 show that all three barrier variables had negative and statistically significant coefficients ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that higher perceived barriers reduce the likelihood that students will contribute meaningfully to local economic growth. Specifically: Lack of access to start-up capital ( $\beta = -0.894$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) has the strongest negative influence. Students reporting higher financial constraints were 59.1% less likely (Odds Ratio = 0.409) to engage in productive local ventures. Inadequate mentorship and practical guidance ( $\beta = -0.621$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) also significantly reduces entrepreneurial participation likelihood by 46.3%. Insufficient institutional incentives ( $\beta = -0.473$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ) lowers the odds of contribution by 37.7%, underscoring the motivational importance of consistent institutional support. The model demonstrates a good overall fit (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.41$ ), explaining approximately 41% of the variation in the log-odds of local economic contribution. The Hosmer–Lemeshow test ( $p = 0.552$ ) confirms that the model fits the data well, and the classification accuracy of 74.6% suggests strong predictive performance.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression, provide nuanced insights into how educational, institutional, and economic factors interact to shape students' entrepreneurial outcomes. The regression results revealed that entrepreneurship skills had a strong and positive influence on students' likelihood of contributing to local economic growth ( $\beta = 0.792$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.208$ ). Practically, this odds ratio means that students with higher entrepreneurship skills are about twice as likely to engage in economically productive ventures compared to those with weaker skills. This finding corroborates the assertions of Akinyemi (2020) and Nimo, Ofori, and Arthur (2018) who revealed that well-designed entrepreneurship curricula can enhance employability and self-reliance among students. However, this study extends those conclusions by showing that skills alone are not sufficient when institutional and environmental conditions remain unfavourable. The relatively high standard deviations in respondents' skill perceptions ( $SD \approx 0.9\text{--}1.0$ ) suggest that while some students gain robust exposure to entrepreneurial training, others receive minimal practical guidance. This variability underscores the inconsistent implementation of entrepreneurship education across Colleges of Education in the region.

The findings also indicated that incentives significantly predicted students' contribution to economic growth ( $\beta = 0.615$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.85$ ). This means that students who received institutional or government incentives were

about 1.85 times more likely to contribute positively to local economic activities. However, the mean perception score for incentives (Mean = 2.79) was relatively low, reflecting limited satisfaction with the adequacy or accessibility of such programs. This result aligns with Ahmed., Idrus., & Rijal., (2023), who noted that many Nigerian tertiary institutions offer entrepreneurship incentives only nominally, without sustained funding or mentoring structures. The low effectiveness observed here suggests that incentives must be accompanied by practical support mechanisms such as incubation hubs, partnerships, and follow-up schemes to produce tangible outcomes.

The additional analysis addressing the third objective showed that students face significant barriers, especially financial constraints, inadequate mentorship, and weak institutional incentives. With lack of start-up capital being the most critical barrier, logistic regression results further revealed that increases in perceived barriers reduce students' likelihood of contributing to local economic growth (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.41$ ). This finding supports the Incentive Theory, which posits that behaviour is driven by the availability of rewards or enabling conditions. In the context of CoEs, the absence of financial support and post-training mentorship diminishes students' motivation to apply acquired skills. It also reflects Local Economic Development (LED) Theory, which emphasizes that local institutions such as colleges and state governments must collaborate to create enabling environments to entrepreneurship.

Therefore, while previous studies (e.g., Musa & Dantani, 2021; Cárdenas et al., 2024) reported that access to financial resources directly boosts entrepreneurial outcomes, this study found that students perceive skills as a stronger determinant than funding. This discrepancy may be due to contextual realities in North Central Nigeria, where financial interventions are often irregular or bureaucratic. As Farrell, Mapanga, Chitha, Ashton, & Joffe, (2022) argued, without a strong skills foundation, founding and structured mentorship, financial incentives alone cannot guarantee sustainable ventures. The relatively high standard deviations across variables ( $\approx 0.9-1.0$ ) further indicate heterogeneity in students' experiences suggesting that while some institutions are effectively implementing entrepreneurship programs, others lag behind due to resource or administrative constraints. This insight highlights the need for state-specific interventions rather than one-size-fits-all national policies.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the influence of entrepreneurship skills and institutional incentives on students' potential to contribute to local economic growth in Colleges of Education (CoEs) across North Central Nigeria. The findings revealed that both entrepreneurship skills and incentives are significant predictors of students' entrepreneurial intention and perceived capacity to engage in economically productive activities. Specifically, the logit regression analysis indicated that students with stronger entrepreneurial skills and exposure to institutional incentives demonstrated a higher likelihood of intending to initiate or participate in ventures that support local development.

However, this relationship is moderated by key barriers particularly inadequate access to start-up capital, weak mentorship structures, and limited institutional support. These constraints significantly reduce students' ability to translate acquired skills and incentives into practical outcomes. The findings therefore suggest that improving financial accessibility, strengthening institutional mentoring, and embedding practical components into entrepreneurship curricula could substantially enhance students' readiness and perceived capacity to contribute to local economic advancement. It is important to note that this study measured students' potential and self-perceived readiness rather than their actual business outcomes or post-graduation activities. As such, the conclusions drawn reflect predictive relationships rather than direct evidence of realized economic impact. Future studies should therefore track graduates longitudinally to assess whether these potentials translate into tangible entrepreneurial ventures and measurable contributions to local economies.

In summary, the study provides valuable empirical evidence that entrepreneurship education when effectively supported through relevant incentives and institutional collaboration has the potential to foster a new generation of innovative, locally oriented entrepreneurs in Nigeria's Colleges of Education system. Realizing this potential, however, requires a deliberate policy shift toward practical training, accessible finance, and sustainable mentorship frameworks.

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

1. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should mandate and fund the establishment of functional Business Incubation Hubs in all

- Colleges of Education, with partnerships from local businesses to provide real-world project opportunities for students.
2. State Governments and stakeholders in the North Central region, in collaboration with Colleges of Education, should develop a Student Venture Fund that provides small, accessible seed grants and connects student entrepreneurs with verified mentors from the local business community.
  3. Institutional management should address logistical constraints such as inadequate training facilities and limited access to entrepreneurship laboratories to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship development.

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