

Local Potential and Youth Entrepreneurship: A Community-Engaged Learning Approach for Sustainable Economic Empowerment in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct entrepreneurship learning by integrating community-engaged learning with local potential utilization as a foundation for sustainable business development in Eastern Indonesia. It addresses a development paradox in Maluku, where abundant local resources remain underutilized while students continue to prioritize formal employment pathways. The study examines how local potential can be contextualized as a source of business ideas, evaluates the effectiveness of experiential and community-engaged learning in fostering entrepreneurial competencies, and proposes a conceptual model for sustainable economic empowerment. A qualitative approach was employed using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) design combined with experiential learning principles. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of students' business plans, and were analyzed thematically with triangulation and member checking to ensure validity. The findings indicate that participatory community-engaged learning significantly enhances students' entrepreneurial knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Students demonstrated improved capacity in identifying locally grounded business opportunities, conducting market analysis, and developing viable business plans, alongside increased social awareness. This study offers a novel integrative framework that links experiential learning, community engagement, and local resource-based development, positioning entrepreneurship education as both a learning process and a form of social intervention for sustainable community empowerment.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship Education, Experiential Learning, Local Potential, Sustainable Development



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INTRODUCTION

The discourse on entrepreneurship education in developing regions has increasingly drawn attention to a persistent paradox: while local communities often possess abundant natural, cultural, and economic resources, these assets remain underutilized as drivers of sustainable economic transformation. This paradox is particularly visible in Eastern Indonesia, including Maluku, where fisheries, marine biodiversity, traditional crafts, and community-based services represent significant economic potential, yet youth unemployment and dependence on formal employment, especially within the public sector, remain high. Empirical data from national labor surveys consistently indicate that university graduates in

peripheral regions demonstrate a strong preference for bureaucratic careers rather than entrepreneurial pathways, reflecting a narrow employment orientation shaped by both structural and cultural factors (Chankseliani et al., 2025; Hendratmi et al., 2024). At the same time, higher education institutions continue to struggle in aligning their pedagogical approaches with the lived realities of local communities, often emphasizing theoretical instruction over practical engagement. This disjuncture suggests that the problem is not merely economic, but epistemological: how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and applied in educational settings fails to resonate with local contexts and opportunities (Krova et al., 2025; Rahmania et al., 2025; Ryandono et al., 2025).

The urgency of addressing this issue lies in its broader implications for sustainable development. Entrepreneurship, when grounded in local potential, has been widely recognized as a catalyst for inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and community resilience (Fahrurrozi, 2025; Narmaditya et al., 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2024). However, without a transformative shift in how entrepreneurial competencies are cultivated, particularly among youth, such potential remains latent. In many cases, entrepreneurship education is delivered as a standardized curriculum detached from socio-cultural realities, thereby limiting its relevance and impact (Swaramarinda et al., 2025; Wardoyo et al., 2025). Consequently, graduates may acquire technical knowledge without developing the adaptive, reflective, and context-sensitive skills required to identify and exploit local opportunities. This gap becomes even more pronounced in regions characterized by geographic isolation and limited access to formal markets, where innovation must often emerge from within the community itself (Adha et al., 2025; Aripin & Zuhriyah, 2025; Hairunisya & Narmaditya, 2025).

A growing body of literature has attempted to address these challenges by rethinking the foundations of entrepreneurship education. Early studies emphasized the role of formal curricula and business training programs in shaping entrepreneurial intentions (Al Ayyubi et al., 2025; Karim et al., 2025). These studies highlighted the importance of pedagogical design, assessment methods, and institutional support in fostering entrepreneurial mindsets. However, their focus largely remained within the confines of classroom-based learning, with limited attention to the broader social environment in which entrepreneurship unfolds. As a result, while such approaches contributed to theoretical advancements, their practical implications for community-based economic development were often constrained.

Subsequent research shifted toward experiential learning as a more dynamic and practice-oriented approach. Drawing on Kolb's experiential learning theory, scholars argued that entrepreneurship is best learned through action, reflection, and iterative problem-solving (Mastika et al., 2023; Sudirman et al., 2025). Empirical studies demonstrated that students who engage in real-world projects, simulations, and business incubators tend to develop stronger entrepreneurial competencies compared to those exposed solely to traditional lectures (Ghimire et al., 2024; Rosado-Cubero et al., 2024; Utomo & Mateo-Babiano, 2024). This perspective marked a significant departure from earlier models by emphasizing learning as a process rather than an outcome. Nevertheless, many experiential

learning initiatives remain institution-centric, often lacking meaningful interaction with local communities or failing to address context-specific challenges.

