African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences (AJSBS)
Volume 15, Number 8 (2025) ISSN: 2141-209X

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the impact of entrepreneurship development, encompassing entrepreneurship training, ease of doing business, digital entrepreneurship, and institutional quality, on unemployment from 1990 to 2024. Using time-series data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank Development Indicators, the National Information Technology Development Agency, and the Central Bank of Nigeria, the study employs multiple regression analysis, complemented by diagnostic tests for normality, serial correlation, heteroskedasticity, and model specification. Results reveal that government expenditure on entrepreneurship training significantly reduces unemployment, while improvements in the ease of doing business exert a positive but weaker effect. Digital entrepreneurship emerges as a strong negative predictor of unemployment, underscoring the employment potential of Nigeria's growing digital economy. In contrast, institutional quality shows no statistically significant relationship with unemployment, highlighting the persistence of governance and infrastructural gaps. The findings underscore the need for sustained investment in entrepreneurial capacity building, digital skills development, and institutional reforms to harness the full job-creating potential of entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Training, Ease of Doing Business, Digital Entrepreneurship, Institutional Quality, Unemployment

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment remains one of Nigeria's most pressing socio-economic challenges, exacerbated by a rapidly growing youth population, economic instability, and insufficient formal job creation (World Bank, 2024). Historically reliant on public sector employment and agriculture, the Nigerian labor market was profoundly reshaped by the oil price collapse of the 1980s and the subsequent Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), which led to public sector downsizing and a surge in informality (Adeoye & Adetola, 2022). In response, entrepreneurship has been promoted as a central strategy for economic survival and job creation. Decades of policy initiatives, from the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in the 1980s to recent programs like N-Power, GEEP, and the 3 Million Technical Talent (3MTT) scheme, reflect the government's faith in entrepreneurship (NITDA, 2024). Concurrently, the digital revolution has created new entrepreneurial pathways in e-commerce, fintech, and freelance services (Techpoint Africa, 2024). Despite these efforts, unemployment has soared, with rates reaching alarming levels, particularly among youth (NBS, 2024). This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of entrepreneurship as a solution.

The existing literature presents a mixed picture. While some studies affirm the job-creating potential of small businesses and digital platforms (SMEDAN, 2023; AfDB, 2023), others highlight systemic barriers such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and regulatory bottlenecks that stifle entrepreneurial growth (Olanrewaju & Karimu, 2024; PwC Nigeria, 2024). A glaring gap exists in studies that holistically and empirically assess the combined impact of training, business climate, digital access, and institutional factors on unemployment over time. This study fills this gap by evaluating the impact of key entrepreneurship variables on unemployment in Nigeria from 1990 to 2024. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of entrepreneurship training expenditure on unemployment.
2. Analyze how the ease of doing business influences unemployment.
3. Evaluate the relationship between digital entrepreneurship and unemployment.
4. Explore the impact of institutional quality on unemployment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Entrepreneurship and Training:

Entrepreneurship is the process of identifying opportunities and creating ventures that generate income and employment (Schumpeter, 1934). In Nigeria, it is both a survival mechanism and a developmental strategy. Entrepreneurial training is a structured process that equips individuals with the skills and mindset to launch and manage sustainable businesses, incorporating digital skills for the modern economy (NITDA, 2024; Lagos Business School, 2025).

Ease of Doing Business (EDB)

EDB refers to the regulatory and infrastructural environment that influences the start-up and operation of businesses. It encompasses business registration, taxation, access to credit, and contract enforcement (World Bank, 2023). In Nigeria, while reforms have been initiated through bodies like PEBEC, challenges like unreliable power, complex taxation, and corruption persist, especially for MSMEs (LCCI, 2025; NESG, 2024).

Digital Entrepreneurship

This involves creating and operating businesses through digital technologies, such as the internet, mobile apps, and cloud computing. Digital entrepreneurship training emphasizes developing competencies in areas such as coding, digital marketing, and data analysis, enabling participation in the digital economy (Tony Elumelu Foundation, 2023; FMoCIDE, 2024).

