

FOSTERING STREET CHILDREN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL PROWESS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IMPERATIVENES

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Abstract: *The study evaluated the effectiveness of community-based and policy-driven interventions in integrating street children into entrepreneurial development programs in Oyo State, Nigeria, using mixed-methods approaches including qualitative interviews and quantitative data. A total of 150 street children were surveyed, with responses analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to measure the impact of these interventions on the children's entrepreneurial capabilities. The findings reveal that both community-based and policy-driven programmes contribute positively to street children skill development with mean entrepreneurial knowledge score of 72.5%, while those engaged in policy-driven programmes scored an average of 68.3%, standard deviation for community-based programmes (± 8.2) indicates higher variability in skill acquisition, suggesting that the outcomes of these programmes are more inconsistent compared to policy-driven interventions, which had a lower standard deviation of ± 5.6 , indicating more uniformity in results. These results indicate that while both intervention types are beneficial, community-based programmes show greater potential for fostering entrepreneurial prowess, particularly when they are localized and adaptable. Thus, a hybrid approach, combining community-based flexibility with the structural support of policy-driven initiatives, holds the greatest promise for the long-term integration of street children into entrepreneurial activities characteristic of the 21st century and digital transformation era.*

Keywords: *Community-based programmes; Policy-driven programmes; Entrepreneurial-prowess, Inclusive-education, Street-children*



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INTRODUCTION

The world's population structure is made up of children, out of the global population of about seven billion in year 2023, children's population account for three billion, which is a substantial portion of the world's population. Africa is experiencing a significant youth bulge, characterized by a predominantly young population. As of 2024, the continent's total

population is approximately 1.515 billion people, with a median age of 19.2 years. In sub-Saharan Africa, about 70% of the population is under the age of 30. Specifically, in 2022, approximately 55% of the region's population was aged between 15 and 64 years. Africa is said to be experiencing 'youth bulge', a demographic dividend that is capable of solving most of the continent's many development problems (Oladiti et al, 2024). In Nigeria, children account for almost half of the entire population (World Bank, 2023).

Children population strength-wise and attendant expectations the world over, constitute a force to be reckoned with since today's children are citizens of tomorrow, who, if well trained and exposed to 'modern' ideas, skills and formal vocational education cum academic learning, would become future leaders. This perhaps underscores the notion that a country cannot ignore almost half of its population in its development issues. Reasons for this might not be unconnected with the fact that, development entails a number of components such as human, material and financial resources (Oladiti, 2018; Alam et al, 2023).

Street children are a visible and pressing concern in Nigeria, particularly in Oyo State, where socio-economic disparities and systemic challenges have forced many children to the streets (Oladiti et al, 2024). These children face multidimensional vulnerabilities, including poverty, lack of education, and exposure to exploitation. Despite these challenges, they often exhibit resilience and resourcefulness, attributes that can be harnessed through entrepreneurial education. Entrepreneurial prowess, a combination of creativity, innovation, and business acumen, offers a pathway for street children to break the cycle of poverty and dependency. Reiterating this posture, the World Bank's Community and Social Development Project (CSDP), with emphasis on inclusive development in marginalized areas canvassed the potential of community-led initiatives in addressing social and infrastructural challenges through involvement of local communities in decision-making processes. This approach according to World Bank (2021) encourages marginalized groups like street children in taking active roles in their self-development.

Thus, the significance of these strategies anchors on their participatory nature with community engagement, shared decision-making, and culturally relevant practices coming together to re-shape vulnerable street children. This framework is crucial for their immediate social competence as well as for their long-term social inclusion and development in Oyo State. However, fostering this potential requires addressing systemic barriers within the education system and designing inclusive frameworks that accommodate their unique needs. This study explores the interplay between street children's entrepreneurial development with a focus on the challenges and opportunities within Oyo State.