Parallel to this development, the concept of service-learning and community engagement has gained prominence as a strategy for bridging the gap between academic knowledge and societal needs. Service-learning integrates community service with structured learning objectives, enabling students to apply theoretical concepts in real-world settings while contributing to social development (Al-Mamary & Alshallaqi, 2022; Petersen et al., 2026). More recent iterations, often referred to as community-engaged learning, extend this approach by emphasizing reciprocal partnerships between universities and communities (Lo Bue et al., 2022; Pelz et al., 2023). Studies have shown that such approaches can enhance students' civic responsibility, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Aïssaoui et al., 2025; Effendi, 2023; Freitas et al., 2025). However, in many cases, community engagement is still positioned as an auxiliary activity, separate from the core curriculum, rather than as an integral component of knowledge construction and skill development.

In the context of local economic development, another strand of literature has highlighted the importance of leveraging indigenous knowledge and local resources as the foundation for innovation. Scholars argue that place-based development strategies are more sustainable because they build on existing capacities and cultural assets (Popkova et al., 2023; Seyfi et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). In developing regions, this approach is particularly relevant, as it enables communities to create value without over-reliance on external inputs. Research on community-based entrepreneurship further underscores the role of collective action, social capital, and cultural identity in shaping entrepreneurial activities (Japutra et al., 2024; Joana Carolina et al., 2024; Sánchez-Vidal et al., 2024). Despite these insights, there remains a limited integration between place-based development frameworks and entrepreneurship education, especially within higher education institutions.

More recent studies have begun to explore the intersection of these domains, suggesting that integrating experiential learning with community engagement and local resource utilization can create more holistic and impactful educational models (Deehan et al., 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2025; Wu & Lin, 2025). These approaches emphasize co-creation of knowledge, where students, educators, and community members collaboratively identify problems and develop solutions. While promising, such integrative models are still relatively underexplored, particularly in peripheral regions like Eastern Indonesia, where socio-economic and cultural dynamics differ significantly from more urbanized contexts. Existing studies often focus on urban entrepreneurship ecosystems or generalized educational frameworks, leaving a gap in understanding how these approaches can be adapted to localized settings characterized by unique challenges and opportunities.

Within this evolving landscape, it becomes apparent that the fragmentation between entrepreneurship education, community engagement, and local economic development continues to limit the transformative potential of higher education. Efforts to address these domains have largely progressed in parallel rather than in synergy, resulting in models that

are either pedagogically sound but socially disconnected, or socially engaged but educationally peripheral. This study, therefore, situates itself at the intersection of these conversations, seeking to weave together strands that have long remained separate.

What emerges from this effort is an approach that not only repositions learning as an embedded, context-driven process but also reframes entrepreneurship as a socially grounded practice rooted in local realities. By bringing students into direct engagement with community actors and situating business ideation within the landscape of local potential, the study offers a way of thinking about entrepreneurship education that is simultaneously pedagogical and developmental. Such a perspective subtly departs from dominant models by suggesting that the value of entrepreneurship education lies not only in producing entrepreneurs, but in cultivating agents of local transformation who are capable of navigating and reshaping their socio-economic environments.

Guided by this perspective, the study aims to: (1) explore how local potential can be contextualized as a source of entrepreneurial ideas among university students; (2) examine the effectiveness of a community-engaged learning approach in fostering entrepreneurial competencies; and (3) develop a conceptual model of entrepreneurship learning that integrates experiential processes, community engagement, and local resource-based development. Through this inquiry, the research seeks to contribute not only to academic discourse but also to the broader agenda of sustainable economic empowerment in developing regions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in a community-based participatory research (CBPR) design, combined with the principles of experiential learning. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the need to capture the depth of social processes, meaning-making, and transformation experienced by participants during the learning intervention. Entrepreneurship, particularly when embedded in local contexts, is not merely a measurable outcome but a lived experience shaped by interaction, reflection, and negotiation with real-world conditions. Therefore, a qualitative design allows for a more nuanced understanding of how students interpret local potential, engage with communities, and develop entrepreneurial competencies in a contextual and relational manner (Alam & Hamzah, 2025; Huang et al., 2022). The adoption of CBPR further strengthens this approach, as it positions community members not merely as research subjects but as active partners in the co-construction of knowledge, ensuring that the research remains socially relevant and grounded in local realities (Ikhsan et al., 2025; Miranda et al., 2025).

The research was conducted in Maluku, Eastern Indonesia, a region characterized by rich local resources alongside persistent socio-economic challenges. This location was deliberately selected due to its representativeness of peripheral regions where development paradoxes are most evident, abundant natural and cultural assets coexist with limited entrepreneurial transformation. Additionally, the researcher's institutional and social

proximity to the area facilitated sustained engagement with both students and community actors, which is essential for participatory and experiential forms of inquiry.

