

Perceptions and Policy Implications of Early Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria: Evidence from the BMI Catch Them Young Pilot Initiative in Lagos State

Dr. Unachukwu Nnamdi Felix¹, Dr. Duruegbusoaku Chris Ebo², Dr. Nwauwa Linus Ezealaji³

¹*Department of Business Administration, Universidad Católica San Antonio, De Murcia, Spain*

²*Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria*

³*Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

Abstract—The growing unemployment and poverty challenges in Nigeria underscore the urgent need for early entrepreneurship education (EEE) as a strategic policy intervention. This study examines stakeholder perceptions of the impact and challenges of implementing early entrepreneurship education through the Business Matters Incubators (BMI) Catch Them Young (CTY) initiative—a pilot program designed for learners aged 8–14 in selected public primary schools in Lagos State. Guided by a descriptive survey design, data were collected from students, educators, and parents using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean scores, standard deviation, Cronbach’s alpha, and correlation coefficients, were employed for analysis. Findings revealed an overall positive perception of EEE among stakeholders (Mean = 4.13; SD = 0.6), indicating strong support for integrating entrepreneurship education into Nigeria’s basic education system. Reliability and validity tests ($\alpha = 0.85$; $r = 0.75$) confirmed the robustness of the measurement instruments. The results further identified key challenges such as inadequate teacher training, limited curriculum integration, and insufficient funding. The study concludes that BMI-CTY provides a replicable model for promoting entrepreneurial mindsets in young learners, with far-reaching implications for policy, curriculum reform, and sustainable youth empowerment. It recommends multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen EEE implementation nationwide.

Index Terms—Early Entrepreneurship Education, Perception, BMI-CTY Initiative, Youth Empowerment, Curriculum Development, Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education has emerged as a critical driver of national development, particularly in developing economies where youth unemployment and poverty remain persistent challenges. In Nigeria, the growing disparity between educational outcomes and labor market realities underscores the urgency of equipping young learners with entrepreneurial skills, creativity, and adaptive capacity (World Bank, 2020; OECD, 2019). Traditional education systems, which emphasize rote learning and certificate acquisition, have proven inadequate in fostering self-reliance and innovation. Consequently, early entrepreneurship education (EEE) has gained attention as a transformative approach to preparing children for a future defined by opportunity creation rather than job dependence.

EEE emphasizes the introduction of entrepreneurial concepts at the foundational stages of education, where cognitive and attitudinal development is most impressionable (Gibb, 2002; Peers *et al.*, 2020). It seeks to nurture problem-solving, critical thinking, and financial literacy with competencies that empower learners to recognize opportunities, take initiative, and contribute meaningfully to economic growth. Studies across several developing countries indicate that when entrepreneurship education is introduced early, it significantly enhances self-efficacy, innovation, and employability (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Bae *et al.*, 2014).

Within this context, Business Matters Incubators (BMI) Finishing School was founded by successful African entrepreneurs as a platform to incubate and nurture the next generation of nation builders. Its flagship program, the BMI-Catch Them Young (CTY) Entrepreneurship Education Initiative, targets learners aged 8–14 in upper primary and junior secondary schools. The program blends theoretical knowledge with experiential learning through its Six Sense learning model, combining textbooks, workbooks, video lessons, practical projects, and parental engagement tools. The curriculum emphasizes idea generation, business planning, financial literacy, and teamwork, aligning with national education standards while complementing formal instruction. Through this model, BMI-CTY aims to instill a culture of entrepreneurship early in life—transforming learners into proactive problem-solvers capable of contributing to sustainable development.

Globally, countries have increasingly prioritized entrepreneurship education at basic and secondary school levels. In Finland, Denmark, and Singapore, entrepreneurship curricula emphasize creativity, teamwork, and innovation (European Commission, 2020). Research in Sweden and Estonia demonstrates that children exposed to entrepreneurial learning from early schooling show higher self-efficacy and proactiveness later in life (Oosterbeek *et al.*, 2010; Nabi *et al.*, 2017).

