

# Mentoring Youth in Creative Entrepreneurship to Enhance Community Independence

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## **Abstract**

This community service project was initiated in response to the growing need to empower rural youth through creative entrepreneurship as a means of promoting community independence and economic resilience. The program aimed to mentor young individuals in developing creative, innovative, and sustainable business ventures using the Service Learning (SL) approach. Conducted over six months in Desa Sukamaju with 30 youth participants, the project combined mentoring sessions, workshops, and practical business development activities. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and pre- and post-assessments, then analyzed using both qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative correlation tests. The findings revealed significant improvements in participants' entrepreneurial literacy, creativity, and self-efficacy, strongly correlated with the intensity of mentoring activities. The project also strengthened community solidarity and stimulated the local creative economy. In conclusion, SL-based mentoring proved to be an effective and sustainable model for youth empowerment, bridging academic engagement and community development.

# Keywords



Creative Entrepreneurship, Community Empowerment, Mentoring.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The empowerment of young people through creative entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative approach to fostering sustainable community development. In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, the ability to innovate and think creatively has become a vital asset for economic resilience, particularly in rural and developing regions. Youth, as a demographic group characterized by energy, adaptability, and innovation, represent a critical resource for national progress. However, many young individuals in underdeveloped areas face challenges such as limited access to entrepreneurial education, a lack of mentorship opportunities, and insufficient capital to start and sustain businesses. These conditions often hinder their potential to become self-reliant and productive

contributors to community development. The introduction of mentoring programs focused on creative entrepreneurship, therefore, provides a strategic pathway to not only empower the youth but also enhance community independence and resilience.

In many developing countries, unemployment among young people remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges. According to global labor statistics, youth unemployment rates are consistently higher than adult unemployment rates, reflecting both structural and educational gaps. In rural and semi-urban communities, this problem is exacerbated by the limited diversity of economic activities and the heavy reliance on traditional sectors such as agriculture or low-skilled labor. Creative entrepreneurship offers an alternative avenue for young individuals to engage in value-added and innovative ventures that can generate sustainable income and create new job opportunities. However, the success of such initiatives depends largely on effective guidance, mentoring, and capacity building. Without proper mentorship, youth-driven enterprises often lack direction, face management inefficiencies, and struggle to compete in modern markets.

Previous community service initiatives have attempted to address youth unemployment through entrepreneurship training, but many of these efforts have been generic, focusing on basic business management without integrating creativity, innovation, or cultural relevance. Furthermore, most programs have been short-term workshops that provide limited follow-up support or mentorship. This has resulted in a significant gap between training outcomes and long-term entrepreneurial success. In contrast, mentoring-based approaches emphasize sustained engagement between experienced mentors and young entrepreneurs, fostering not only technical skills but also soft skills such as leadership, problem-solving, and resilience. This mentoring relationship enables youth to navigate challenges more effectively, develop innovative business models, and adapt to market changes. Thus, the uniqueness of this study lies in its emphasis on creative entrepreneurship mentoring as a holistic empowerment framework that integrates skill development, innovation, and community-based sustainability.

Another gap in previous community empowerment programs is the insufficient focus on the role of creativity in entrepreneurship. Many training modules have treated entrepreneurship as a purely economic activity rather than as a creative and cultural process. In fact, creativity is essential for identifying unique opportunities, designing innovative products, and adding cultural or social value to business endeavors. By mentoring youth to think creatively, communities can harness local resources, traditions, and talents in ways that generate distinctive products and services with both local and global appeal. Creative entrepreneurship, therefore, not only strengthens the economic base of a community but also preserves and promotes cultural identity. This dual benefit of economic and cultural sustainability is often overlooked in conventional entrepreneurship programs, making the present initiative distinct and forward-looking.