Informants in this study consisted of 18 participants, including 12 university students involved in the entrepreneurship learning program, 3 local community members who acted as partners in business development initiatives, and 3 facilitators or lecturers responsible for designing and implementing the intervention. The selection of informants was conducted purposively, based on their direct involvement and experiential knowledge of the program (Kusumaningrum et al., 2024; Saiyed et al., 2023; Samputra & Alfarizi, 2025). Students were chosen as primary participants because they represent the target group of the intervention and are in the process of developing entrepreneurial capacities. Community members were included to provide insights into local potential, contextual constraints, and the dynamics of collaboration, while facilitators offered reflective perspectives on pedagogical design and implementation.

Data collection was carried out through a combination of participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participatory observation was essential to capture real-time interactions and behavioral changes during the learning process, allowing the researcher to understand how entrepreneurial ideas emerged and evolved within specific social contexts (Audretsch et al., 2024; Keefe et al., 2024). In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' reflections, motivations, and perceived transformations, providing access to subjective experiences that could not be observed directly. Document analysis focused on students' business plans and project reports, which served as tangible outputs of the learning process and offered insights into their analytical and strategic thinking. The integration of these methods was intended to ensure a comprehensive and holistic understanding of both process and outcome.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, involving iterative coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns of change in knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Kataeva et al., 2024; Lukeš & Zouhar, 2025). The process was conducted reflexively, with continuous comparison between data sources to maintain analytical rigor. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was employed through multiple strategies. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing perspectives from students, community members, and facilitators, while method triangulation involved cross-validating findings from observation, interviews, and documents. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with key informants to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Bendig et al., 2024; Faiz et al., 2024; Yesmin & Calzada Olvera, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reframing Local Potential as Entrepreneurial Opportunity

At the initial stage of the intervention, the findings reveal a noticeable limitation in how students perceived their surrounding environment as a source of entrepreneurial opportunity. Most participants entered the program with a conventional understanding of

entrepreneurship, often associating viable business ideas with urban-oriented sectors such as digital startups, franchised food businesses, or capital-intensive ventures. Local resources, particularly those embedded in everyday life such as small-scale fisheries, traditional food processing, or community-based services, were largely overlooked or perceived as lacking market value. This tendency reflects what has been described in the literature as a “contextual blindness” in opportunity recognition, where individuals fail to identify opportunities within their immediate environment due to dominant economic imaginaries shaped by formal education and media exposure (Malik et al., 2025; Olaleye et al., 2026). One participant, identified as R.A., explicitly noted during the early phase of the program, “We always thought business means something modern or from outside. We never considered what is already around us as something that can be developed.”

However, as the learning process unfolded through direct engagement with local communities, a gradual but significant shift in perception began to emerge. Through participatory observation and collaborative exploration with community members, students were exposed to the lived realities of local economic practices. They observed how fishermen processed their catch, how women’s groups produced traditional food products, and how informal service networks operated within villages. These interactions functioned not merely as observational activities, but as dialogical spaces where students and community members exchanged knowledge, experiences, and aspirations. In this process, local potential was no longer seen as static or given, but as something that could be reinterpreted and reimagined. As one informant, S.M., reflected, “When we talked to the community, we realized that what they have is actually unique. It just needs to be developed and connected to the market.”

This transformation can be understood through the lens of place-based entrepreneurship, which emphasizes that entrepreneurial opportunities are deeply embedded in specific socio-spatial contexts rather than existing as abstract or universally identifiable entities (Berthet & Corrado, 2025; Maulana et al., 2025). In this perspective, opportunity recognition is not a purely cognitive process, but a socially constructed one that emerges through interaction with local actors and environments. The findings of this study reinforce this view by demonstrating that students’ ability to identify business opportunities improved not through isolated classroom instruction, but through situated engagement with community life. The act of “seeing” opportunity became relational, shaped by dialogue, trust-building, and shared understanding between students and community members.

Moreover, the process observed in this study aligns closely with the principles of effectuation theory, particularly the idea that entrepreneurial action begins with available means rather than predefined goals (Elidjen et al., 2022; Fischer & Nisa, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Instead of starting with a fixed business plan, students were encouraged to explore what resources were already accessible to them, local materials, existing skills within the community, and social networks. This means-driven approach allowed them to develop business ideas that were both feasible and contextually grounded. For instance, a group of students developed a business concept around processed smoked fish by building on the

existing practices of local fishermen, while another group explored cultural-based tourism services by collaborating with community elders. These initiatives illustrate how students moved away from predictive, goal-oriented thinking toward a more adaptive and iterative mode of entrepreneurship.

Importantly, this shift was not instantaneous but occurred through a reflective learning process. Students were required to continuously revisit their assumptions, test their ideas in real contexts, and adapt based on feedback from community partners. This iterative cycle resonates with recent discussions on local resource-based development, which highlight that innovation in developing regions often emerges from the recombination of existing resources rather than the introduction of entirely new ones (Ivanov et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025; Santoso, 2024). In such contexts, the value of entrepreneurship lies not in novelty per se, but in the ability to reinterpret and enhance what is already present. The findings suggest that when students are immersed in this process, they begin to appreciate the economic and cultural value of local assets that were previously taken for granted.