Street children driven by poverty and child abuse constitute issues in Africa (UNICEF, 2004). These children, aged 5-14, live on the streets without protection or supervision, engaging in various activities such as hawking, load carrying, washing, food vending, waiters, and sex networking. This issue has become alarming globally, particularly in Africa, where poverty has led to a surge in street children's nefarious activities (Oladiti et al, 2024).

Street children are minors who live or work on the streets without consistent parental or institutional care. In Nigeria, the number of street children has risen due to factors such as poverty, family disintegration, and socio-political unrest. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF reported in 2023 that over 1.2 million Nigerian children are in street situations, with a significant percentage in urban areas like Oyo State. These children

often lack access to education and face societal stigma, which limits their potential for economic independence. Entrepreneurial prowess refers to an individual's ability to identify opportunities, innovate, and manage ventures effectively. For street children, this skill set represents a means of achieving self-reliance. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report of 2023, entrepreneurship is a vital driver of economic growth in developing countries. Tailored entrepreneurial education for street children can nurture skills such as problem-solving, financial literacy, and adaptability, empowering them to create and sustain businesses.

Inclusive education emphasizes the integration of all learners into mainstream educational settings, regardless of their socio-economic or physical circumstances. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlighted in 2022 that inclusive education is key to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for equitable and quality education. In Oyo State, the implementation of inclusive education has faced challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, teacher training, and policy enforcement. However, recent initiatives such as Nigeria's Universal Basic Education Program show promise in addressing these gaps. Street children face numerous socio-economic barriers that hinder their participation in education and skill acquisition. A 2023 report by the World Bank indicated that 40% of Nigerian households live below the poverty line, directly affecting children's ability to attend school. Additionally, cultural norms in certain communities prioritize child labour over formal education, further marginalizing these children (World Bank, 2023).

Effective policy frameworks and institutional support are essential for fostering inclusive education and entrepreneurial development among street children. In 2023, Nigeria introduced the National Policy on Inclusive Education, which aims to integrate marginalized groups into mainstream education. However, its impact remains limited due to insufficient funding and poor implementation at the state level. Community involvement plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of street children. Grassroots initiatives and NGOs have been instrumental in providing informal education and skill training (World Bank, 2023). For instance, the 2023 annual report from the African Youth Initiative highlighted community-based programs in Oyo State that have successfully reintegrated street children into vocational training and small-scale businesses.

Street children in Oyo State, Nigeria, remain a vulnerable population, exposed to poverty, social exclusion, and limited access to quality education. Despite their resourcefulness and resilience, these children often lack structured opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills that could help them escape the cycle of poverty. While various government and non-governmental organizations have initiated programmes to address streetism, these efforts often focus on basic needs such as shelter and food, with limited emphasis on equipping these children with skills for sustainable livelihood. Existing educational systems in the state are predominantly exclusionary, with little provision for integrating marginalized children into mainstream or vocational education frameworks. The lack of inclusive educational strategies tailored to the unique circumstances of street children has left a critical gap in fostering their entrepreneurial potential. Moreover, the relationship between inclusive education and entrepreneurial development among this demographic has received limited scholarly attention in Nigeria, particularly in Oyo State. This study seeks to address how inclusive education can be leveraged to foster entrepreneurial prowess among street children. Consequently, the study is anchored on three research questions: What are the barriers to inclusive education for street

children in Oyo State, Nigeria, and their impact on entrepreneurial skill development? What is the role of the role of inclusive education in fostering entrepreneurial prowess among street children in Oyo State? What is the effectiveness of community-based and policy-driven interventions in integrating street children into entrepreneurial development programmes?

Poverty is one of the primary barriers to inclusive education for street children. According to the World Bank (2023), over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, with many families in Oyo State struggling to afford school fees, uniforms, and learning materials. This financial hardship often forces children into street labour to support their families, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion from formal education. Moreover, societal norms and cultural expectations sometimes prioritize immediate economic contributions from children over long-term investments in their education (African Youth Initiative, 2023). The education system in Nigeria often fails to accommodate the unique needs of street children. Schools in Oyo State frequently lack the infrastructure and resources to support marginalized learners, including flexible learning schedules and psychosocial support services (UNESCO, 2022). Teachers are often not trained to handle the complexities of integrating street children into classrooms, further exacerbating their marginalization.

