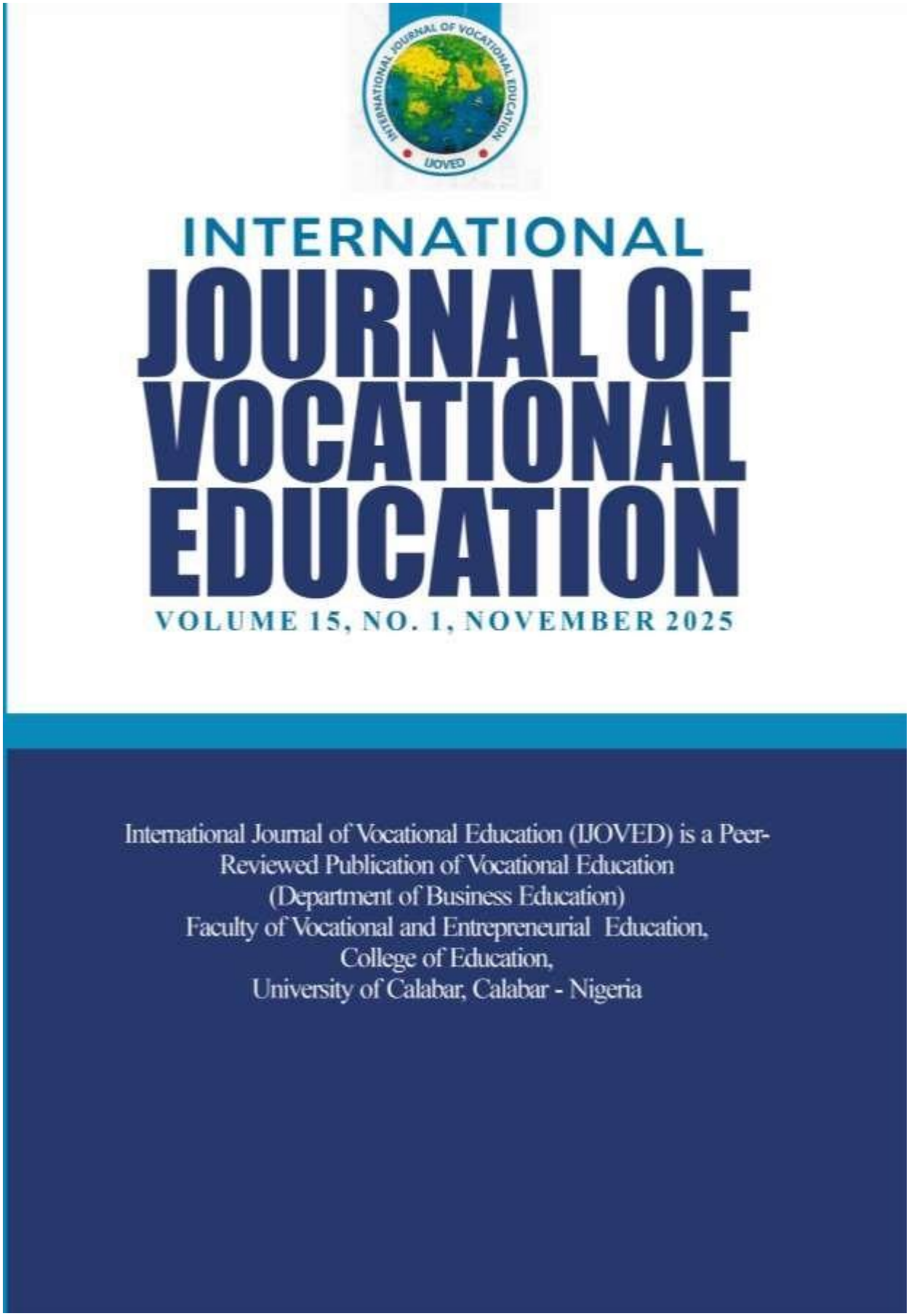

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Editor'sNote

This volume presents a focused and contemporary contribution to business and entrepreneurship education, with strong empirical evidence drawn largely from universities, and related contexts across Nigeria, and beyond. The articles explore emerging themes such as artificial intelligence integration, e-learning, entrepreneurship training, curriculum relevance, pedagogical innovation, and enterprise development within higher education systems. The collection reflects the growing intersection between technology, pedagogy, and entrepreneurial outcomes, while also addressing practical concerns such as poverty reduction, market sustainability, and small business performance. The institutional coverage highlights the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, and other affiliated academic and professional environments, reinforcing the regional relevance and broader applicability of the findings.

