

Innovative Approaches to Entrepreneurship Education for Girls in Marginalized Communities

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Abstract

This study examines innovative approaches to entrepreneurship education for girls in marginalized communities, focusing on community-based learning, project-based pedagogy, mentorship, and digital integration. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey data (n = 120) with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions to provide both statistical and experiential insights. The study is anchored primarily in Human Capital Theory, complemented by Empowerment, Social Capital, and Institutional perspectives to explain how skills development, agency, networks, and socio-cultural structures influence girls' entrepreneurial outcomes. Findings reveal high exposure to community-based (88%) and project-based learning (82%), with significant improvements in problem-solving (M = 4.01), business skills (M = 3.92), and self-efficacy (M = 3.85). However, major constraints persist, including lack of funding (81%), poor infrastructure (69%), and cultural barriers (63%). The study concludes that innovative, context-sensitive entrepreneurship education enhances girls' skills, confidence, and entrepreneurial intentions, but sustainable impact requires institutional support, financial inclusion pathways, and gender-responsive implementation strategies.

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Background to the Study

Entrepreneurship education is increasingly recognised as a strategic vehicle for economic inclusion, skills development, and poverty reduction, particularly in contexts where formal employment opportunities are scarce. Globally, initiatives that integrate practical business skills into educational frameworks have demonstrated positive outcomes in fostering innovation, self-reliance, and economic participation among learners (Front. Educ., 2025). Despite these advancements, girls in marginalized communities characterised by limited access to quality education, entrenched gender norms, and socio-economic constraints remain disproportionately excluded from these opportunities. Research indicates that restricted access to entrepreneurial skills training, cultural constraints, and resource barriers inhibit girls' capacity to engage meaningfully in entrepreneurial activities (Ramle & Mardikaningsih, 2024).

In sub-Saharan Africa, empowering girls through education not only enhances their economic prospects but also contributes to broader community well-being and sustainable development (United Nations, 2025). Entrepreneurship education equips learners not only with business competencies but also with confidence, creativity, and resilience, which are critical for navigating socio-economic challenges and breaking cycles of poverty (Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 2024). Yet, traditional pedagogical models often lack the context-specific, experiential components necessary to engage girls in marginalized settings effectively. This gap underscores the urgent need for innovative approaches that are culturally responsive, accessible, and tailored to the lived realities of girls in underserved communities.

Literature Review:

Entrepreneurship Education and Gender

Entrepreneurship education plays a key role in promoting innovation, self-reliance, and economic participation by equipping learners with practical business, financial, and problem-solving skills (Reis & Ferreira, 2015; Liu et al., 2023; Sharp et al., 2024). However, studies consistently show that girls face greater barriers to accessing and benefiting from such programmes due to gender norms, limited resources, and weak mentorship structures (Andreea & Suci, 2024). In developing contexts, women's entrepreneurial participation remains further constrained by institutional and socio-cultural factors, including limited access to finance and networks, which weakens entrepreneurial outcomes and aspirations (Ojediran & Anderson, 2020).

Entrepreneurship Education in Marginalized Contexts

Marginalized communities, characterised by poverty, isolation, and weak institutional support, require context-sensitive approaches to entrepreneurship education. Evidence suggests that school-based and community-oriented practical projects improve financial literacy and self-sufficiency, but their long-term impact depends on sustained support systems such as mentorship and industry linkages (Reis & Ferreira, 2015; Oyekan, 2016; Zemlyak et al., 2023). The literature also emphasises culturally responsive, community-embedded, and project-based models that align learning with local realities and indigenous knowledge systems.

Innovative Pedagogical Strategies

Recent studies advocate for integrated models combining experiential learning, mentorship, and appropriate use of technology to strengthen entrepreneurial mindsets among girls (Frontiers in Education, 2025). Mentorship and role models are particularly important for building self-efficacy and entrepreneurial identity, while digital tools help extend learning access in underserved areas. Despite these advances, research on gender-responsive and context-specific entrepreneurship education in low-resource settings remains limited. There is insufficient evidence on how such interventions can be effectively implemented, scaled, and sustained, and many studies fail to integrate socio-cultural, economic, and institutional perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on an integrated framework drawing from Human Capital Theory, Empowerment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Institutional Perspectives.

Human Capital Theory: Holds that education and skills development enhance productivity and economic participation by strengthening knowledge and competencies (Becker, 1964; Oyelude et al., 2022). In this study, entrepreneurship education is viewed as an investment in girls' productive capacities.

