

# The Challenges Faced by Youths in Accessing and Benefiting from Entrepreneurship Skill-Acquisition Programmes in Southern Senatorial District, of Taraba State

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges faced by youths in accessing and benefiting from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State. Although such programmes are widely promoted as tools for youth empowerment, many beneficiaries encounter barriers that limit their full participation and post-training impact. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 384 respondents across Donga, Takum, and Wukari Local Government Areas. Findings revealed that financial constraints, poor programme awareness, and long travel distances were major access barriers. Among those who participated, challenges included inadequate training materials, absence of mentorship, and lack of start-up capital. These findings support the Social Exclusion Theory, which highlights the role of systemic and structural barriers in perpetuating marginalisation. The study concludes that entrepreneurship programmes must go beyond enrolment figures to address both access and benefit gaps if they are to promote inclusive youth development. It recommends decentralised delivery, improved outreach, and robust post-training support as strategies to enhance programme effectiveness in rural and underserved settings.

**Keywords:** Youth access, entrepreneurship training, programme barriers, social exclusion, rural empowerment, Taraba State

## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has gained prominence in Nigeria as a national strategy for addressing youth unemployment, poverty, and social instability. Various skill-acquisition programmes have been introduced by both government and non-governmental actors to equip young people with entrepreneurial competencies intended to enhance self-reliance and reduce dependency on limited formal employment. However, while these initiatives are well-intentioned, many youths continue to face significant challenges in accessing and benefiting meaningfully from such programmes, particularly in underserved areas like Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State (Aliyu & Ibrahim, 2023).

Access to entrepreneurship programmes involves more than availability; it requires awareness, inclusivity, affordability, and socio-cultural alignment. Youths in rural and semi-urban areas often encounter logistical, financial, informational, and institutional barriers that prevent them from participating in training opportunities. Even when enrolled, they may struggle to derive full benefits due to factors such as poor instructional quality, lack of mentorship, limited access to startup capital, and insufficient follow-up support (Ajani & Oluwaseun, 2022). These challenges reduce the transformative potential of entrepreneurship programmes and perpetuate youth marginalisation.

Furthermore, structural inequalities rooted in gender, geography, education, and socio-economic background often shape who can access entrepreneurship training and how they benefit from it. For many young people in Taraba State, these systemic barriers create exclusionary conditions that limit personal development and livelihood advancement despite the existence of multiple entrepreneurship schemes (Musa & Olamide, 2020). Without addressing these challenges, youth-targeted interventions risk reinforcing existing disparities rather than closing them.

Previous studies have focused primarily on the outcomes of entrepreneurship training, especially economic empowerment. Far less attention has been given to the barriers that inhibit access and participation, particularly from the perspective of beneficiaries in rural communities. Understanding these challenges is vital for improving programme design and ensuring equitable youth development. This study responds to that gap by exploring the lived experiences of youths in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State regarding their access to and benefit from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition initiatives.

## **Problem Statement**

Despite the increasing number of entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes targeting Nigerian youths, significant disparities persist in terms of access, participation, and programme effectiveness. In Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State, many young people remain unable to enroll in or complete available training due to financial limitations, lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, and social exclusion. Even among those who participate, a substantial number report limited benefits due to weak programme implementation, inadequate follow-up support, and difficulty in accessing resources such as start-up capital and mentorship. These challenges reduce the effectiveness of entrepreneurship initiatives and undermine their potential to address youth unemployment and underdevelopment. While national-level reports often highlight enrolment figures and funding allocations, few studies examine the actual constraints youths encounter on the ground. Without clear insight into these barriers, policymakers and programme designers cannot adequately respond to the needs of marginalised youth or ensure the inclusivity and impact of entrepreneurship interventions (Chukwudi & Uduji, 2020). Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for developing more accessible and responsive programmes that deliver measurable, equitable outcomes across youth populations.

## **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the challenges faced by youths in accessing and benefiting from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State.

## **Research Questions**

- i. What barriers prevent youths from accessing entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State?
- ii. What factors limit the ability of participating youths to benefit fully from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in the region?

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **Understanding Barriers to Inclusive Youth Entrepreneurship Programming**

Entrepreneurship programmes are often promoted as solutions to youth unemployment, but the extent to which young people can access and benefit from these interventions depends on several interrelated factors. Access is not determined solely by programme availability; it is shaped by economic, institutional, informational, and social barriers that disproportionately affect marginalised populations. In regions such as Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State, these challenges are particularly acute due to poor infrastructure, limited awareness, low literacy levels, and poverty. Programmes often fail to reach the most vulnerable youth who lack the resources or networks to participate in government and donor-led initiatives (Ismaila & Mohammed, 2021).

One major barrier to access is financial exclusion. Many entrepreneurship programmes require registration fees, transportation costs, or hidden expenses that are prohibitive for low-income youth. Even where programmes are subsidised, indirect costs such as feeding and opportunity loss discourage participation. In such cases, well-intentioned interventions inadvertently reinforce economic inequalities by serving only those already slightly advantaged (Musa & Olamide, 2020).