Furthermore, this mentoring initiative recognizes that youth empowerment is not merely about individual success but about collective community transformation. When young

people are equipped with entrepreneurial mindsets and creative capacities, they tend to contribute actively to local development—creating jobs, introducing innovative solutions to social problems, and inspiring others to pursue similar paths. This ripple effect fosters community independence, reducing dependency on external assistance and government aid. The project, therefore, positions creative entrepreneurship as both an economic strategy and a social innovation mechanism. Mentoring becomes the bridge that translates knowledge and skills into action, ensuring that the empowerment process leads to tangible, long-term community benefits.

The primary objective of this community service project is to mentor young individuals in developing creative and sustainable entrepreneurial ventures that can enhance the independence and resilience of their communities. Through structured mentoring sessions, capacity-building workshops, and real-world project implementation, the program aims to equip participants with the necessary competencies to identify local potentials, manage small enterprises effectively, and sustain their businesses in a competitive market. The initiative also seeks to cultivate a sense of leadership and social responsibility among participants, encouraging them to use entrepreneurship as a means to solve community problems rather than merely for personal gain. By integrating mentorship and creativity into entrepreneurship training, this project fills the gap left by conventional short-term interventions and provides a model for sustainable youth empowerment. In the long term, the mentoring of youth in creative entrepreneurship is expected to yield significant outcomes. Economically, it can stimulate local industries, diversify community income sources, and reduce unemployment rates. Socially, it promotes self-confidence, collaboration, and innovation among youth, turning them into agents of change within their communities.

## **METHOD**

This community service project employed the *Service Learning (SL)* approach, integrating academic knowledge with direct community engagement to foster mutual learning and sustainable empowerment. The mentoring program for youth in creative entrepreneurship was carried out over a six-month period, from March to August 2025, in Desa Sukamaju, a semi-rural community characterized by a large youth population and limited access to entrepreneurial resources. The primary participants and community partners were 30 local youths aged 17–25 years, including recent high school graduates, young artisans, and small business starters. These participants were selected in collaboration with local authorities, the village youth organization (*Karang Taruna*), and community leaders. The SL model was chosen to ensure that university mentors and students actively contributed not only as facilitators but also as co-learners, helping the community to build its own capacity while gaining practical experience in entrepreneurship education and mentoring.

The implementation began with a detailed *planning and preparation phase*, including problem identification through field observation, informal interviews, and focus group discussions with local youth and village officials to assess their needs, interests, and existing

business practices. This was followed by securing *permissions and partnerships* with the village government, local educational institutions, and small business associations to ensure institutional support and logistical coordination. The *preparation phase* also involved curriculum design for creative entrepreneurship mentoring, mentor training, and the development of teaching materials focused on innovation, marketing, and digital literacy. During the *implementation phase*, participants engaged in a series of structured mentoring sessions, workshops, and collaborative projects guided by university experts and practitioners from creative industries. The activities included ideation sessions, business plan development, financial management training, and product design workshops. To enhance real-world learning, participants were also encouraged to develop prototype products and test them in local markets through exhibitions and online platforms.

Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, participant reflections, and documentation of mentoring activities. Quantitative data were obtained through pre- and post-tests measuring participants' entrepreneurial knowledge, creativity, and self-efficacy levels. Qualitative data were derived from interviews and focus group discussions capturing participants' perceptions, challenges, and success stories. The data sources consisted of youth participants, mentors, and local stakeholders involved in the program. Data analysis combined descriptive qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to empowerment and creativity development, while quantitative data were analyzed using correlation tests to examine the relationship between mentoring intensity and the improvement in participants' entrepreneurial skills. Triangulation was conducted to validate findings from multiple sources and ensure data reliability.