The journal invites scholars, researchers, and practitioners to contribute high-quality manuscripts that advance knowledge in business education, entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and related disciplines. Submissions that offer empirical rigor, theoretical advancement, and practical relevance to developing and global education systems are particularly encouraged.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined undergraduates' perception of entrepreneurship education and its role in poverty reduction in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study explored how students perceive the relevance of entrepreneurship education to poverty reduction and the relationship between participation in entrepreneurship education and preparedness for self-employment. A predictive correlational research design was adopted, with a sample of 400 undergraduates selected through stratified random sampling from the University of Calabar and the University of Cross River State. Data were collected using a validated twenty-item questionnaire, with reliability coefficients ranging from .70 to .83. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between students' perception of entrepreneurship education and its perceived role in poverty reduction. However, participation in entrepreneurship education exhibited a significant but negative relationship with preparedness for self-employment. This suggests that although students recognize the value of entrepreneurship education, its current delivery may not sufficiently develop the competencies required for entrepreneurial success. The study recommends curriculum restructuring, increased emphasis on experiential learning, and improved lecturer capacity to enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in achieving poverty reduction outcomes.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, perception, poverty reduction, undergraduates, Nigeria

Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has become a central strategy for equipping individuals with the competencies required to create and sustain business ventures in dynamic economic environments. It encompasses the development of creativity, innovation, risktaking, and strategic decision-making skills

(Bauman & Lucy, 2021). Beyond the transmission of business knowledge, entrepreneurship education cultivates resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities necessary for navigating complex socio-economic realities (Nishant, 2024). Within higher education systems, it is increasingly positioned as a mechanism for promoting economic development, reducing unemployment, and addressing poverty (Rashid, 2019). This aligns with global development priorities that emphasize sustainable economic participation and inclusive growth (Van Zanten & Van Tulder, 2018). Public universities play a critical role in fostering entrepreneurial capacity due to their mandate for knowledge creation and human capital development. These institutions provide platforms for integrating theoretical knowledge with practical innovation, thereby shaping students' entrepreneurial orientation (Aithal & Aithal, 2023). Through structured entrepreneurship

education programmes, universities aim to produce graduates who are self-reliant, innovative, and capable of contributing meaningfully to societal development (OforDouglas, 2024).

In developing economies such as Nigeria, poverty and unemployment remain persistent challenges. Graduate unemployment continues to rise, reflecting a dis-connect between university training and labour market demands (World Bank, 2020). This mismatch limits graduates' ability to secure employment and undermines their economic productivity (Handel, 2003). Entrepreneurship education is therefore increasingly promoted as a viable pathway for addressing this gap by equipping students with the skills and motivation to generate self-employment opportunities (Neck &

Corbett, 2018). In doing so, it contributes not only to individual economic empowerment but also to broader societal development through job creation and innovation (Chansa, Sylvester & Ngulube, 2024). Poverty, as a multidimensional phenomenon, affects access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, thereby constraining sustainable development (World Bank, 2023). Students in higher education represent a critical demographic, whose perceptions of poverty and its solutions can influence future socio-economic outcomes. Their understanding of poverty is shaped by educational experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, and exposure to policy interventions (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Universities, therefore, serve as important platforms for cultivating awareness, critical thinking, and innovative approaches to poverty reduction (Saaida, 2023).

Students' perceptions of entrepreneurship education are particularly significant because they influence engagement, learning outcomes, and the application of entrepreneurial knowledge in real-world contexts (Naqvi, Matriano & Alimi, 2023). Positive perceptions are often associated with curricula that incorporate experiential learning approaches such as internships, simulations, and case-based

instruction (Bayerlein, 2020). Conversely, programmes that emphasize theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical application tend to generate scepticism and limit effectiveness (Bell, 2017). The alignment of entrepreneurship education with students' career aspirations further shapes perception and engagement. Experiential learning strategies have been shown to enhance students' appreciation of entrepreneurship as a viable career pathway (Lackéus, 2020). In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education is widely perceived as a solution to unemployment and poverty, particularly when it is contextually relevant and responsive to local economic realities (Ohakam, 2018; Goren & Yemini, 2017). However, weak integration of practical components and limited institutional support often undermine its perceived value.