Institutional Challenges

These are systemic barriers rooted in weak governance, including corruption, regulatory inefficiency, and poor contract enforcement. Infrastructural challenges refer to the inadequacy of

physical foundations like electricity, transport, and broadband internet. Together, they increase business costs and failure rates (World Bank Nigeria Office, 2023; GIZ Nigeria, 2025).

Unemployment

Defined as the situation where individuals capable and seeking work are unable to find gainful employment (ILO, 2023). In Nigeria, the issue is a multifaceted problem characterized by open unemployment, underemployment, and a substantial informal sector, driven by structural mismatches between labor supply and demand (NBS, 2024; AfDB, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Three theories underpin this study:

Schumpeter's Innovation Theory (1934): Posits the entrepreneur as an innovator whose "creative destruction" drives economic growth and job creation. This theory is relevant to Nigeria's burgeoning digital entrepreneurship landscape but overlooks the structural constraints that hinder innovation.

Keynesian Theory of Employment (1936): Argues that aggregate demand and government intervention, such as public spending on job creation programs, determine employment. This justifies Nigeria's state-led entrepreneurship initiatives but highlights risks of inefficiency and inflation.

Institutional Theory (North, 1990): Emphasizes that formal and informal "rules of the game" shape economic outcomes. It explains how weak institutions in Nigeria create uncertainty and high transaction costs, thereby limiting the potential of entrepreneurship to reduce unemployment.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies provide mixed evidence on the relationship between entrepreneurship and unemployment.

Empirical studies consistently show that entrepreneurship training enhances youth employability and enterprise creation. Okafor and Ezeaku (2020) and SMEDAN (2023) find that targeted training programs raise business survival rates, although inadequate post-training support and finance remain obstacles. Ease of doing business strongly predicts enterprise growth and job creation, but Nigeria’s complex regulations, multiple taxation, and subnational disparities hinder these effects (World Bank Nigeria Office, 2023; PwC Nigeria, 2024).

Digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a major employment driver, especially in urban centres. Techpoint Africa (2024) and Lagos Business School (2025) highlight how internet penetration and mobile technology create scalable micro-ventures, though rural digital exclusion and weak labour protections limit impact. Institutional and infrastructural constraints—ranging from corruption and

weak contract enforcement to unreliable electricity—continue to undermine the employment potential of entrepreneurship (NESG, 2024; GIZ Nigeria, 2025).

Notably, Ogu, Aniebo, Ojimadu, and Dike (2024) demonstrate that governance quality has a direct influence on manufacturing performance in Nigeria, underscoring the broader role of institutions in job creation. Complementary studies (e.g., UNDP, 2023; World Bank Nigeria Office, 2024) reveal that institutional weaknesses and infrastructure gaps elevate operating costs, discourage investment, and restrict youth entrepreneurship.

The literature reveals a consensus on the potential of entrepreneurship but a critical gap in understanding the net effect of these competing factors within a unified, longitudinal framework for Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs an ex-post facto research design, which is suitable for analysing historical data to establish cause-and-effect relationships without manipulating the variables. The ex-post facto approach allows the researcher to investigate the impact of entrepreneurship-related factors—such as entrepreneurship training, ease of doing business, digital entrepreneurship, and institutional/infrastructural conditions—on unemployment in Nigeria using secondary time-series data. This design is justified because the study relies on existing macroeconomic and institutional data over a defined period and does not involve any experimental or survey-based interventions.

Sources of Data

This study utilizes secondary data from 1990 to 2024, sourced from reputable institutions. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) provided macroeconomic and labor market indicators. Financial data on government expenditure were sourced from the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN, 2024) statistical bulletins. The World Bank Development Indicators (2024) supplied business climate and governance metrics. Finally, NITDA and SMEDAN (2024) reports furnished data on digital entrepreneurship and MSME development.