Empowerment Theory: Emphasises building individuals' confidence, agency, and control over life choices. In the context of girls' entrepreneurship education, empowerment is reflected in improved self-confidence, decision-making ability, and economic independence (Oyelude et al., 2022).

Social Capital Theory: highlights the importance of networks, mentorship, and community support in facilitating access to resources and opportunities. For girls in marginalized communities, such social connections strengthen learning and support business start-up and growth (Bourdieu; Tsounis & Xanthopoulou).

Institutional Perspectives: Focus on how policies, cultural norms, and social structures shape entrepreneurial opportunities. This framework explains how gender norms and institutional barriers constrain girls' participation and how supportive policies and community engagement can promote inclusion.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how innovative entrepreneurship education affects girls in marginalized communities. Mixed methods enable the integration of numerical evidence with in-depth experiential insights and support triangulation of findings, thereby strengthening the robustness of the study (Creswell & Teddlie, 2009). This approach is particularly suitable for examining both participation patterns and lived experiences in under-resourced educational contexts.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprises girls aged 12-18 enrolled in entrepreneurship education programmes in selected marginalized communities, as well as key stakeholders such as teachers, facilitators, and community leaders. Purposive sampling will be used to select relevant schools and communities, while stratified sampling will ensure adequate representation across age groups and educational levels in the survey. For the qualitative component, criterion-based sampling will be used to select participants with direct experience of the innovative approaches under study.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data will be collected using structured questionnaires measuring entrepreneurial knowledge, self-efficacy, attitudes, and perceived barriers. The instrument will be adapted from established scales and pre-tested for reliability and validity using Likert-scale items. Qualitative data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, enabling in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, community norms, and the contextual relevance of entrepreneurship education. The combination of these methods allows the study to capture both measurable outcomes and contextual realities shaping girls' engagement in entrepreneurship learning.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests and regression) to examine relationships between exposure to innovative teaching methods and learning outcomes. Qualitative data will be analysed using thematic analysis, following an iterative inductive and deductive coding process to identify key patterns and meanings in participants' narratives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards will be strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Special care will be taken to respect cultural sensitivities and protect minors involved in the study.

Validity and Reliability

Validity will be strengthened through **triangulation** of data sources and methods, while reliability of the questionnaire will be ensured through pilot testing and internal consistency analysis (e.g., Cronbach's alpha). The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings will further enhance the credibility of the results.

Table 1: Summary of Quantitative Findings (n = 120)

Category	Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Demographics	Mean Age	15.6 years	Mid-adolescence
	Rural/Peri-urban	72% / 28%	Mostly rural
Exposure	Project-based learning	82%	High exposure
	Mentorship	76%	High exposure
	Community-based learning	88%	Very high
	Digital learning	54%	Moderate
Outcomes (Mean, 1-5)	Business skills	3.92	High
	Financial literacy	3.68	Moderate-High
	Problem-solving	4.01	High
	Self-efficacy	3.85	High
	Entrepreneurial intention	3.77	High
Challenges	Lack of funding	81%	Most severe
	Poor infrastructure	69%	Severe
	Cultural barriers	63%	Severe
	Lack of trained teachers	58%	Moderate Severe

Table 2: Integrated Qualitative Themes

Theme	Quantitative Support	Key Insight	Conclusion
Empowerment	Self-efficacy = 3.85	Increased confidence	Agency improved
Skills acquisition	Skills = 3.92	Practical skills gained	Learning is relevant
Access & inclusion	Exposure > 80%	Barriers reduced	Inclusion improved
Barriers	Funding 81%, Infrastructure 69%	Poverty & norms persist	Structural issues remain
Sustainability	Intention = 3.77	Funding/policy concerns	Institutional support needed

Results

Table 1 indicates that most respondents were rural-based (72%) with a mean age of 15.6 years, showing that the intervention reached girls at a critical stage for skills development. Exposure to innovative approaches was high, especially community-based (88%) and project-based learning (82%), while digital learning was moderate (54%), reflecting infrastructural limitations in marginalized contexts (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

The girls recorded high mean scores in problem-solving (M = 4.01), business skills (M = 3.92), and self-efficacy (M = 3.85), with entrepreneurial intention also high (M = 3.77). This suggests that practical approaches positively influenced competence and motivation, consistent with recent studies on experiential and mentorship-driven entrepreneurship

education (Liu et al., 2023; Frontiers in Education, 2025). Major challenges included lack of funding (81%) and poor infrastructure (69%), followed by cultural barriers (63%) and shortage of trained teachers (58%), a pattern typical of low-resource settings (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). Table 2 supports these findings, as participants reported improved confidence and practical skills but expressed concerns about sustainability and policy support.