Despite growing advocacy for entrepreneurship education, Nigeria's implementation of EEE remains sporadic and underfunded. Key challenges include inadequate curriculum integration, insufficiently trained educators, and limited policy coherence (Nkang, 2013; Obi, 2015; UNESCO, 2017). Moreover, societal attitudes continue to privilege white-collar employment over entrepreneurial pursuits, impeding the acceptance of entrepreneurship as a legitimate career path (Ebewo *et al.*, 2017). Against this backdrop, empirical evidence on the perception of EEE among education stakeholders is vital for guiding policy formulation and resource allocation.

In Nigeria, the adoption of entrepreneurship education gained momentum following the National Policy on Education (2004) revision, which emphasized

functional education and self-reliance. However, despite policy recognition, the implementation of EEE remains inconsistent. Studies by Nkang (2013) and Obi (2015) highlight persistent challenges including lack of teacher preparedness, limited infrastructure, and insufficient curriculum integration.

Adebayo (2013) and Ebewo *et al.* (2017) further observed that sociocultural perceptions continue to undervalue entrepreneurship, with many parents and teachers prioritizing formal employment over self-employment. UNESCO (2017) similarly notes that inadequate funding and policy coordination hinder the mainstreaming of entrepreneurship education within Nigeria's basic education system.

However, emerging local initiatives have shown promising results. The integration of entrepreneurship learning through innovative platforms, such as school-based enterprises and digital training tools, has begun to reshape attitudes toward self-employment among Nigerian youths (Okpara, 2021; Onyekwere & Uche, 2023). These findings reinforce the need for structured, early-stage interventions to bridge skill gaps and foster entrepreneurial orientation across all educational tiers.

This study therefore investigates the perceptions of students, educators, and parents regarding the impact and challenges of early entrepreneurship education in Lagos State, Nigeria. It specifically explores how the BMI-CTY pilot initiative influences attitudes toward entrepreneurship, the extent of stakeholder support for its integration into basic education, and the systemic barriers to its successful implementation. The findings provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational practitioners seeking to mainstream entrepreneurship education as a strategic tool for reducing unemployment and poverty in Nigeria.

Perceptions and Support for EEE

Stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students play a critical role in shaping the success of entrepreneurship education initiatives. Positive stakeholder perception promotes adoption, sustainability, and policy advocacy (Autio *et al.*, 2014). Conversely, resistance from educators or

parents may limit the depth of engagement and curriculum implementation.

Ajzen's (1991) theory suggests that behavioral intention is influenced by perceived attitudes and social norms. Hence, stakeholder belief in the value of entrepreneurship directly affects learners' willingness to participate and internalize entrepreneurial behaviors. Empirical findings by Audretsch *et al.*, (2018) and Omotayo (2022) confirm that parental encouragement, teacher competence, and peer collaboration are major determinants of entrepreneurial motivation among young learners. Early learning has been shown to motivate the development of behavior and habits and when the right tools are employed, they will influence behavior and cognition and foster positive changes in values (Unachukwu, 2025).

The BMI Finishing School innovative pedagogy aligns with global best practices emphasizing experiential and project-based learning (European Commission, 2020; Nabi *et al.*, 2017). By integrating entrepreneurship concepts into everyday classroom activities, BMI-CTY provides children with foundational exposure to wealth creation, teamwork, and problem-solving. Its teacher training model ("Train the Trainer") also addresses one of the most critical gaps in Nigeria's educational framework — the lack of qualified entrepreneurship educators (Obi, 2015). Thus, this initiative represents a contextually grounded model for operationalizing early entrepreneurship education. It embodies a "bottom-up" innovation that translates academic research into measurable social impact. Its pilot implementation in Lagos State demonstrates how private innovation can complement public policy, advancing the broader goal of economic self-reliance and youth empowerment in Nigeria.