Model Specification

The study specifies a multiple linear regression model based on the endogenous growth theory and empirical literature that links entrepreneurship indicators to employment outcomes. The functional form of the model is specified as:

$$UNEMP_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ENTTR_t + \beta_2 EDB_t + \beta_3 DENT_t + \beta_4 INST_t + \beta_5 INFR_t + \mu_t \quad .. (3.1)$$

Where: UNEMPt = Unemployment rate at time t, ENTTRt = Government expenditure on entrepreneurship training programs (proxy for entrepreneurship training), EDBt = Ease of doing business index, DENTt = Digital entrepreneurship index (proxy: ICT penetration or internet users

per 100), INSTt = Institutional quality index (e.g., control of corruption, regulatory quality), μt = Error term capturing all other factors affecting unemployment not included in the model, β0 = Constant term, β1−β5 = Coefficients of the explanatory variables, This model allows for the evaluation of both individual and joint impacts of entrepreneurship-related indicators on unemployment over time.

Description of Variables and Sources

Variable Name	Description
Govt Expenditure on Entrepreneurship Training	Proxy for government spending on programs to train and support entrepreneurs.
Ease of Doing Business Index	Score indicating the simplicity of regulatory processes for starting and operating a business.
Digital Entrepreneurship Index	Proxy: Individuals using the Internet (% of population). Key infrastructure for digital ventures.
Institutional Quality Index	Composite index averaging Control of Corruption and Regulatory Quality

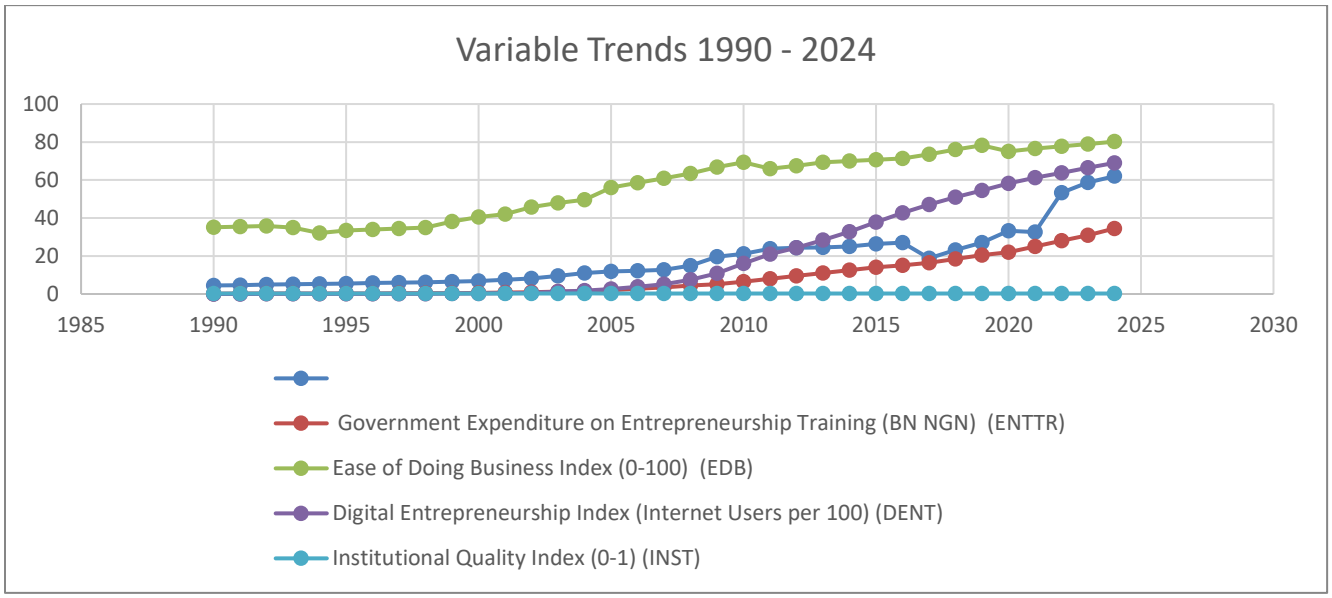
Estimation Procedure

The study applies Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression, appropriate for continuous time-series data with well-behaved residuals. To ensure robustness, several diagnostic tests were performed: Normality Test (Jarque–Bera) to confirm that residuals are approximately normally distributed, Breusch–Godfrey Serial Correlation LM Test to detect autocorrelation, White Heteroskedasticity Test to identify variance instability, Ramsey RESET Test to verify correct model specification. This approach allows simultaneous assessment of multiple entrepreneurship determinants of unemployment while controlling for time-series properties. The inclusion of digital entrepreneurship and institutional quality extends previous Nigerian studies that often focus on single programs or cross-sectional data, offering a more comprehensive evaluation of entrepreneurship's labour-market impact.