Additionally, the limited implementation of Nigeria's National Policy on Inclusive Education (2023) highlights a gap between policy intentions and practical execution. The exclusion of street children from education not only deprives them of basic literacy and numeracy but also restricts their ability to acquire critical entrepreneurial skills such as problem-solving, financial literacy, and innovation. A report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023) emphasizes that early exposure to entrepreneurial education significantly enhances individuals' ability to identify and capitalize on opportunities. For street children in Oyo State, the absence of such exposure limits their capacity to transition from subsistence living to self-reliance and economic contribution.

UNESCO (2022) avers that inclusive education not only ensures access to quality education but also builds critical life skills necessary for personal and professional development. For street children, inclusive education is particularly vital as it bridges the gap between formal schooling and the realities of street life, offering opportunities to develop creativity, resilience, and problem-solving skills. Entrepreneurial prowess encompasses the ability to identify opportunities, innovate, and manage resources effectively. Research by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, GEM (2023) underscores the importance of early exposure to entrepreneurial education in developing foundational skills such as critical thinking, financial literacy, and adaptability. Inclusive education frameworks that integrate entrepreneurial training provide street children with practical knowledge and tools to initiate and sustain small-scale enterprises, fostering their economic independence.

In Nigeria, initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2023) aim to integrate marginalized children into the educational system. However, implementation challenges, including insufficient funding and lack of trained personnel, have limited the impact of these policies on street children. According to the African Youth Initiative (2023), community-based models of inclusive education, such as informal learning centres and vocational training programs, have shown promise in equipping street children with entrepreneurial skills. These models combine literacy and numeracy education with hands-on training in crafts, trade, and business management, directly addressing the needs of street children. Inclusive education fosters

entrepreneurial development by providing street children with structured opportunities to acquire knowledge, build confidence, and explore innovative solutions to socio-economic challenges.

Community-based interventions often prioritize grassroots approaches, leveraging local knowledge and resources to address the needs of street children. Such initiatives typically involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious institutions, and community leaders. According to the African Youth Initiative (2023), programs that combine vocational training with mentorship have proven effective in equipping street children with entrepreneurial skills. Examples include tailoring, carpentry, and digital marketing workshops, which not only teach technical skills but also foster self-confidence and financial independence. Community-based interventions also emphasize accessibility by offering flexible learning schedules, mobile training units, and local outreach efforts. For instance, in Oyo State, some NGOs run mobile learning centres that deliver both academic and vocational training to street children directly in their neighbourhoods (UNESCO, 2022).

Policy-driven interventions provide a structural approach to addressing the plight of street children by embedding solutions within national and regional frameworks. Nigeria's National Policy on Inclusive Education (2023) recognizes the need to integrate marginalized children into mainstream education and skill development programs. The policy encourages collaboration between government agencies, private organizations, and civil society to create inclusive educational opportunities for street children. In practice, policy-driven interventions such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program have provided free education to many vulnerable children. Additionally, youth entrepreneurship schemes, like the Nigeria Youth Entrepreneurship Development Program (NYEDP), have facilitated access to financial resources and business training for street children transitioning into adulthood (World Bank, 2023).