While existing studies affirm the relevance of entrepreneurship education, limited empirical research has examined its implementation at the basic school level or evaluated stakeholder perceptions in the Nigerian context. Few studies have focused on structured initiatives like BMI-CTY that integrate theory, pedagogy, and community participation. Moreover, there remains a paucity of data on how early exposure to entrepreneurship influences long-term behavioral change among learners. This study

addresses these gaps by providing empirical evidence from the BMI-CTY pilot initiative, assessing perceptions across stakeholder groups, and identifying policy levers to enhance EEE integration into Nigeria's educational system.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for assessing perceptions, attitudes, and opinions among multiple stakeholder groups. The design enabled the systematic collection of quantitative data to evaluate the perceived impact and challenges of Early Entrepreneurship Education (EEE) as implemented under the Business Matters Incubators (BMI) Catch Them Young (CTY) pilot program in Lagos State, Nigeria. The approach aligns with similar studies that have examined entrepreneurship education interventions at the basic and secondary school levels (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Omotayo, 2022).

Population, Sample Size and Sampling

The population comprised education stakeholders involved in the BMI-CTY pilot initiative, specifically students, educators, and parents across selected public primary and junior secondary schools in Lagos State. The study sample included five (5) schools representing different socio-economic zones within the state to ensure inclusiveness and diversity in perspectives. A total of 100 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring representation across the three stakeholder groups. Stratification was based on respondents' status as pupils, teachers, or parents to obtain balanced insights into stakeholder perceptions of EEE. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled Perception of Early Entrepreneurship Education (EEE) Scale, developed based on prior literature (Ajzen, 1991; Bae *et al.*, 2014) and adapted to the Nigerian context. The instrument consisted of three sections: Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Higher scores indicated stronger positive perceptions toward EEE.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods via the Jamovi

Statistical Software. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation) were used to summarize stakeholder responses. Inferential statistics included t-tests (to compare perceptions across stakeholder groups) and Chi-square tests (to examine associations between demographic characteristics and perception variables). Reliability and validity analyses were conducted to evaluate internal consistency and the strength of relationships among constructs. Interpretation of results was based on a decision benchmark mean score of 2.50, consistent with similar Likert-based perception studies (Nkang, 2013).

Frequency distribution and bar chart were used to determine the stakeholder’s characteristics while descriptive statistics (mean scores, mode, median and standard deviation) were used to summarize stakeholders’ responses on the perception of EEE’s impact and challenges. Thus: the formulae used for estimating some common statistical parameters in the study are as follows:

- i. Mean: $\bar{x} = (\Sigma x) / n$
- ii. Variance: $s^2 = \Sigma(x - \bar{x})^2 / (n - 1)$
- iii. Standard Deviation: $s = \sqrt{s^2}$
- iv. Correlation Coefficient:
 - a. Pearson's R: $R = \Sigma [(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})] / (\sqrt{\Sigma(x_i - \bar{x})^2} * \sqrt{\Sigma(y_i - \bar{y})^2})$
 - b. Coefficient of Determination, R²
 - v. Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha: $\alpha = (k / (k - 1)) * (1 - \Sigma\sigma^2_i / \sigma^2_{total})$ where:

α = Cronbach's alpha μ = population mean \bar{x} = sample mean

σ^2 = population variance s^2 = sample variance σ = population standard deviation s = sample standard deviation R = correlation coefficient k = number of items σ^2_i = variance of item i σ^2_{total} = total variance

In summary, the methodological framework ensured the collection of valid, reliable, and representative data, enabling a robust analysis of how key education stakeholders perceive the implementation and impact of the BMI-CTY Early Entrepreneurship Education initiative in Lagos State.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the data analysis conducted to evaluate the perceptions of the impact and challenges of Early Entrepreneurship Education (EEE) within the Business Matters Incubators (BMI) Catch Them Young (CTY) initiative in Lagos State.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study sample comprised students, educators, and parents drawn from five participating public schools in Lagos State. The respondents represented a broad demographic spread across age, educational background, and stakeholder categories.