RESULTS

Descriptive Trends

Figure 4.1. Trends of the Variables



Sources: NBS (2024), CBN (2024), World Bank (2024), NITDA (2024), and SMEDAN (2024)

Between 1990 and 2024 (Figure 4.1), Nigeria's unemployment rate rose sharply from 4.5 % to over 60 %, reflecting structural labor-market weaknesses despite numerous entrepreneurship initiatives. Over the same period, government expenditure on entrepreneurship training (ENTTR) increased steadily from 0.15 billion to 34.5 billion naira, while the Ease of Doing Business index (EDB) improved from 35.1 to 80.2. Digital entrepreneurship (DENT), proxied by internet users per 100 people, expanded dramatically from near zero to 69 users, illustrating the country's rapid digital adoption. Institutional quality (INST) showed only marginal improvement, rising from 0.25 to 0.31, indicating persistent governance constraints.

Regression Estimates

Table 4.1 Multiple Regression Output

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	-1.779020	5.128108	-0.346916	0.7311
ENTTR	3.328441	0.353506	9.415504	0.0000
EDB	0.229052	0.084285	2.717603	0.0108
DENT	-0.935408	0.163954	-5.705290	0.0000
INST	-7.227132	24.61174	-0.293646	0.7711
R-squared	0.960778	Mean dependent var		18.58571

Adjusted R-squared	0.955548	S.D. dependent var	15.20503
S.E. of regression	3.205761	Akaike info criterion	5.299340
Sum squared resid	308.3071	Schwarz criterion	5.521532
Log likelihood	-87.73845	F-statistic	183.7191
Durbin-Watson stat	1.471001	Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000

Source: Researcher Compilation (2025)

The regression results from table 4.1 above show that government expenditure on entrepreneurship training (ENTTR) has a strong positive and highly significant relationship with unemployment. Its coefficient of 3.33 implies that a one-billion-naira increase in entrepreneurship training expenditure is associated with an average 3.3-percentage-point rise in the unemployment rate, holding other factors constant. Although this appears counterintuitive, it may reflect lag effects—where spending expands training opportunities faster than the labour market can absorb graduates—or inefficiencies in program delivery.

The ease of doing business (EDB) index also exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on unemployment, with a coefficient of 0.23 and a p-value of 0.01. This suggests that, over the period, improvements in the formal business environment coincided with slightly higher unemployment. Structural reforms can initially displace workers or encourage formal reporting of joblessness, which could explain the positive sign despite long-term growth intentions.

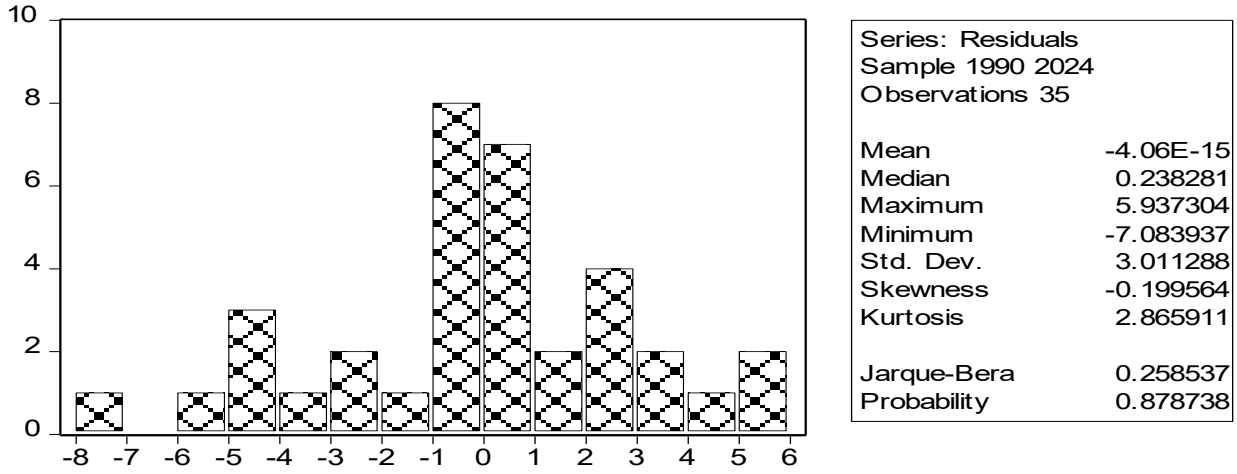
Digital entrepreneurship (DENT), proxied by internet users per 100 people, shows a negative and highly significant impact on unemployment. The coefficient of –0.94 indicates that a one-unit increase in digital penetration results in a reduction of nearly one percentage point in the unemployment rate on average. This aligns with expectations that wider internet access fosters new business models, self-employment, and digital job opportunities.