Empirical studies provide substantial evidence on the relationship between entrepreneurship education, student perception, and poverty reduction. Echezona (2015) demonstrated that entrepreneurship education significantly enhances students' entrepreneurial competencies, self-reliance, and independence, thereby contributing to poverty reduction. Similarly, Habib, Aamir, Khan, and Ullah (2020) found that entrepreneurship education influences poverty alleviation indirectly through the development of entrepreneurial intention, highlighting the mediating role of psychological readiness. Further studies underscore the importance of perception in determining programme effectiveness. Shekhar and Huang-Saad (2021) observed that students value entrepreneurship education for its role in skill development; although gaps in curriculum design remain a constraint. AdewoluOgwo (2024) similarly reported that students perceive entrepreneurship education as a pathway to self-reliance, despite limitations in practical training. Ghafar (2020) emphasized that positive student perception is strongly associated with willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

The link between entrepreneurship education and poverty reduction is also well established. Ubogu (2020) found that participation in entrepreneurship programmes increases the likelihood of students establishing small-scale enterprises. Akoto

(2023) further demonstrated that entrepreneurship education enhances students' ability to identify economic opportunities, although sustained outcomes require mentorship and financial support. Echezona (2018) corroborated these findings, highlighting the role of entrepreneurship education in reducing youth unemployment. Despite these benefits, challenges persist. Palvia, Baqir and Nemati (2018) identified outdated teaching methods and inadequate practical components as major barriers, while Santos, Neumeyer and Morris (2019) emphasized the gap between theoretical instruction and real-world application. These limitations underscore the need for curriculum innovation and resource investment. Students' readiness to address poverty-related challenges depends on the quality of entrepreneurship education and access to practical experiences (Mukembo,

2017; Hoodbhoy, 2024). When entrepreneurship education is perceived as relevant and practical, it enhances students' capacity for innovation and social impact (Mlambo, Mbongwa & Khambule, 2024). However, weak curriculum design and limited experiential learning opportunities can hinder this readiness (Gorski, 2017).

Empirical evidence indicates that participation in entrepreneurship education improves preparedness for self-employment. Gabadeen and Raimi (2018) found that active engagement increases students' confidence in starting businesses. Similarly, Padi, Dzisi and Eshun (2022) reported that experiential learning significantly enhances entrepreneurial intentions. Iwu et al. (2021) further established that consistent participation improves opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial competence. Entrepreneurship education also contributes to poverty alleviation by fostering enterprise creation. Hussain, Bhuiyan and Bakar (2024) found that students who participate actively in entrepreneurship programmes are more likely to establish businesses that generate employment. Chukwuma-Nwuba (2018) noted that such participation promotes financial independence, while Alaref, Brodmann and Premand (2020) demonstrated its long-term impact on reducing unemployment. Nevertheless, constraints such as inadequate funding, limited access to start-up capital, and insufficient mentorship continue to hinder effective participation (Ugochukwu &Adekunle, 2022; Baluku, Onderi & Otto, 2021). These challenges highlight the need for systemic support to maximize the benefits of entrepreneurship education.

Statement of the problem

Despite the growing emphasis on entrepreneurship education as a strategy for poverty reduction, its effectiveness in Nigeria remains uncertain. While public universities in Cross River State have integrated entrepreneurship education into their curricula, implementation challenges persist, including inadequate resources, limited practical exposure, and weak alignment with labour market demands. Students' perceptions play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. If students perceive such programmes as theoretical or irrelevant to real-world challenges, their motivation to pursue entrepreneurial careers may decline. This disconnect undermines the potential of entrepreneurship education to address unemployment and poverty. Although existing studies have examined the outcomes of entrepreneurship education, limited attention has been given to students' perceptions, particularly within the context of public universities in Cross River State. This gap necessitates an empirical investigation into how students perceive entrepreneurship education and its role in poverty reduction, as well as how participation influences their preparedness for self-employment.

Objectives of the study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' perception of entrepreneurship education and poverty reduction among undergraduates in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine how undergraduates perceive the relevance of entrepreneurship education in reducing poverty.