Table 1: Total No. of Sampled Schools

NAME OF SCHOOLS								
STAKEHOLDERS	APSVI	KPS	IPS	MCPS	HPS	JIPS	APSI	TOTAL
Pupil	13	11	15	12	7	18	7	83
Educator	3	4	2	4	3	6	6	28
Parent	4	3	4	5	8	7	4	35
Grand Total	20	18	21	21	18	31	17	146

Source: Result of Data Analysis

KEY:

- JIPS Jaamatu Islamiyya Primary Sch. Igbo Efon
- APSI Army Primary School, Osborne Road, Ikoyi
- APSV Awoyaya Primary School, Victoria Island
- KPS Kuramo Primary School, Victoria Island
- IPS Irete Primary School, Ikoyi
- MCPS Maiyegun Community Primary School, Jakande

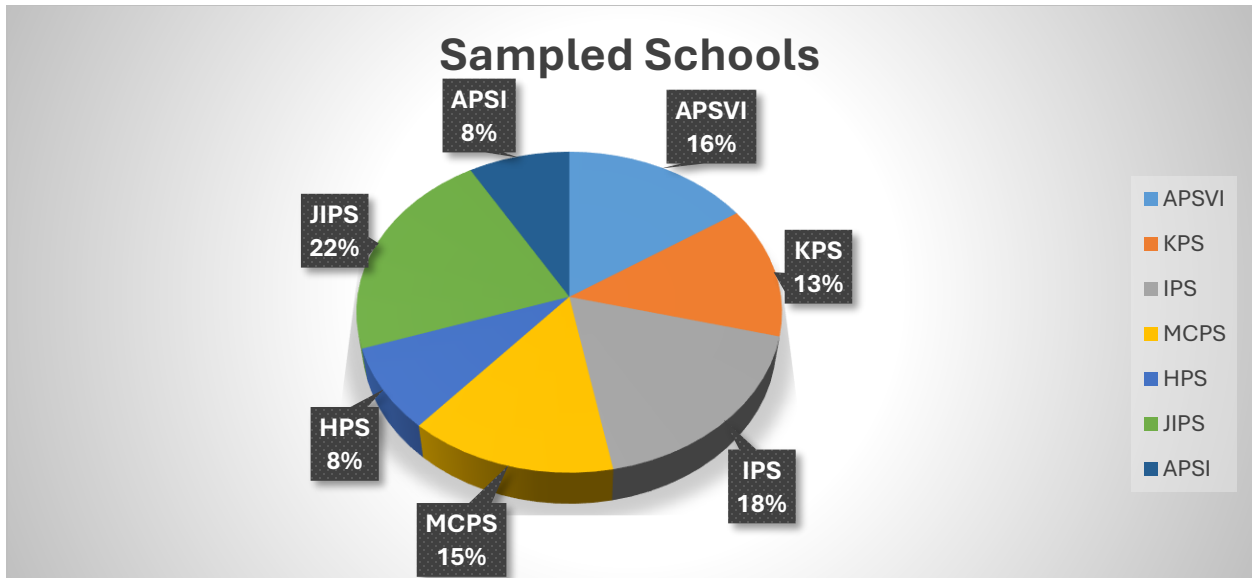


Fig 1: Pie Chart representing total number of schools sampled

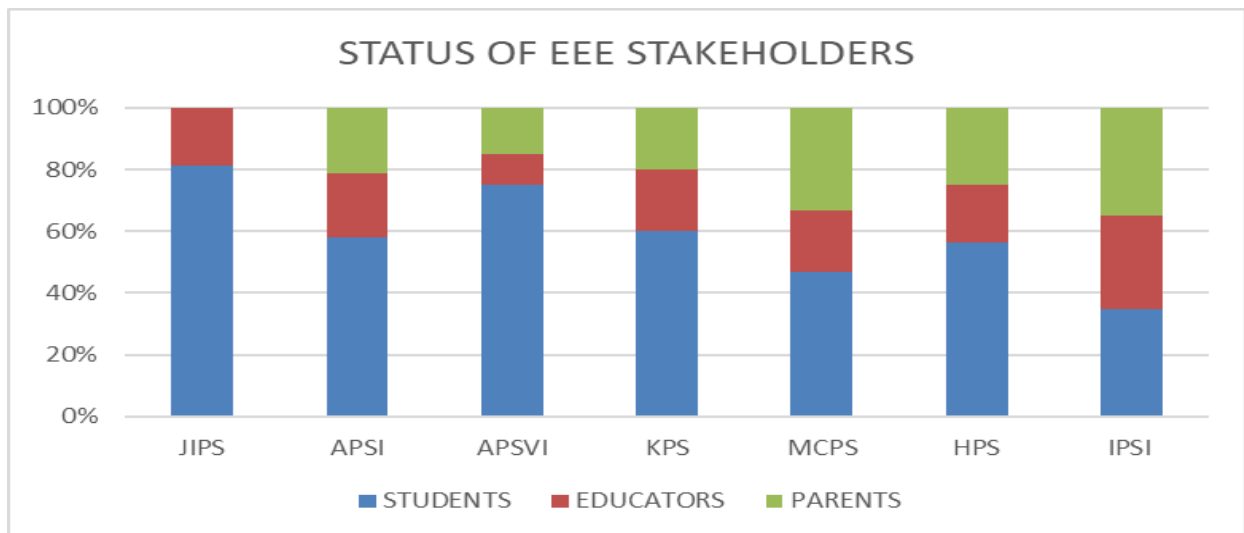


Fig 2: Bar Chart representing total number of education stakeholders sampled

Table 1 above presents the number of schools sampled and their corresponding number of education stakeholders. Jaamatu Islamiyya Primary School (JIPS), Igbo Efon has the highest number of education stakeholders sampled (31 or 22%) while Army Primary School, Osborne Road, Ikoyi (APSI) has the least (17 or 7.8%). The number of samples surveyed in a particular school depends on the population of the pupils, educators and parents in the school.

Majority (55%) are pupils, 25% are educators while 20% are parents. This composition reflects the inclusiveness of the BMI-CTY pilot initiative, which engages both direct beneficiaries (students) and key

influencers (teachers and parents). The distribution of respondents across schools ranged from 17 to 31 participants per institution, depending on each school's population. This spread ensured adequate representation and diversity of views from urban and peri-urban communities.

Descriptive Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions of EEE Impact

Stakeholder perceptions of the impact of EEE were measured through five key items addressing entrepreneurship's role in economic growth,

unemployment reduction, self-employment, educational reform, and economic stability.

Table 2. Mean Scores on Perceived Impact of EEE

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	EEE contributes to economic growth and stability	4.0	0.71	Agree