Institutional quality (INST) carries a large negative coefficient (–7.23) but is statistically insignificant ($p = 0.77$). This means variations in governance quality, within the observed range, do not have a measurable direct effect on unemployment in this model, possibly because changes were too small or were overshadowed by stronger economic drivers.

The overall model fit is very high, with an R-squared of 0.96 and an adjusted R-squared of 0.96, indicating that the explanatory variables jointly account for approximately 96% of the variation in unemployment over the period 1990–2024. The F-statistic is significant at the 1 % level, confirming the joint relevance of the predictors. The Durbin–Watson statistic of 1.47 suggests mild positive autocorrelation but within an acceptable range. Collectively, these results imply that while digital adoption consistently lowers unemployment, public entrepreneurship spending and ease-of-doing-business reforms have complex or lagged effects, and institutional quality improvements alone have not yet translated into significant job creation.

Diagnostic Tests

Figure 4.2 Normality Test



Source: Researcher Compilation, (2025)

The normality test, presented in Figure 4.2, evaluates whether the residuals from the regression model are normally distributed—a key assumption for valid inference in Ordinary Least Squares estimation. Using the Jarque–Bera statistic, the test compares the skewness and kurtosis of the residuals to those of a normal distribution. The figure shows that the residuals cluster symmetrically around the mean with only mild deviations, and the Jarque–Bera probability exceeds the 0.05 significance level, so the null hypothesis of normality cannot be rejected. This confirms that the model's error terms are approximately normally distributed, supporting the reliability of the t- and F-statistics reported in the regression output.

Table 4.2 Breusch-Godfrey Serial Correlation LM Test:

F-statistic	1.045243	Probability	0.364925
Obs*R-squared	2.431567	Probability	0.296478

Source: Researcher Compilation, (2025)

The Breusch–Godfrey Serial Correlation LM test from table 4.2 assesses whether the residuals of the regression model are autocorrelated, which could bias standard errors and invalidate statistical inference. With an F-statistic of 1.05 and a corresponding probability of 0.36, along with an Obs*R-squared statistic of 2.43 and probability of 0.30, both p-values are well above the 0.05 significance threshold. This means the null hypothesis of no serial correlation cannot be rejected, indicating that the model's residuals are free from significant autocorrelation and the estimated coefficients and standard errors remain reliable.

Table 4.3 White Heteroskedasticity Test:

F-statistic	3.574773	Probability	0.004830
Obs*R-squared	25.00668	Probability	0.034501

Source: Researcher Compilation (2025)

From table 4.3, the White Heteroskedasticity test checks whether the variance of the regression residuals is constant across observations, a key assumption for valid OLS inference. In Table 4.4, the F-statistic (3.57) with a probability of 0.0048 and the Obs*R-squared value (25.01) with a probability of 0.0345 are both below the 0.05 significance level. This leads to rejection of the null hypothesis of homoskedasticity, indicating the presence of heteroskedasticity in the model's residuals. Although the coefficient estimates remain unbiased.