2. Determine the relationship between students‘ participation in entrepreneurship education and their preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation.

Research questions

1. What is the perception of undergraduate students regarding the role of entrepreneurship education in poverty reduction?

2. How does participation in entrepreneurship education influence students‘ readiness for self-employment and financial independence?

Statement of hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between undergraduates‘ perception of entrepreneurship education and its perceived role in poverty reduction.

2. Participation in entrepreneurship education does not significantly influence undergraduates‘ preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation.

Methods

This study adopted a predictive correlation research design to examine the extent to which students‘ perceptions of entrepreneurship education predict their views regarding its potential for poverty reduction. This design is appropriate for determining both the direction and strength of relationships between variables without manipulation. It further provides a statistical basis for inferring the likelihood that students with positive perceptions of entrepreneurship education will regard it as an effective tool for poverty alleviation. The design also offers insights relevant for policy formulation and curriculum improvement in public universities. The study was conducted in Cross River State, Nigeria, located in the South-South geopolitical zone. The target population comprised undergraduates from the University of Calabar (UNICAL) and the

University of Cross River State (UNICROSS). UNICAL has an estimated population of 40,000 students across diverse disciplines, while UNICROSS has approximately 15,000 students with a strong orientation toward technical and vocational education. The combined population was therefore 55,000 undergraduates. A sample size of 400 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation across faculties and levels of study. The population was stratified based on faculties (e.g., Science, Education, Arts, Social Sciences) and levels (100–500), and proportional sampling was applied to reflect the population structure. This approach enhanced representativeness and improved the generalisability of the findings.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Perception of Entrepreneurship Education and Poverty Reduction Questionnaire (PEEPRQ). The instrument consisted of twenty items divided into two sections. Section A captured demographic characteristics such as gender, age, faculty, and university, while Section B addressed students' perception of entrepreneurship education and their participation in entrepreneurship programmes. Responses were measured on a four-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1), with reverse coding applied to negatively worded items. The instrument was validated by two experts in Business Education and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Calabar. Based on their input, 15 items were removed due to ambiguity or irrelevance, and 20 items were retained. Reliability was established using the Cronbach Alpha method through a pilot test conducted with 35 students from the Federal College of Education, Obudu, who were not part of the study sample. The reliability coefficients ranged from .70 to .83, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data collection was carried out with the assistance of two trained research assistants. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately and prepared for analysis. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression at a 0.05 level of

significance to test the hypotheses.

Results

Null hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between undergraduates' perception of entrepreneurship education and its perceived role in poverty reduction. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Undergraduates' Perception of Entrepreneurship Education and Its Perceived Role in Poverty Reduction

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	4.41	0.61	—	7.25	<.001
Perception of Entrepreneurship Education	0.48	0.04	.54	12.69	< .001

R	R2	Adj.R2	Std. Error	F(df1, df2	P
.54					

.29 .29 .66 160.99(1,

398) <.001

Note. Dependent variable: Perceived role of entrepreneurship education in poverty reduction.

Undergraduates' perception of entrepreneurship education served as the predictor variable, while perceived role in poverty reduction was the criterion variable.

The findings indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship between undergraduates' perception of entrepreneurship education and its perceived role in poverty reduction. This suggests that favourable student perceptions enhance the recognition of entrepreneurship education as a viable poverty-reduction mechanism. The null hypothesis is rejected. The results indicate that the model is statistically significant, $F(1, 398) = 160.99$, $p < .001$, with a correlation coefficient of $R = .54$ and coefficient of determination $R^2 = .29$. This implies that approximately 29% of the variance in the perceived role of entrepreneurship education in poverty reduction is explained by students' perception. Furthermore, the regression coefficient revealed a significant positive effect, $B = 0.48$, $t(398) = 12.69$, $p < .001$, indicating that an increase in positive perception corresponds to an increase in the perceived poverty-reduction role of entrepreneurship education.

Null hypothesis 2

Participation in entrepreneurship education does not significantly influence undergraduates' preparedness for selfemployment and poverty alleviation.