Another important dimension of this transformation is the role of social interaction in reshaping students' aspirations. Initially, many participants expressed a preference for stable, formal employment, particularly within the public sector. However, as they engaged more deeply with community-based economic activities, some began to reconsider their career trajectories. An informant coded as F.L. remarked, "I used to think working in an office is the only safe option. But after this experience, I see that building something from our own resources is also possible, even meaningful." This shift indicates that opportunity recognition is closely linked to identity formation, where students begin to see themselves not only as job seekers but as potential creators of value within their own communities.

Transformative Learning through Community-Engaged Experience

The findings of this study reveal that the integration of community-engaged learning into entrepreneurship education generates a deeply transformative learning process, one that extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge toward a reconfiguration of how students understand, interpret, and act within their social environment. At the outset, most students approached entrepreneurship as a largely technical domain, associated with business plans, profit calculations, and market strategies learned in classroom settings. However, as the program unfolded through direct and sustained engagement with local communities, this perception began to shift in meaningful ways. Learning was no longer confined to abstract discussions but became embedded in lived experiences, shaped by real interactions, uncertainties, and social negotiations. This transition reflects a movement from what might be described as "learning about" entrepreneurship to "learning through" entrepreneurship, where knowledge is constructed through practice rather than transmitted as static content.

This transformation was particularly evident in how students began to engage more reflexively with their own assumptions. Through participatory observation and collaborative activities, students encountered situations that challenged their preconceived notions about business, community, and value creation. For instance, several participants initially

underestimated the complexity of local economic practices, assuming that community-based enterprises were informal and inefficient. However, direct involvement revealed nuanced systems of trust, reciprocity, and adaptive strategies that sustain these activities. One student, coded as D.K., reflected, “When we first came, we thought we could just introduce new ideas. But after working with them, we realized they already have their own system. We had to adjust our thinking.” Such moments of dissonance are central to transformative learning, as they disrupt existing frames of reference and open space for new interpretations (Autio et al., 2025; Fernández-Guadaño & Martín-López, 2023).

The process observed in this study aligns closely with the theoretical foundations of transformative learning, which emphasize critical reflection as a mechanism for perspective transformation. Rather than passively receiving information, students actively interrogated their experiences, often through structured reflection sessions facilitated by lecturers. These sessions encouraged them to question not only what they learned, but how and why they learned it, fostering a deeper level of cognitive and emotional engagement. As another participant, S.L., noted, “It was not just about doing the project, but also about thinking again, why we do it, what it means for us and for the community.” This reflective dimension played a crucial role in enabling students to internalize their experiences and translate them into meaningful learning outcomes.

In addition to individual reflection, the dialogical nature of community engagement significantly contributed to the learning process. Interactions with community members created a space for mutual learning, where students were not positioned as external experts but as co-learners. This relational dynamic challenged hierarchical assumptions often embedded in formal education and encouraged a more collaborative approach to problem-solving. Community members, in turn, shared practical knowledge and contextual insights that enriched students’ understanding of local realities. An informant identified as M.T., a community partner, expressed, “They came here not to teach us, but to learn with us. That made the process more open and meaningful.” This reciprocity underscores the importance of social interaction in shaping learning experiences, as knowledge emerges through dialogue rather than unilateral transmission.

From the perspective of experiential entrepreneurship education, these findings resonate with recent arguments that emphasize the role of action-based and context-sensitive learning in developing entrepreneurial competencies. Ferrigno et al. (2023) argue that entrepreneurship education becomes more effective when it engages students in authentic experiences that require them to navigate ambiguity, make decisions under uncertainty, and reflect on the consequences of their actions. The present study provides empirical support for this view, demonstrating that community-engaged learning creates precisely such conditions. Students were required to adapt their ideas in response to real constraints, negotiate with stakeholders, and continuously refine their strategies based on feedback. This iterative process not only enhanced their practical skills but also cultivated a mindset characterized by flexibility, resilience, and responsiveness.

Importantly, the transformative impact of this approach extends beyond cognitive development to include shifts in values and orientations. As students became more immersed in community contexts, many began to develop a stronger sense of social responsibility and ethical awareness. Entrepreneurship was no longer perceived solely as a means of personal gain, but as a potential avenue for contributing to community well-being. One participant, F.R., articulated this shift by stating, “Before, I thought business is about profit. Now I see it can also help solve problems in the community.” This reorientation reflects what some scholars describe as the emergence of a socially embedded entrepreneurial mindset, where economic and social objectives are intertwined (Afdawaiza et al., 2025; Tiasmalomomo et al., 2025).