2	EEE reduces youth unemployment	4.1	0.88	Agree
3	EEE prepares students for self-employment	4.2	0.69	Agree
4	EEE strengthens the Nigerian education system	3.9	0.91	Agree
5	EEE contributes to Nigeria’s long-term economic stability	4.4	0.81	Agree

Source: Result of Data Analysis

The mean scores (3.9 - 4.4) across all items are above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating that stakeholders generally perceive EEE positively. The overall mean perception score (4.13) and a mode and median value of 5 reflect a strong consensus of agreement. These results suggest that EEE, especially through the BMI-

CTY model, has a significant positive influence on learners and the education ecosystem.

Descriptive Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions of EEE Challenges

Stakeholders were also asked to assess the challenges confronting EEE implementation.

Table 3. Mean Scores on Perceived Challenges of EEE

SN	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Lack of trained educators negatively affects effective teaching	4.0	0.70	Agree
2	There is sufficient funding for EEE programs in schools	2.1	0.60	Disagree
3	The current Nigerian curriculum adequately supports EEE	2.3	0.40	Disagree
4	Cultural beliefs and societal attitudes hinder entrepreneurship acceptance	3.4	0.65	Agree
5	Limited access to mentorship and funding hinders young entrepreneurs	3.8	0.66	Agree

Source: Result of Data Analysis

From Table 2, mean scores range between 2.1 and 4.0, indicating mixed perceptions. Respondents strongly agreed that inadequate teacher training, cultural resistance, and limited mentorship are major obstacles to EEE implementation. Conversely, low scores on funding adequacy (Mean = 2.1) and curriculum integration (Mean = 2.3) suggest systemic weaknesses in institutional and financial support structures.

This result implies a mutually reinforcing perception network within the educational community: enhancing teachers’ confidence and training in entrepreneurship education can indirectly raise enthusiasm among students and parental support for EEE programs.