Monitoring and evaluation were carried out continuously throughout the program. The *monitoring phase* involved regular supervision of mentoring sessions, feedback collection from participants, and review meetings between facilitators and village officials. Evaluation was conducted at both formative and summative stages. The formative evaluation assessed the ongoing process—such as participant engagement, mentor performance, and the effectiveness of materials—while the summative evaluation measured the overall impact on youth empowerment and community independence after program completion. The final stage included a dissemination workshop where participants showcased their creative business outcomes and shared lessons learned with the broader community. This holistic approach ensured that the Service Learning process not only achieved its educational objectives but also contributed directly to enhancing local economic resilience and youth independence through creative entrepreneurship.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the *Service Learning*-based mentoring program in creative entrepreneurship produced several significant findings regarding the empowerment of youth and the strengthening of community independence. The initial stage of mentoring revealed that the majority of participants had limited understanding of entrepreneurship and lacked confidence in their creative potential. Through consistent mentoring sessions, however, participants demonstrated substantial progress in entrepreneurial knowledge, idea generation, and business planning skills. Quantitative analysis from pre- and post-assessments showed a marked increase in participants' average scores on entrepreneurial literacy and creative thinking—rising from an average of 58.4 in the initial test to 84.7 in the final assessment. This improvement was positively correlated with mentoring intensity, as confirmed by the correlation test (r = 0.72), indicating a strong relationship between the frequency and quality of mentoring sessions and the enhancement of entrepreneurial competence among participants.

Qualitative findings further highlighted the transformative impact of the mentoring process. Participants reported that the mentoring approach not only provided them with technical business knowledge but also built their confidence, problem-solving ability, and teamwork skills. During focus group discussions, many youths expressed that the mentoring sessions motivated them to see entrepreneurship not merely as a financial pursuit but as a means of contributing to community development. The participatory learning environment fostered by the *Service Learning* approach encouraged a sense of ownership among the participants, who began to take initiative in identifying local resources and developing innovative business ideas. Several participants, for instance, created products that integrated local culture—such as handicrafts made from recycled materials, traditional snacks with modern packaging, and digital marketing strategies promoting local tourism. These creative projects became tangible symbols of youth innovation and local empowerment.

Another important finding was the development of strong mentor–mentee relationships that proved essential in maintaining participants' motivation and consistency. The continuous guidance provided by university mentors and practitioners helped participants overcome common entrepreneurial challenges, such as capital limitations, market uncertainty, and fear of failure. The data from interviews and observations showed that mentees who received consistent support tended to demonstrate higher levels of creativity, persistence, and risk-taking compared to those with irregular attendance. This emphasizes that mentorship is not only a transfer of knowledge but also a psychological and emotional support system that nurtures the entrepreneurial mindset. The mentoring framework thus became a model of relational empowerment, where learning is built through trust, collaboration, and mutual respect between mentors and youth participants.

The project also produced measurable community-level outcomes. The emergence of small-scale creative businesses initiated by the participants began to stimulate local economic

activities. Some participants successfully marketed their products in village markets and through digital platforms such as social media, increasing both their income and the visibility of their community's local products. This entrepreneurial movement encouraged peer-to-peer learning, inspiring other young people in the area to join subsequent training cycles. The village government recognized the program's success by including youth entrepreneurship as part of its local development agenda and allocating community funds for business incubation and marketing promotion. Such institutional support reflected the program's sustainability and its integration into the broader framework of local economic development.

The results also revealed several challenges encountered during the implementation. Limited infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, and time constraints among participants were recurring issues, especially for those who combined the training with work or school commitments. Nonetheless, these challenges were mitigated through adaptive mentoring methods, including blended learning and flexible scheduling. The participants' commitment to completing their business projects despite these barriers demonstrated a growing sense of responsibility and perseverance—core traits of entrepreneurial independence. This adaptability and resilience were seen as indicators of successful character formation resulting from the mentoring process.

Overall, the findings affirm that the *Service Learning*-based creative entrepreneurship mentoring significantly contributed to enhancing youth empowerment and community self-reliance. The integration of academic knowledge, experiential learning, and community collaboration resulted in a practical and sustainable model for developing entrepreneurial capacity among rural youth. Beyond improving economic outcomes, the program also fostered social cohesion, cultural creativity, and a spirit of collective growth. The success stories emerging from this project where young participants transformed ideas into viable businesses illustrate that structured mentoring in creative entrepreneurship can become a catalyst for sustainable local development.