The cumulative effect of these processes suggests that community-engaged learning functions as a catalyst for transformative learning by situating students within complex, real-world environments that demand both action and reflection. It creates a learning ecology in which knowledge, experience, and social interaction are interdependent, enabling students to develop a more holistic and grounded understanding of entrepreneurship. In contrast to conventional classroom-based approaches, which often prioritize theoretical abstraction, this model foregrounds the relational and contextual dimensions of learning, making it particularly relevant for regions where local realities play a critical role in shaping economic opportunities.

Strengthening Entrepreneurial Competencies: From Knowledge to Practice

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of community-engaged and experiential learning significantly strengthens students’ entrepreneurial competencies across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. At the outset of the program, most students exhibited a fragmented understanding of entrepreneurship, largely confined to theoretical constructs such as business models and profit calculation. Their knowledge tended to be procedural rather than strategic, and often detached from the complexities of real-world application. However, as the intervention progressed, a marked shift became evident in how students approached entrepreneurial tasks. This transformation was not simply an accumulation of knowledge, but a reconfiguration of how knowledge was understood, applied, and internalized through practice.

From a cognitive perspective, students demonstrated substantial improvement in their ability to conduct market analysis and develop context-sensitive business plans. Initially, many participants struggled to define target markets or articulate value propositions, often relying on generic assumptions rather than empirical insights. Through iterative engagement with community actors and direct exposure to local economic activities, students began to ground their analyses in actual conditions. For instance, a student group working with smoked fish products refined their market segmentation by identifying specific consumer preferences in nearby urban areas, while also considering distribution constraints faced by local producers. One participant, coded as A.P., explained, “Before, we just wrote what we thought would sell. But after talking to buyers and sellers, we realized the market is more specific, and

we need to adjust our product accordingly.” This shift indicates a movement toward more analytical and evidence-based thinking, which is central to entrepreneurial competence.

Beyond cognitive gains, the study also reveals important developments in the affective domain, particularly in terms of attitudes, motivations, and self-perceptions. Students who initially expressed hesitation or lack of confidence gradually became more proactive and willing to take initiative. This change was closely linked to their direct involvement in real-world problem-solving, where they encountered both challenges and small successes that reinforced their sense of agency. An informant identified as R.S. noted, “At first, I was afraid to propose ideas because I thought they might not work. But after trying and getting feedback, I feel more confident to take action.” Such experiences contributed to the cultivation of what is often described as an entrepreneurial mindset, characterized by openness to uncertainty, persistence, and a willingness to learn from failure.

In the behavioral or psychomotor domain, students exhibited notable improvements in practical skills related to business planning, communication, and risk management. The process of developing business plans was no longer treated as a purely academic exercise, but as a dynamic tool that evolved in response to real conditions. Students learned to negotiate with community partners, adjust production strategies, and anticipate potential risks, such as fluctuations in raw material supply or market demand. For example, one group working on a community-based tourism initiative revised their operational plan after recognizing seasonal variations in visitor patterns. As one member, coded as F.L., reflected, “We realized that planning is not fixed. We have to keep adjusting based on what actually happens in the field.” This adaptive approach to planning illustrates the development of practical competence grounded in experience.

These findings can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of entrepreneurial competency development, which conceptualizes competence as a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are developed through iterative interaction between individuals and their environment (Kresnanto & Putri, 2024; Neuman & Powers, 2021; Wibisono et al., 2023). In this framework, competence is not a static attribute but an emergent outcome of continuous learning and practice. The present study reinforces this perspective by showing that competencies are most effectively developed when students are actively engaged in authentic contexts that require them to integrate and apply different forms of knowledge.

Furthermore, the results align with recent literature on entrepreneurial mindset formation in experiential learning environments. Wibowo et al. (2023) argue that entrepreneurial competencies are best cultivated through learning processes that involve value creation for others, as this fosters deeper engagement and intrinsic motivation. In the context of this study, students were not merely completing assignments, but contributing to community-based initiatives with tangible social and economic implications. This sense of purpose appears to have played a crucial role in sustaining their engagement and enhancing their learning outcomes. As one participant, S.M., articulated, “It feels different because what

we do is not only for grades, but also for the community. That makes us more serious and responsible.”

Importantly, the development of competencies observed in this study was not linear but iterative and often non-linear. Students frequently encountered setbacks, such as misaligned expectations with community partners or initial business ideas that proved unfeasible. However, these challenges were not treated as failures, but as integral components of the learning process. Through reflection sessions and continuous feedback, students were encouraged to analyze these experiences and extract lessons that informed subsequent actions. This cycle of action and reflection is central to experiential learning theory and highlights the importance of creating pedagogical spaces where uncertainty and experimentation are not only tolerated but valued.