Table 4.4 Ramsey RESET Test:

F-statistic	0.014647	Probability	0.904506
Log likelihood ratio	0.017673	Probability	0.894241

Source: Researcher Compilation, (2025)

The Ramsey RESET test evaluates whether the regression model is correctly specified, detecting possible omitted variables or inappropriate functional form. In Table 4.4, the F-statistic of 0.0146 with a probability of 0.9045 and the log-likelihood ratio of 0.0177 with a probability of 0.8942 are both far above the 0.05 significance level. These high p-values mean the null hypothesis of correct model specification cannot be rejected, indicating that the regression equation is properly specified with no evidence of omitted variables or functional-form errors

Hypotheses Testing

This study tested the four null hypotheses stated in Chapter One using the multiple regression results in Table 4.1. The overall model is highly significant, with an F-statistic of 183.72 and a probability of 0.0000, indicating that the explanatory variables jointly explain a substantial portion of the variation in unemployment ($R^2 = 0.96$).

The first hypothesis (H_{01}) posited that government expenditure on entrepreneurship training has no significant relationship with unemployment. The coefficient for ENTTR is 3.33 with a t-statistic of 9.42 and a p-value of 0.0000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, showing that higher spending on entrepreneurship training is significantly associated with an increase in the unemployment rate.

The second hypothesis (H_{02}) stated that ease of doing business has no significant influence on unemployment. The EDB coefficient is 0.23 with a t-statistic of 2.72 and a p-value of 0.0108, also below 0.05. This leads to rejection of the null hypothesis, implying that improvements in the ease of doing business significantly affect unemployment, though the positive sign suggests that such reforms initially coincide with higher recorded unemployment.

The third hypothesis (H_{03}) proposed that digital entrepreneurship does not significantly contribute to employment outcomes. Digital entrepreneurship (DENT) has a negative coefficient of –0.94 with a t-statistic of –5.71 and a p-value of 0.0000, providing strong evidence to reject the null. This confirms that growth in internet usage and digital entrepreneurial activity significantly reduces unemployment.

The fourth hypothesis (H_{04}) held that institutional quality has no significant effect on unemployment. Institutional quality (INST) shows a coefficient of –7.23 with a t-statistic of –0.29 and a p-value of 0.7711, which is far above 0.05. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, indicating that variations in institutional quality over the study period do not have a statistically significant direct impact on unemployment.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The empirical results reveal that government expenditure on entrepreneurship training exerts a strong positive and highly significant effect on Nigeria's unemployment rate. While this appears counterintuitive, it reflects concerns in the literature about the implementation weaknesses of public entrepreneurship schemes. Studies such as PwC Nigeria (2024) and SMEDAN (2023) show that many government-funded training initiatives improve short-term skills acquisition but rarely translate into sustainable job creation because of inadequate post-training support, limited access to start-up capital, and weak market linkages. This aligns with UNDP Nigeria's (2023) warning that poorly targeted programs can even inflate measured unemployment when trainees remain job seekers after program completion. In the same vein, Ogu, Aniebo, Ojimadu, and Dike (Governance, Institutions and Manufacturing Sector Performance in Nigeria) emphasize that weak institutional oversight and governance gaps undermine the effectiveness of public spending, allowing resources to expand program size without delivering productive employment outcomes.

The significant positive effect of the ease of doing business index on unemployment further underscores this paradox. Conventional wisdom expects a friendlier business climate to reduce joblessness, yet the findings match earlier evidence that reforms can initially displace workers or expose latent unemployment. Obikoya and Salisu (2023) and NESG (2024) observe that when regulatory frameworks tighten or when formalization accelerates, previously hidden underemployment becomes visible, raising measured unemployment in the short term. Moreover, structural reforms often require time to stimulate new investment and enterprise growth. The study by Ogu et al. also provides relevant insight, showing that in Nigeria's manufacturing sector, governance weaknesses slow the transmission of regulatory improvements into real production and employment gains. This supports the idea that better "rules on paper" are insufficient without strong institutional capacity to implement them consistently.