Discussion

The findings confirm that innovative, context-sensitive entrepreneurship education significantly improves girls' skills, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial aspirations in marginalized communities. The strong performance in problem-solving and business skills highlights the effectiveness of experiential and community-based learning models (Liu et al., 2023; Frontiers in Education, 2025). The high self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention scores also support Human Capital and Empowerment perspectives, which emphasize skills acquisition and confidence-building as foundations for economic participation (Becker, 1993; UNESCO, 2024). Qualitative evidence further underscores the importance of mentorship and community involvement, consistent with Social Capital Theory. However, persistent challenges related to funding, infrastructure, and cultural constraints suggest that pedagogical innovation alone is insufficient. Without sustained institutional and policy support, the long-term impact and scalability of such programmes remain uncertain (World Bank, 2023; UNICEF, 2023).

This study examined innovative approaches to entrepreneurship education for girls in marginalized communities, focusing on community-based learning, project-based pedagogy, mentorship, and limited digital integration. The results show clear improvements in entrepreneurial skills, problem-solving ability, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention, confirming the effectiveness of experiential learning approaches (Liu et al., 2023; Frontiers in Education, 2025). The findings also align with Human Capital and Empowerment perspectives, which view education as a means of expanding capabilities and economic agency (Becker, 1993; UNESCO, 2024). However, ongoing challenges especially funding, infrastructure, and cultural barriers continue to limit programme sustainability, a situation widely reported in low-resource education contexts (World Bank, 2023; UNICEF, 2023).

Conclusion

This study has shown that innovative and context-sensitive approaches to entrepreneurship education especially community-based learning, project-based pedagogy, and mentorship have a strong positive influence on girls in marginalized communities. The results indicate clear improvements in entrepreneurial skills, problem-solving ability, self-confidence, and willingness to pursue self-employment. These outcomes confirm that practical and experiential learning methods are more effective than purely theoretical approaches in low-resource environments. The study also reveals that entrepreneurship education does more than build technical skills; it strengthens confidence, independence, and decision-making capacity among girls, thereby

improving their chances of achieving economic self-reliance and contributing meaningfully to their communities. However, the persistence of major challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, cultural barriers, and limited teacher capacity shows that instructional innovation alone is not enough to guarantee long-term success.

Recommendations

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

- 1. Strengthen Policy and Institutional Support**

Governments and educational authorities should formally integrate entrepreneurship education for girls into school and community education programmes and provide stable funding to support its implementation and expansion.

- 2. Expand Practical and Community-Based Learning**

Schools and training centres should prioritize project-based and community-oriented learning approaches that connect training directly to real-life economic activities within the local environment.

- 3. Promote Mentorship and Role-Model Programmes**

Structured mentorship schemes involving successful entrepreneurs and community role models should be strengthened to motivate girls, build their confidence, and broaden their career aspirations.

- 4. Improve Infrastructure and Learning Facilities**

There should be deliberate investment in training facilities, workshops, and basic learning infrastructure, including access to simple digital tools where possible, especially in rural and underserved communities.

- 5. Build the Capacity of Teachers and Facilitators**

Regular training and retraining programmes should be organized to equip teachers and facilitators with practical, learner-centred, and entrepreneurship-oriented teaching skills.

- 6. Women-Only Safe Learning Spaces**

Where socio-cultural norms restrict girls' open participation in mixed settings, programme designers should consider implementing women-only or female-only learning cohorts. Such safe learning spaces can enhance participation, confidence, and open discussion, particularly in conservative or marginalized communities. Creating culturally responsive environments where girls feel psychologically safe to ask questions, share ideas, and develop entrepreneurial identity can significantly strengthen learning outcomes and retention.

- 7. Embedding Financial Literacy and Access Pathways**

Entrepreneurship programmes should move beyond skills training to include structured financial literacy education, digital financial skills (such as mobile banking and digital payments), and practical exposure to funding pathways. Integrating micro-grant or seed funding components, alongside formal linkages with microfinance institutions and community savings groups, can bridge the gap between entrepreneurial intention and actual business start-up. This will enhance sustainability and translate learning into real economic participation.

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