In addition to economic constraints, weak institutional coordination often results in poor programme delivery. Youths may encounter unqualified facilitators, outdated curricula, or lack of basic equipment and materials. These deficiencies limit learning outcomes and hinder the transfer of entrepreneurial skills into sustainable

practice. In some cases, training is delivered as a one-time event with no post-training support, thereby reducing the likelihood of long-term impact (Adebayo & Daramola, 2023).

Social and cultural factors also shape access and outcomes. Gender norms, household responsibilities, or language barriers may prevent some youths especially girls and rural minorities from enrolling or engaging fully. Programmes that do not actively address these issues risk excluding key segments of the youth population or failing to create safe, inclusive learning environments (Aliyu & Ibrahim, 2023).

Finally, informational barriers, such as lack of awareness about opportunities or complex registration procedures, can prevent eligible youths from participating. In rural communities, communication channels may not reach the intended audience, and young people without mobile phones, internet access, or community networks may be left out entirely. Effective entrepreneurship training requires outreach strategies that are youth-friendly, accessible, and adapted to local realities (Yakubu & Agboola, 2022).

### **Structural and Institutional Constraints in Programme Access**

Entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes often face implementation challenges related to poor infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, and weak policy coordination. In many cases, training centres lack qualified facilitators, appropriate tools, and conducive learning environments. These deficiencies reduce the effectiveness of training and limit the reach of programmes, especially in rural communities where government presence is minimal. Studies have shown that fragmented implementation and inconsistent funding prevent many youths from participating in programmes or benefiting meaningfully from them (Adebayo & Daramola, 2023). When institutions fail to provide timely communication, standardised curricula, or monitoring systems, the intended outcomes of entrepreneurship interventions are diluted or lost altogether.

In addition, centralised programme planning often overlooks local realities. Youths in remote areas of Taraba State may be excluded due to the absence of decentralised training facilities or field support systems. Where programmes are implemented without local partnerships, their sustainability is weakened, and access remains skewed in favour of urban-based or connected individuals. These structural gaps reinforce patterns of exclusion and raise questions about the long-term viability of entrepreneurship as a pathway to inclusive youth development (Aliyu & Ibrahim, 2023).

### **Programme Quality and Post-Training Gaps**

The quality of entrepreneurship training significantly determines whether youth participants can convert acquired knowledge into real-life impact. Poor instructional delivery, inadequate hands-on practice, and generic training content reduce the practical value of such programmes. Many initiatives prioritise short-term enrolment figures over the depth of learning or long-term skill application. This limits the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and leaves participants with insufficient tools for navigating real business environments (Oladele & Ayeni, 2022).

Another key concern is the absence of structured post-training support. Beneficiaries frequently report difficulties in accessing startup capital, mentorship, or market linkages after completing the training. These gaps weaken the transition from knowledge to enterprise creation. Without post-training follow-up, many youths abandon their entrepreneurial pursuits or revert to dependency patterns. Research shows that programmes with built-in support services, including business incubation and peer mentoring, produce more sustainable outcomes than those with stand-alone training components (Yakubu & Agboola, 2022).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Social Exclusion Theory, which provides a relevant lens for understanding the barriers that prevent youths from accessing and benefiting fully from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes. Social Exclusion Theory focuses on the processes through which individuals or groups are systematically denied full participation in social, economic, and political life. It highlights the interconnected roles of poverty, institutional neglect, discrimination, and spatial inequality in perpetuating marginalisation (Silver, 1994; as cited in Ismaila & Mohammed, 2021;).

Applied to this study, the theory helps explain how structural constraints such as poor infrastructure, information gaps, and socio-cultural barriers exclude many rural youths in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State, from entrepreneurship opportunities. It also provides insight into why even beneficiaries of such programmes may be unable to translate training into sustainable livelihood outcomes due to persistent disadvantages in access to finance, mentorship, and markets (Musa & Olamide, 2020).

By framing entrepreneurship as a mechanism of inclusion, this theory draws attention to the need for policy reforms and programme designs that go beyond technical training to address systemic inequalities. It underscores the importance of removing both visible and invisible barriers that restrict youth participation and benefits. Therefore, Social Exclusion Theory supports the core objective of this study: to identify and analyse the hidden and overt challenges that hinder inclusive youth empowerment through entrepreneurship interventions in underserved regions.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the challenges youths face in accessing and benefiting from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State. The design was suitable for capturing participants' perspectives across multiple locations and socio-economic backgrounds.

The study population comprised youths in Donga, Takum, and Wukari Local Government Areas, with a combined population of 511,006 (National Population Commission, 2022; <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng>). A sample size of 384 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table, with proportional allocation across the three LGAs. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select wards, communities, and individual participants using simple random sampling.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising both closed and open-ended questions. The instrument was divided into two sections: demographic information and thematic items guided by the research questions. Validity was ensured through expert review from the Department of Sociology, Taraba State University, while reliability was tested using a pilot study and Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 as recommended by Taber (2018).