Conversely, digital entrepreneurship shows a strong negative and highly significant relationship with unemployment, confirming the pivotal role of technology-driven enterprises in job creation. This finding resonates with evidence from NITDA (2024), Techpoint Africa (2024), and the African Development Bank (2023), which document how internet penetration and digital platforms generate flexible employment opportunities in e-commerce, fintech, and online services. The coefficient implies that expanding internet access and digital skills directly supports self-

employment and freelance work, helping young Nigerians bypass traditional labor market constraints. Lagos Business School (2025) similarly finds that digital entrepreneurs often hire peers quickly, amplifying the employment impact of technology adoption.

Institutional quality, though negatively signed, has no statistically significant effect on unemployment, suggesting that the modest improvements in governance over the study period were insufficient to drive measurable labour market change. This is consistent with GIZ Nigeria (2025) and the World Bank (2024), which report that institutional reforms in Nigeria have been slow, fragmented, and uneven across states. The findings of Ogu et al (2016) reinforce this interpretation: their analysis of governance and manufacturing performance demonstrates that weak institutions and poor regulatory enforcement limit the ability of industrial and entrepreneurial policies to generate employment, even when headline reforms appear positive.

Taken together, these results highlight a structural imbalance in Nigeria's entrepreneurship strategy. Government spending and regulatory reforms, though extensive, have not fully overcome the systemic barriers of capital access, infrastructure, and policy continuity identified by Adewale and Thomas (2023) and NESG (2024). By contrast, digital entrepreneurship thrives despite institutional weaknesses, leveraging technology to create flexible work and bypass traditional bottlenecks. The combined evidence suggests that future policy must not only increase funding but also strengthen institutional capacity, improve governance, and expand digital inclusion to ensure that entrepreneurship programs and business climate reforms translate into sustainable reductions in unemployment.

Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that government expenditure on entrepreneurship training exerts a strong positive and significant effect on unemployment, indicating that rising public investment in training has not yet translated into sustainable job creation because of weak follow-up support and program inefficiencies. Improvements in the ease of doing business also show a positive and significant relationship with unemployment, suggesting that regulatory reforms may initially expose hidden joblessness or displace workers before their long-term benefits emerge. By contrast, digital entrepreneurship demonstrates a significant negative effect on unemployment, confirming that expanding internet penetration and technology-driven ventures create new opportunities for self-employment and freelancing. Institutional quality exhibits a negative but statistically insignificant influence on unemployment, reflecting Nigeria's slow progress in governance and regulatory enforcement during the study period.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of entrepreneurship-related factors on unemployment in Nigeria from 1990 to 2024, focusing on government expenditure on entrepreneurship training, ease of doing business, digital entrepreneurship, and institutional quality. Using multiple regression analysis supported by standard diagnostic tests, the research shows that while public spending on entrepreneurship and business-climate improvements are statistically significant, they have coincided with rising unemployment—likely because of weak implementation, policy lag effects,

and deep-seated structural challenges in the labor market. Digital entrepreneurship, on the other hand, significantly reduces unemployment by fostering self-employment and technology-enabled job creation. Institutional quality shows no measurable direct impact, underscoring Nigeria's limited progress in governance and regulatory effectiveness. Overall, the findings highlight digital innovation as the most potent driver of employment, while public programs and regulatory reforms require stronger institutional backing and effective follow-up mechanisms to achieve lasting reductions in joblessness.

Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurship training expenditure, the government should reinforce monitoring, evaluation, and post-training support—such as access to credit, mentorship, and market linkages—so that increased funding translates into sustainable enterprises and real employment rather than temporary skill acquisition. Regulatory and business climate reforms should be carefully sequenced and paired with labor market interventions, including retraining schemes and transitional support, to cushion workers from short-term job displacement and help hidden unemployment shift into productive, formal employment. Policies must also prioritize nationwide broadband rollout, affordable data plans, and digital skills training to expand digital entrepreneurship and amplify its proven unemployment-reducing effect. Finally, institutional quality and governance need strengthening through enhanced regulatory transparency, reliable contract enforcement, and anti-corruption measures to create a stable environment where entrepreneurship programs and private investment can generate durable employment growth.

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