**Figure 1.** Mentoring Youth in Creative Entrepreneurship to Enhance Community Independence

The figure 1 above depicts a mentoring session on creative entrepreneurship held in a

community hall as part of the Service Learning program. The mentor, standing confidently before a group of attentive youth participants, delivers an interactive presentation aimed at developing innovation, teamwork, and business creativity. The banner in the background, titled "Mentoring Youth in Creative Entrepreneurship to Enhance Community Independence," symbolizes the spirit of collaboration and empowerment central to the program. The relaxed and inclusive atmosphere of the session reflects how community-based mentoring bridges formal education and practical life skills, inspiring young participants to become independent and innovative contributors to local economic development.

The results of this community service initiative demonstrate that mentoring youth through *Service Learning (SL)*—based creative entrepreneurship has a profound impact on both individual empowerment and community sustainability. When compared with previous community service programs that focused solely on entrepreneurship training without sustained mentoring, the outcomes of this project show greater long-term effectiveness. Earlier initiatives, such as those conducted by Rahman et al. (2021) and Nurlaila (2022), revealed that short-term entrepreneurship workshops often led to temporary enthusiasm among participants but failed to translate into stable business ventures. This gap occurred because most of those programs emphasized theoretical knowledge over experiential learning and lacked consistent follow-up mechanisms. In contrast, the present SL-based mentoring model provided continuous guidance and collaborative learning between mentors and mentees, which strengthened the participants' ability to apply entrepreneurial concepts in real-life contexts. This finding reinforces Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which posits that learning is most effective when individuals engage in a cyclical process of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and experimenting.

The mentoring framework used in this study also aligns with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and guidance from more knowledgeable others in cognitive development. The mentor–mentee dynamic facilitated a "zone of proximal development," where participants were able to reach higher levels of understanding and skill application through collaborative problem-solving. This was evident in how participants who initially lacked business confidence gradually became proactive innovators capable of designing and implementing their own creative projects. Similar outcomes were observed in the study by Setiawan and Harahap (2020), which found that consistent mentorship increased entrepreneurial self-efficacy among rural youth. However, the present project extended these findings by integrating creative thinking and cultural values into entrepreneurship, allowing participants not only to manage businesses but also to express local identity through their products. This synthesis between creativity, entrepreneurship, and community identity reflects the principles of *creative economy* development as proposed by Howkins (2001), which views creativity as a renewable resource for sustainable development.

From a practical standpoint, the mentoring model produced results that went beyond economic gains. Participants developed a deeper sense of social responsibility and community

belonging, which is consistent with the theoretical foundation of *Service Learning*. According to Eyler and Giles (1999), *Service Learning* bridges academic learning and civic engagement by combining reflection and action in community contexts. The findings from this study confirm that this dual emphasis fosters holistic growth participants not only learned to manage business ventures but also understood the social implications of entrepreneurship in enhancing community welfare. This approach contrasts with previous community development projects that focused primarily on skill transfer without integrating social awareness or ethical considerations. As a result, the youths in this program emerged not merely as business owners but as social innovators capable of generating community-based solutions through entrepreneurship.

The correlation analysis further reinforces theoretical expectations that mentoring intensity significantly affects entrepreneurial competence. The strong positive correlation (r = 0.72) between mentoring frequency and the increase in participants' knowledge and creativity levels echoes the findings of Kusuma and Lestari (2020), who demonstrated that consistent mentorship positively correlates with entrepreneurial intention among university students. However, this study contributes new insights by showing that the combination of mentoring and creative problem-solving activities within a community setting amplifies these effects. Mentoring sessions that incorporated participatory learning, peer collaboration, and project-based assignments helped transform abstract knowledge into tangible entrepreneurial actions. This process validates Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes through observation, imitation, and modeling within social contexts. Participants who observed successful examples from mentors and peers became more confident in experimenting with their own creative ideas.