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency tables, mean scores, and standard deviations with SPSS Version 26. Qualitative responses were summarised thematically to provide contextual insights. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the analysed data on the challenges faced by youths in accessing and benefiting from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State. The analysis is based on a four-point Likert scale, where responses were rated as:

Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

### Barriers to Accessing Entrepreneurship Programmes

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	I could not participate in some training due to lack of awareness.	3.38	0.66	Agree
2	Transportation costs prevented me from attending programmes regularly.	3.27	0.71	Agree
3	Most programmes were conducted far from my location.	3.33	0.68	Agree
4	I could not register due to financial constraints.	3.42	0.64	Agree
5	Gender roles or family responsibilities limited my ability to attend.	3.10	0.80	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2025

These results show a high level of agreement that logistical and financial barriers remain the dominant challenges limiting youth access to entrepreneurship programmes. Lack of proximity, poor awareness, and gendered responsibilities also contributed to reduced participation.

### Challenges in Benefiting from Entrepreneurship Programmes

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
6	The training I attended lacked adequate materials and tools.	3.30	0.73	Agree
7	I did not receive follow-up support after completing the training.	3.41	0.69	Agree
8	I found it difficult to access capital to start my own business.	3.48	0.62	Agree
9	The quality of teaching was not sufficient to build practical business skills.	3.15	0.78	Agree
10	I was not linked to any mentorship or support network after the training.	3.36	0.70	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Respondents indicated that while they were able to attend some programmes, inadequate post-training support and access to capital remained significant limitations. Poor instructional quality and lack of mentorship further reduced the potential benefits of the programmes.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that youths in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State face multiple and interrelated challenges in accessing and benefiting from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes. The most prominent barriers include lack of awareness, high transportation costs, financial constraints, and distant training locations. These access-related issues confirm earlier research highlighting how logistical and economic factors limit the participation of rural youth in development programmes (Musa & Olamide, 2020). Such findings demonstrate that entrepreneurship interventions, though widely promoted, often fail to reach the most disadvantaged groups unless deliberate efforts are made to remove structural barriers.

Post-training challenges were also pronounced, with many respondents reporting inadequate training materials, poor instructional quality, and lack of follow-up support. The absence of post-training mentorship and access to start-up capital limits the practical application of entrepreneurial knowledge. These outcomes are consistent with the observations of Oladele and Ayeni (2022), who found that without a structured support system, beneficiaries struggle to transition from training to business establishment.

Social Exclusion Theory helps contextualise these findings by illustrating how institutional, economic, and social factors systematically marginalise certain groups from benefiting fully from development programmes. In the case of entrepreneurship training, exclusion is not only a matter of being left out but also of being insufficiently supported even when included. This reinforces inequality and reduces the long-term impact of skill-acquisition initiatives (Ismaila & Mohammed, 2021).

Overall, the findings emphasise the need for inclusive and youth-centred programme designs that account for the lived realities of target beneficiaries. Access must be matched with sustained support if entrepreneurship is to serve as a viable path to youth empowerment in under-resourced regions.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges faced by youths in accessing and benefiting from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes in Southern Senatorial District, Taraba State. The findings reveal that despite the availability of such programmes, multiple access barriers persist. These include lack of awareness, transportation difficulties, financial constraints, and distant training locations. In addition, many youths who enrolled in the programmes were unable to fully benefit due to poor instructional quality, lack of training resources, absence of mentorship, and limited access to start-up capital.



The results affirm that entrepreneurship initiatives alone are insufficient for youth empowerment if they are not designed to address the underlying social and institutional exclusions experienced by rural and semi-urban youth. Programmes that neglect post-training support and fail to adapt to the economic conditions of participants risk reinforcing the very inequalities they aim to reduce. These findings support the core principles of Social Exclusion Theory, which emphasises the need to identify and dismantle structural barriers to full participation in economic and social life.

To enhance impact and inclusiveness, entrepreneurship programmes must shift from one-size-fits-all approaches to targeted, context-sensitive interventions that incorporate both access facilitation and long-term support structures. A more inclusive model of entrepreneurship education is essential for equipping youths not just with skills but with the capacity, confidence, and resources to thrive in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Government agencies and implementing partners should decentralise entrepreneurship training to reach underserved communities more effectively. This includes establishing mobile training centres or partnering with local institutions in Donga, Takum, and Wukari LGAs. Communication strategies should also prioritise community-based awareness campaigns using local languages and trusted networks to ensure that all eligible youths are informed and included.

Entrepreneurship programmes should embed structured post-training components such as mentorship, access to micro-grants, and business incubation services. Providing tailored support after training completion will help beneficiaries transition from knowledge acquisition to enterprise development. These mechanisms should be responsive to the unique needs of youths in low-resource settings to promote sustainability and growth.

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