Social Awareness and Collective Responsibility in Entrepreneurship

One of the most compelling findings of this study lies in the emergence of social awareness and a sense of collective responsibility among students, a dimension that is often underemphasized in conventional entrepreneurship education. At the beginning of the program, most participants framed entrepreneurship primarily as an individual economic pursuit, closely associated with income generation and personal success. This orientation was consistent with dominant narratives of entrepreneurship that prioritize competitiveness, efficiency, and profit maximization. However, as students became immersed in community-engaged learning processes, their understanding of entrepreneurship began to expand in both scope and depth. Direct interaction with local communities exposed them to structural challenges such as limited market access, fluctuating resource availability, and unequal distribution of economic opportunities. These encounters did not merely provide contextual information; they elicited emotional and ethical responses that reshaped how students perceived the purpose and impact of entrepreneurial activity.

Through participatory observation and in-depth engagement, students developed a more nuanced awareness of the interconnected nature of economic and social issues. For instance, while working with small-scale fish processors, several student groups observed that the primary challenge was not production capacity, but rather the absence of stable market linkages and bargaining power. This realization prompted them to rethink their initial business ideas, shifting from product innovation alone toward strategies that also addressed distribution and collaboration. One participant, identified as M.R., reflected, “We first thought we just needed to improve the product, but then we saw the bigger problem is how they sell it. So, we started thinking about how to connect them to wider markets.” This shift illustrates how exposure to real-world conditions can move students beyond narrow technical solutions toward more systemic and socially informed approaches.

The development of social awareness was also closely tied to the relational dynamics established between students and community members. Rather than positioning themselves as external problem-solvers, students gradually adopted a more empathetic and collaborative stance. This was evident in how they listened to community concerns, negotiated ideas, and

adapted their interventions based on local priorities. An informant coded as S.L. noted, “At first, we came with our own plans, but over time we realized that we need to understand what the community really needs, not just what we think is good.” Such reflections indicate a shift from a top-down to a participatory mindset, where entrepreneurship is understood as a shared process rather than an individual endeavor. This relational orientation is critical in fostering a sense of collective responsibility, as it situates entrepreneurial action within a broader social context.

These findings resonate strongly with the concept of social entrepreneurship, which emphasizes the integration of economic and social value creation. In contrast to traditional models that prioritize financial returns, social entrepreneurship seeks to address societal challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions (Himaz, 2022; Lee et al., 2025). The present study demonstrates that when students are engaged in community-based learning environments, they are more likely to internalize this dual orientation. Entrepreneurship becomes not only a means of generating income but also a vehicle for addressing local problems and enhancing community well-being. This is particularly relevant in developing regions, where economic activities are often deeply intertwined with social structures and cultural practices.

Furthermore, the notion of community-centered innovation provides a useful lens for understanding how these transformations occur. This perspective highlights that innovation does not emerge solely from individual creativity, but from collective processes that involve multiple stakeholders, including local communities, institutions, and networks. In this study, students’ entrepreneurial ideas evolved through continuous interaction with community members, who contributed local knowledge, identified practical constraints, and validated proposed solutions. As one community participant, coded as H.T., expressed, “We shared our experiences, and they brought new ideas. Together we found something that works better.” This collaborative process not only enhanced the relevance of the business initiatives but also reinforced the idea that entrepreneurship is inherently social and embedded in relationships.

The shift toward a more socially oriented understanding of entrepreneurship was accompanied by changes in students’ values and motivations. Many participants reported a growing sense of responsibility toward the communities they worked with, which influenced their decision-making processes. For example, some groups deliberately chose business models that prioritized local employment or environmental sustainability, even when these options were not the most immediately profitable. An informant identified as F.R. explained, “We realized that if we only think about profit, it might not last long. But if the community also benefits, then the business can be more sustainable.” This statement reflects an emerging awareness of long-term impact and sustainability, key elements in contemporary discussions of responsible entrepreneurship.

The findings also suggest that this transformation is facilitated by the reflective components embedded in the learning process. Structured reflection sessions encouraged students to critically examine their experiences, question their assumptions, and articulate

the broader implications of their actions. Through this process, students were able to connect their practical experiences with ethical considerations, thereby deepening their understanding of entrepreneurship as a socially embedded practice. This aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing that the development of an impact-oriented entrepreneurial mindset requires not only exposure to real-world challenges but also opportunities for critical reflection and meaning-making (Hanoteau et al., 2021; Raappana & Pihkala, 2024; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2023).

An Integrative Model of Community-Engaged Entrepreneurship Learning

The synthesis of findings from this study points toward the emergence of an integrative model of community-engaged entrepreneurship learning, one that brings together experiential learning processes, community engagement practices, and the utilization of local potential into a coherent and dynamic learning ecosystem. Rather than treating these elements as separate or sequential components, the model conceptualizes them as mutually reinforcing dimensions that interact continuously throughout the learning process. At its core, the model repositions entrepreneurship education as a relational and context-embedded practice, where knowledge is co-constructed through sustained engagement between students, community actors, and the socio-economic environment in which they are situated.