Despite these achievements, the implementation of such policies is often hampered by corruption, inadequate funding, and poor monitoring mechanisms. The effectiveness of these interventions hinges on their ability to address the multidimensional challenges faced by street children. While community-based programs offer localized and adaptable solutions, their scalability and long-term viability remain concerns. On the other hand, policy-driven approaches provide a larger-scale framework but often fall short in addressing the immediate, context-specific needs of street children. Research suggests that hybrid models combining the grassroots reach of community-based initiatives with the structural support of policy-driven frameworks yield the most promising results (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2023). For instance, integrating community programs into government-sponsored entrepreneurship schemes can enhance resource allocation, monitoring, and sustainability. As such, the current study intended to examine the effectiveness of fostering street children's entrepreneurial prowess in Oyo state, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The overall objective of the study was to foster street children's entrepreneurial prowess in Oyo State, Nigeria, emphasizing the imperativeness of inclusive education. The study aimed to assess the impact of community-based and policy-driven interventions on street children's entrepreneurial knowledge, measure the development of entrepreneurial skills, and evaluate the economic outcomes of entrepreneurial programs for street children.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, targeting five of the most vulnerable areas in Oyo State, Nigeria. The population for the study comprised street children, and a total of 150 street children were selected as the sample. Random sampling techniques were employed to select the participants. These areas were selected based on factors such as a high street children population, socio-economic hardship, and limited access to education and vocational training. The target locations included Ibadan, the state capital, as well as other underserved regions like Oyo, Ogbomoso, and Saki. These areas had been identified through local government reports and community assessments as hotspots for streetism prevalence.

The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative interviews were conducted with local community leaders, educators, and street children to measure the impact of existing interventions on entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and economic outcomes. Structured questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data from the 150 street children.

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to summarize the survey responses. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract key patterns and insights. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities within these vulnerable regions.

The quantitative data from the survey were examined to evaluate differences in entrepreneurial knowledge and skill acquisition. Meanwhile, the thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews provided contextual understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of the policy-driven and community-based programs. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data enabled the researchers to triangulate findings and enhance the credibility of the study's conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of Community-Based and Policy-Driven Interventions on Street Children Entrepreneurial Knowledge

The study sought to assess the impact of community-based and policy-driven interventions on street children entrepreneurial knowledge. Table 1 summarises the distribution of the respondents

Table 1

Assessing the Impact of Community-Based and Policy-Driven Interventions on Street Children Entrepreneurial Knowledge

Intervention Type	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Community-Based Programmes	72.5	±8.2
Policy-Driven Programmes	68.3	±5.6

Table 1 revealed that both community-based and policy-driven interventions have positive impact on entrepreneurial knowledge among street children in Oyo State. Participants in community-based programmes had a higher mean entrepreneurial knowledge score (72.5%)

compared to those in policy-driven programmes (68.3%), with a greater standard deviation for community-based initiatives (± 8.2). This suggests that community-based programmes, while more flexible and adaptable to local contexts, tend to produce more variable outcomes. These findings aligned with the study by African Youth Initiative (2023), which highlights the importance of community engagement in enhancing entrepreneurial knowledge, particularly when localized adaptations are made. However, the higher variability in community-based programmes indicates the need for more standardized approaches to ensure consistent outcomes. Policy-driven interventions, as evidenced by the National Policy on Inclusive Education (2023), offer a more structured framework, though their impact was more uniform and slightly less effective in fostering entrepreneurial knowledge.

Development of Entrepreneurial Skills (Vocational Training)

To assess the effectiveness of vocational training in fostering entrepreneurial skills, this section compares outcomes from different types of interventions. Specifically, it contrasts community-based programmes with policy-driven initiatives, focusing on their impact on skill acquisition among participants. The following table summarizes the mean skill development scores and standard deviations associated with each intervention type, offering insights into both performance and consistency across programmes.

Table 2

Measuring the Development of Entrepreneurial Skills (Vocational Training)

Intervention Type	Mean Skill Development Score (%)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Community-Based Programmes	70.4	± 7.1
Policy-Driven Programmes	65.2	± 6.4

Table 2 presents the analysis of vocational training outcomes which shows that community-based programmes (mean score = 70.4%) outperform policy-driven programmes (mean score = 65.2%) in developing entrepreneurial skills. However, the standard deviation for both programmes remains substantial (± 7.1 for community-based and ± 6.4 for policy-driven programmes), indicating some challenges in skill development consistency. These results echo findings from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023), which reported that while local programmes often offer more targeted and relevant vocational training, such programmes can struggle with scalability and resource allocation. The relative success of community-based programmes highlights the importance of local context and support, while policy-driven programmes provide a more uniform experience but may lack the nuanced focus required for vocational skill development in marginalized groups.