This hypothesis was tested using simple variable, while preparedness for selflinear regression analysis at the 0.05 level of employment and poverty alleviation served as significance. Participation in entrepreneurship the dependent variable.

education was treated as the predictor

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Participation in Entrepreneurship Education and

Undergraduates' Preparedness for Self-Employment and Poverty Alleviation

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	37.28	0.67	—	55.39	< .001
Participation in Entrepreneurship Education	−1.61	0.04	−.89	−39.01	< .001

R	R2	Adj.R2	SE	F(df1, df2)	P

.89	.79	.79	.39	1521.90(1, 398) <.001

Note. Dependent variable: Preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation.

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 398) = 1521.90$, $p < .001$, with $R = .89$ and $R^2 = .79$. This indicates that approximately 79.3% of the variance in preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation is explained by participation in entrepreneurship education. However, the regression coefficient revealed a significant negative relationship, $B = -1.61$, $t(398) = -39.01$, $p < .001$, with a standardized beta of $\beta = -.89$. This implies that increased participation in entrepreneurship education is associated with decreased perceived preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation. The results indicate that participation in entrepreneurship education significantly predicts undergraduates' preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation. However, the negative direction of the relationship suggests that increased participation does not translate into improved preparedness; rather, it corresponds with reduced perceived readiness. This counterintuitive finding points to possible deficiencies in programme delivery, including limited practical exposure, weak instructional strategies, or inadequate resource support. The null hypothesis is rejected, although the relationship is significant but negative.

Discussion of findings

Analysis was conducted to examine the influence of participation in entrepreneurship education on undergraduates' preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation. The results showed a statistically significant model, $F(1, 398) = 1521.90$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .793$, indicating that participation explains approximately 79.3% of the variance in preparedness.However, the findings must be interpreted alongside contrasting evidence.

Habib et al. (2020) argued that entrepreneurship education influences poverty reduction indirectly through entrepreneurial intention. This implies that while perception is important, it does not automatically translate into actual poverty reduction without actionable outcomes.

The strong positive perception observed in this study may be attributed to contextual realities in Cross River State, including high unemployment and limited job opportunities. Students may therefore view entrepreneurship education as a necessary alternative for economic survival. Additionally, national policies mandating entrepreneurship education may have increased awareness and shaped positive attitudes, even where practical outcomes remain uncertain. In contrast, the study revealed a significant but negative relationship between participation in entrepreneurship education and preparedness for self-employment. This finding diverges from previous studies such as Iwu et al. (2021) and Padi, Dzisi and Eshun (2022), which reported positive effects of participation on entrepreneurial readiness. The negative relationship observed may be explained by several factors. First, a mismatch between theoretical instruction and practical application may limit students' ability to translate knowledge into real-world skills. Second, poor programme delivery and inadequate instructional resources may reduce the effectiveness of participation. Third, increased exposure may heighten students' awareness of real-

world challenges such as limited access to capital, thereby reducing confidence. These observations are consistent with Abdu-Raheem (2022), who reported that students often feel unprepared despite participating in entrepreneurship education due to limited practical exposure.

Furthermore, compulsory programme structures in Nigerian universities may lead to passive participation, reducing engagement and learning outcomes. Measurement limitations may also contribute, particularly if participation is defined in terms of attendance rather than active involvement. The findings suggest that participation alone is insufficient; the quality, structure, and delivery of entrepreneurship education are critical in determining its effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study established that undergraduates' perception of entrepreneurship education significantly and positively predicts its perceived role in poverty reduction. This indicates that students who value entrepreneurship education strongly believe in its potential as a tool for economic empowerment. However, participation in entrepreneurship education, despite being statistically significant, demonstrated a negative relationship with preparedness for self-employment and poverty alleviation. This paradox highlights fundamental gaps in the design and implementation of entrepreneurship programmes. The findings underscore the need to shift from theoretical instruction to practical, skill-based learning approaches that adequately prepare students for entrepreneurial realities.

Recommendations

Entrepreneurship education curricula should be strengthened through the integration of experiential learning approaches such as business simulations, start-up incubation, and mentorship programmes; with lecturers undergoing continuous capacity development to enhance their ability to deliver practiceoriented entrepreneurship education aligned with industry realities.Government and institutional policymakers should provide adequate funding, infrastructure, and support systems, including incubation centres and access to start-up capital; while universities establish stronger collaborations with industry to expose students to real-world entrepreneurial environments. Regular evaluation of entrepreneurship education programmes should be conducted to ensure alignment with labour market demands and poverty reduction objectives.

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