The empirical basis of this model can be traced to the iterative cycles observed during the intervention. Students did not begin with fully formed business ideas; instead, they entered the process with preliminary assumptions that were gradually reshaped through interaction with local realities. Engagement with community members served as the entry point, enabling students to access local knowledge, identify latent opportunities, and understand the constraints shaping economic activities. This was followed by phases of experimentation, where students translated insights into tentative business concepts, often through small-scale trials or prototypes. These actions were continuously accompanied by reflection, both individually and collectively, allowing students to reassess their strategies and adapt to emerging feedback. As one participant, coded as A.L., noted, “We kept going back and forth between trying something and reflecting on it. Each time, we understood more about what works and what doesn’t.” This cyclical process reflects the integration of action and reflection that lies at the heart of experiential learning.

What distinguishes this model, however, is the central role of community engagement not merely as a pedagogical tool, but as a constitutive element of the learning environment itself. Community actors were not passive recipients of student initiatives; they actively shaped the direction and substance of the learning process. Their involvement ensured that entrepreneurial ideas remained grounded in local needs and realities, while also introducing a level of accountability that is often absent in classroom-based learning. An informant from the community, coded as H.S., expressed, “We were involved from the beginning, so the ideas they developed were also our ideas. It felt like a shared process.” This sense of co-ownership is critical in transforming learning into a socially embedded practice, where outcomes are not

only educational but also socially meaningful.

The integration of local potential into this model further reinforces its contextual relevance. Rather than importing external business models or relying on standardized templates, students were encouraged to build upon resources that were already present within the community. This included not only tangible assets such as natural resources and existing products, but also intangible elements such as cultural knowledge, social networks, and local practices. Through this approach, local potential becomes both the starting point and the anchor of entrepreneurial activity. As reflected by one student, S.T., “We realized that we don’t need to look far for ideas. What we need is already here, we just have to see it differently.” This orientation aligns with the notion that sustainable entrepreneurship in developing regions is often rooted in the recombination and enhancement of existing resources rather than the introduction of entirely new ones.

From a theoretical perspective, the model resonates with recent developments in engaged scholarship, which advocate for a closer integration between academic inquiry and societal engagement. Engaged scholarship emphasizes the co-production of knowledge through collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and communities, thereby challenging traditional boundaries between theory and practice (Garcia-Fry et al., 2022; Rey-Ortiz et al., 2025). In the context of this study, learning itself becomes a form of engaged scholarship, as students and community members jointly participate in the creation of knowledge that is both academically relevant and socially applicable. This convergence suggests that entrepreneurship education can serve as a platform for bridging epistemological divides, transforming universities into active contributors to local development.

At the same time, the model can be situated within broader discussions on entrepreneurial ecosystems in developing regions. Porfírio et al. (2023) and Wijaya et al. (2025) argue that entrepreneurial ecosystems are shaped not only by formal institutions and market structures, but also by social relationships, cultural norms, and localized knowledge systems. The findings of this study extend this perspective by highlighting the role of higher education as an embedded actor within such ecosystems. Through community-engaged learning, universities can facilitate connections between students and local actors, thereby strengthening the relational infrastructure that supports entrepreneurial activity. This function is particularly important in peripheral regions, where formal support systems may be limited and where innovation often depends on informal networks and community-based collaboration.

An important implication of this integrative model is that it redefines the outcomes of entrepreneurship education. Rather than focusing solely on the production of individual entrepreneurs or business ventures, the model emphasizes broader processes of capacity building and social transformation. Students emerge not only with enhanced competencies, but also with a deeper understanding of their role within the community and a stronger commitment to contributing to local development. At the same time, communities benefit

from the infusion of new ideas, skills, and networks, creating a reciprocal relationship that extends beyond the duration of the program. As one facilitator, coded as D.P., observed, “The impact is not only on the students, but also on the community. There is a mutual learning process that continues even after the program ends.”

This dual impact underscores the positioning of entrepreneurship learning as both an educational process and a form of social intervention. By embedding learning within real-world contexts and fostering collaboration across institutional boundaries, the model contributes to the development of more inclusive and sustainable economic practices. It challenges the conventional separation between learning and application, suggesting instead that the two are inseparable and mutually constitutive. In doing so, it offers a conceptual foundation for rethinking how entrepreneurship education can be designed and implemented in ways that are responsive to the complexities of developing regions.