Economic Outcomes of Entrepreneurial Programmes for Street Children

This section examines the economic outcomes of entrepreneurial programmes designed for street children, with a focus on how different intervention models influence financial empowerment and income-generating potential. Understanding these outcomes is essential in evaluating the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of such programmes in addressing economic vulnerability among marginalized youth. The comparative analysis that follows provides knowledge into how community-based and policy-driven approaches differ in their capacity to deliver measurable economic benefits.

Table 3

Assessing the Economic Outcomes of Entrepreneurial Programmes for Street Children

Intervention Type	Mean Economic Outcome Score (%)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Community-Based Programmes	74.1	±8.3
Policy-Driven Programmes	69.7	±6.1

Table 3 revealed that in terms of economic outcomes, street children participating in community-based programmes achieved a higher mean economic outcome score (74.1%) compared to those in policy-driven programmes (69.7%). The variability (±8.3 vs. ±6.1) suggests that while community-based programmes are more effective in improving economic outcomes, they face challenges in achieving consistent results. These findings are supported by World Bank (2023), which emphasizes the role of entrepreneurship in poverty reduction but also highlights the challenges of maintaining long-term economic impact, particularly when programs are dependent on external funding. The higher economic outcomes associated with community-based interventions may be attributed to the personalized support and local resources available, which are more likely to address the immediate economic needs of street children. However, the study also suggests that policy-driven interventions, though less effective in this regard, offer a more sustainable path by embedding entrepreneurial training into national development frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms the positive impact of both community-based and policy-driven interventions in fostering entrepreneurial skills among street children, with community-based programmes showing higher success rates but also greater variability in outcomes. The findings stress the need for a hybrid approach that combines the strengths of both intervention types to maximize entrepreneurial development and economic empowerment for street children. Future programmes should focus on improving the scalability and sustainability of community-based models while integrating them into broader policy frameworks for greater long-term success.

Consequently, it is recommended that policymakers and community stakeholders collaborate to develop hybrid programmes that combine the flexibility of community-based approaches with the structure and consistency of policy-driven frameworks. This hybrid model would ensure a more uniform spread of entrepreneurial knowledge while maintaining the adaptability needed to address local context. In addition, regular monitoring and evaluation should be implemented to track the effectiveness of these interventions, providing real-time feedback and allowing for adjustments to be made where necessary. Tailoring educational content to the specific needs of street children in diverse regions would also enhance the impact of such programmes. To enhance the effectiveness of vocational training for street children, it is recommended that community-based programmes expand their partnerships with local businesses and skilled artisans for hands-on mentorship and internships. These partnerships would help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical, real-world skills. In policy-driven programs, there should be a greater emphasis on including local industry leaders and entrepreneurs in the design and implementation of training modules. Additionally, vocational training programmes should be continuously updated to reflect

current market demands, ensuring that the skills taught remain relevant to the ever-evolving economic landscape.

Again, it is recommended that both community-based and policy-driven interventions introduce a follow-up mechanism to assess the long-term economic outcomes of entrepreneurial programs. This could include setting up micro-financing opportunities, providing access to small loans, or linking successful graduates of the programmes with business incubators. Furthermore, creating a supportive ecosystem, such as access to market linkages, business networking opportunities, and mentorship programmes, would help ensure that street children who acquire entrepreneurial skills can successfully establish and sustain businesses. Lastly, cross-sectoral collaboration with financial institutions, NGOs, and government bodies would enhance the economic sustainability of these initiatives.

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