When viewed through the lens of community empowerment theory, the findings suggest that the SL-based mentoring model effectively operationalized the empowerment process as described by Zimmerman (2000), who defines empowerment as the process of gaining control over one's life and influencing the organizational and social structures surrounding it. The program not only improved participants' individual skills but also fostered collective empowerment reflected in the formation of peer support networks and small entrepreneurial groups that continued collaborating beyond the project's official completion. This outcome was rarely achieved in earlier initiatives, which tended to focus on individual skill development rather than community-based transformation. The institutional support that followed the program, including the village government's integration of youth entrepreneurship into its development agenda, signifies a transition from individual empowerment to structural empowerment a core goal of sustainable community development.

Despite its success, the analysis also identifies contextual limitations that mirror findings in earlier studies. For instance, infrastructural challenges such as inadequate internet access and limited marketing channels resemble barriers noted in the research by Haris and Yuliani (2021), who observed that rural entrepreneurship programs often struggle with technological

and logistical constraints. However, the adaptive approach used in this study—combining online and offline mentoring, flexible scheduling, and locally sourced materials—proved effective in mitigating these issues. This adaptability supports the idea proposed by Chambers (1997) that participatory development must be context-sensitive and responsive to local realities. By embedding flexibility into the mentoring design, the program ensured inclusivity and sustained engagement despite external challenges.

In summary, the analytical synthesis between this study's findings, previous community service outcomes, and relevant theoretical frameworks underscores the effectiveness of the *Service Learning*—based mentoring model as a vehicle for creative entrepreneurship and community empowerment. The combination of continuous mentoring, creative skill development, and social reflection has been shown to produce deeper and more sustainable impacts than conventional training approaches. The findings affirm that creativity is not merely an individual attribute but a social process that flourishes through mentoring and collaboration. This integration of theory and practice positions the SL-based mentoring model as a replicable and scalable framework for fostering youth-driven, creativity-centered community independence aligning academic engagement with real-world transformation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this community service program affirm that mentoring youth in creative entrepreneurship through the *Service Learning* (SL) approach effectively addresses the researchers' initial concern—namely, how to transform unemployed and underutilized rural youth into productive, independent agents of community development. The results revealed that sustained mentoring, grounded in participatory learning and creativity, significantly improved participants' entrepreneurial literacy, self-confidence, and innovation skills. Beyond measurable outcomes, the project succeeded in fostering a sense of ownership, collaboration, and social responsibility among young participants, thereby strengthening the foundation for long-term community independence. These achievements validate the SL model as a holistic framework that integrates knowledge application, experiential learning, and social transformation—bridging the gap between academic involvement and local empowerment.

However, this program also faced several limitations. Infrastructural barriers, such as limited internet connectivity and inadequate facilities, constrained the full implementation of digital marketing and online entrepreneurship modules. Time availability among participants—many of whom were working or studying—also affected the consistency of attendance and engagement. Additionally, the limited duration of the program restricted the depth of mentorship and long-term business incubation. Despite these challenges, the adaptive and flexible mentoring design allowed the program to maintain participant commitment and achieve its key objectives.

For future community service initiatives, it is recommended that mentoring programs adopt a longer duration and include post-program business assistance to ensure sustainability. Establishing collaborations with local cooperatives, financial institutions, and digital

marketing platforms would also enhance participants' access to resources and broader markets. Integrating technological literacy and innovation-based entrepreneurship into future training modules could further strengthen the creative economy potential of rural youth. Ultimately, this program underscores the vital role of mentorship and creativity as pillars of community empowerment—demonstrating that when young people are guided, trusted, and inspired, they can become powerful drivers of independent and sustainable local development.

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