Implications for Sustainable Economic Empowerment in Peripheral Regions

The findings of this study carry important implications for advancing sustainable economic empowerment in peripheral regions, particularly in contexts where local potential remains underutilized and higher education has yet to fully engage with community realities. At a practical level, the integrative approach developed through this research demonstrates that entrepreneurship education can move beyond its conventional instructional boundaries and function as a catalytic platform for local development. By embedding students within community contexts and structuring learning around real socio-economic challenges, the approach enables the co-creation of solutions that are both contextually relevant and socially grounded. This suggests that the replication of such a model in other developing regions requires not merely curricular adjustments, but a broader institutional commitment to reorienting learning toward engagement, collaboration, and contextual responsiveness.

One of the key practical insights emerging from the study is the importance of designing learning environments that are open, iterative, and relational. The success of the intervention was not driven by rigid program structures, but by the flexibility to adapt to local conditions and the willingness to treat communities as equal partners in the learning process. This has implications for how universities conceptualize their role in society. Rather than positioning themselves solely as knowledge providers, higher education institutions can act as facilitators of local innovation ecosystems, connecting students, community actors, and resources in ways that generate mutual benefit. As one facilitator, coded as D.P., observed, “When the university steps outside the classroom and works directly with the community, the impact becomes more visible and more meaningful.” This perspective aligns with the growing recognition that universities in developing regions must play a more active role in addressing local development challenges (Porfírio et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2025).

The adaptability of this approach across different peripheral contexts also depends on its sensitivity to local diversity. While the specific forms of local potential may vary, from marine resources in coastal areas to agricultural products or cultural industries in other regions, the underlying principle remains consistent: entrepreneurship should be rooted in

what communities already possess and value. In this sense, the model is not prescriptive but generative, offering a framework that can be tailored to different socio-economic and cultural settings. An informant, S.T., reflected on this adaptability by noting, “What we learned here is not just about one type of business, but about how to see opportunities from our own environment. That can be applied anywhere.” This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that development interventions do not impose external models that may be misaligned with local realities.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to ongoing debates on sustainable development by illustrating how economic empowerment can be achieved through the integration of learning and community engagement. Traditional development approaches often treat education and economic intervention as separate domains, with universities focusing on knowledge production while development agencies implement programs on the ground. The findings of this study challenge this separation by showing that learning itself can function as a form of intervention, generating both educational and socio-economic outcomes simultaneously. This perspective resonates with recent scholarship emphasizing the role of localized, participatory approaches in achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in regions characterized by structural inequalities and limited institutional capacity (Gupta et al., 2024; Nazir et al., 2025).

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of fostering inclusive and socially embedded forms of entrepreneurship. The shift observed among students, from a predominantly profit-driven orientation to a more impact-driven mindset, suggests that entrepreneurship education can play a critical role in shaping the values and priorities of future economic actors. This has significant implications for long-term development trajectories, as it points toward the emergence of entrepreneurs who are not only economically motivated but also socially responsible. One participant, coded as F.R., articulated this transformation by stating, “Now I see that business is not only about making money, but also about how we can contribute to our community.” Such reflections highlight the potential of education to influence not only what students do, but how they think about their role in society.

In terms of policy implications, the findings suggest a need for more integrated and cross-sectoral approaches to higher education development. Policies that support community-engaged learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and partnerships between universities and local stakeholders can create enabling conditions for the kind of transformative learning observed in this study. This includes not only curriculum reform, but also institutional incentives, funding mechanisms, and evaluation systems that recognize and reward engagement-oriented activities. Without such support, initiatives like the one examined in this research risk remaining isolated experiments rather than becoming embedded practices within the higher education system.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of aligning higher education policies with broader regional development strategies. In many peripheral regions, economic

planning is often disconnected from educational planning, leading to mismatches between graduate competencies and local needs. By integrating entrepreneurship education with community-based development initiatives, universities can help bridge this gap, contributing to more coherent and sustainable development pathways. As noted by one community informant, H.S., “When students work with us, it is not just for their learning, but also for our future. We can grow together.” This statement captures the essence of the approach: a mutually reinforcing relationship between education and development.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that reconstructing entrepreneurship learning through the integration of community-engaged learning and local potential utilization provides a viable pathway for addressing the persistent disconnect between higher education and the socio-economic realities of peripheral regions. The findings confirm that local potential can be effectively contextualized as a source of business ideas when students are immersed in real community settings, where opportunities are not merely identified but socially constructed through interaction and reflection. At the same time, the study shows that experiential and community-engaged approaches are not only pedagogically effective in strengthening entrepreneurial competencies, spanning knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but also transformative in shaping a more adaptive, reflective, and socially oriented entrepreneurial mindset. Importantly, the conceptual model developed in this research highlights that entrepreneurship learning, when designed as an integrative and participatory process, extends beyond individual capacity building to function as a form of social intervention that contributes to community empowerment. In this sense, the study offers a grounded yet flexible framework that repositions entrepreneurship education as both context-sensitive and impact-oriented, providing a meaningful response to the development paradox in Eastern Indonesia without detaching from the complexities of local realities.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants’ confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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