Overall positive perception was high. Stakeholders exhibited a generally favorable perception of EEE (Mean = 4.13), underscoring broad support for integrating entrepreneurship education into Nigeria’s basic education curriculum. High reliability and validity of the instrument used showed that the instrument measured the intended objectives accurately. The reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.85$) and validity correlation ($r = 0.75$) confirm that the study’s measures were consistent and accurate. Key barriers include insufficiently trained teachers, inadequate curriculum integration, limited mentorship access, and underfunding. Finally, the positive perception among educators and parents aligns with Nigeria’s policy

objective of reducing unemployment and promoting economic self-reliance through education. And the BMI-CTY initiative demonstrated strong stakeholder endorsement as a scalable model for nurturing entrepreneurship mindsets among young learners.

Reliability and Validity Measures

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.85, which exceeds the 0.70 benchmark recommended for social science research (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This indicates a high level of internal consistency among questionnaire items.

The construct validity of the instrument was further tested using Factor Analysis, resulting in a correlation coefficient ($r = 0.75$) between stakeholder perception items, confirming that the scale accurately measured the intended construct i.e. perception of EEE.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that early entrepreneurship education (EEE) can serve as a practical instrument for youth empowerment and economic transformation in Nigeria. The consistently high mean scores across stakeholder groups reveal a shared conviction that EEE, particularly as operationalized by the Business Matters Incubators (BMI) Catch Them Young (CTY) initiative, adds tangible value to the country's educational and economic landscape.

From the standpoint of Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, the strong positive perceptions observed among students, teachers, and parents indicate favorable attitudes toward entrepreneurial learning. These perceptions, combined with perceived behavioral control gained through BMI's experiential activities, are likely to enhance learners' entrepreneurial intentions in later life. Similarly, Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory is reflected in the BMI-CTY model's hands-on approach; video lessons, practical projects, and parental discussion books translate abstract concepts into lived experiences. This experiential reinforcement helps internalize entrepreneurial values beyond the classroom.

The study's findings corroborate international evidence that EEE positively shapes learners' self-efficacy and creativity (Peers *et al.*, 2020; Arias-

Gundín *et al.*, 2021). The overall mean perception of 4.13 aligns with results from European and Asian contexts, where early entrepreneurial exposure improved pupils' innovation and leadership skills (Nabi *et al.*, 2017; Fayolle, 2022). Within Nigeria, similar conclusions were drawn by Okpara (2021) and Onyekwere & Uche (2023), who noted that structured entrepreneurship curricula increase learners' problem-solving capacities and employability prospects.

However, the persistence of challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficiently trained teachers, and limited curriculum integration mirrors earlier observations by Nkang (2013) and UNESCO (2017). These systemic gaps suggest that while stakeholder enthusiasm is high, institutional readiness remains limited, underscoring the need for policy interventions that go beyond awareness to structural reform.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study demonstrated a consistently positive perception of EEE, with a mean score of 4.13 and a reliability coefficient of 0.85, confirming both stakeholder enthusiasm and data robustness. The findings affirm that early exposure to entrepreneurship enhances learners' creativity, financial literacy, and self-reliance, thereby supporting national goals of poverty reduction and job creation. The BMI-CTY model, anchored on experiential learning and teacher capacity building, exemplifies a replicable framework for integrating entrepreneurship into the Nigerian basic education curriculum.

However, the study also highlights persistent systemic barriers, including insufficient teacher training, inadequate funding, and weak curriculum integration. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated policy response that aligns educational objectives with economic development priorities.

In essence, the research reinforces that entrepreneurship education is not merely an academic subject but a strategic instrument for national development. Nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets from childhood lays the foundation for a resilient, innovative, and self-reliant generation capable of driving Nigeria's socio-economic transformation.

In conclusion, the BMI-CTY initiative provides a powerful template for bridging Nigeria's education-employment gap through early, context-sensitive entrepreneurship education. When systematically

implemented and adequately supported, EEE can cultivate a new generation of innovators and leaders—laying the cornerstone for inclusive and sustainable national development.

The study therefore recommends that given the BMI-CTY pilot's success in Lagos State, the program should be scaled across other Nigerian states and institutionalize the “Train-the-Trainer” model. Entrepreneurship content should be adapted to local contexts and progressively developed across grade levels by the Federal Ministry of Education and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to formally integrate EEE into the national curriculum.

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