

## **Barriers to Institutional Collaboration for Students' Self-Employment in Tertiary Institutions in Bayelsa State**

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**Abstract:** *The study investigated the barriers to institutional collaboration for students' self-employment in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. Two research questions were raised to guide the study which employed convergent mixed method approach. The population of the study was all private employers of labour in small and medium scale businesses in Bayelsa State as well as Directors, lecturers and students in the various Entrepreneurship Centres across all the State owned tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State out of which 192 respondents made up of three Directors, 30 CEOs of STEAM industries, 15 lecturers and 144 students within and around the selected institutions were sampled using multistage sampling procedure. Primary source of data was adopted in the study which included questionnaire and Key Informant Interview which were used for data gathering and analyzed using frequency, percentage, and thematic analysis. The result of the study showed that benefits of institutional collaboration on students' self-employment includes business networking and improved career development. The possible constraints to this collaboration includes difference in organizational goals as well as government regulations. It was recommended that tertiary educational institutions should be granted autonomy by the government to establish collaborations that will improve students' employment prospects while existing government regulations to such collaborations should be reformed for improved students' self-employment.*

**Keywords:** Barriers, Institutional Collaboration, Self-Employment, Tertiary Institution, Bayelsa State

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Previous administrations in Bayelsa State have initiated different employment programmes into the recruitment of graduates and non-graduates into the various volunteer schemes, fishing academy, forest guard as well as the employment of all PhD holders of Bayelsa State indigeneship into various tertiary institutions in the State while the current administration has also invested into

vocational training, monthly empowerment packages in order to cushion the effects of unemployment in the State (Nkemakolem, 2019; Briseimo, 2022). All of these interventions are geared towards reducing the number of unemployed persons in the State and possibly enable them to be job creators. Unemployment in most State including Bayelsa State is not limited to the uneducated people alone but students who have graduated from tertiary institutions who are expected to either create jobs or secure employment are also captured in the unemployment cycle. This has compelled the government to continue to seek for alternative ways of dealing with this crisis both in Bayelsa State and nationally.

The private sector whether micro, small, medium or large are known as the largest contributors to employment generation all over (Ajuwon et al., 2017). Employment creation in Nigeria as well as Bayelsa State for several years has been one of the basic responsibilities of the government against what is the best practice in other developed countries where private individuals focus more on job creation after an enabling environment has been created. One of the reasons for this development is the lack of entrepreneurial ability among students who have undergone different educational programmes across various available tertiary institutions. Education at the tertiary level according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) is designed to contribute to the development of middle level manpower for national development. Exploring other options of dealing with the unemployment crisis in the State is therefore a major concern that requires a change in strategy for improving the self-employment intention and prospects of graduates from Bayelsa State tertiary institutions and this includes the adoption of collaborative approaches for assisting students to not only secure employment after graduation but also to be self-employed and generate employment for other job seekers.

According to Abdulkarim (2012), self-employment is the practice of working for oneself and it is the process of running a business where all business decisions are taken by the owner of the business. On the other hand, Wood and Gray as cited in Onajite and Oyerinde (2017) defined institutional collaboration as a process which occurs when individuals with shared interest about a problem engage in an interactive process, by applying shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that problem. Institutional collaboration requires institutions bringing their resources together to solve a problem; in this case assisting students to be self-employed which will be in the overall interest of all stakeholders. Institutional collaboration has been identified as one of the basic requirements for building the capacity of people and institutions with some institutions engaging in multi-institutional collaborations (Semali et al., 2013) and all formal organizations including tertiary educational systems can leverage on this platform for assisting graduates to start tier own business after graduation.

There is no doubt that there are several factors that limit institutions from engaging in collaborations even for students' self-employment. According to Adu-Ampong (2017), collaborations are sometimes hindered by too many or too few stakeholders coming together which

makes it difficult to determine the nature and direction of the collaboration as well as the objective that is to be achieved. Inadequacy in terms of the nature and type of stakeholders required sometimes pose a threat to institutional collaboration. On the other hand, Kwibisa and Majzoub (2017) identified political influence as well as lack of autonomy as factors limiting institutions from collaborating. Public institutions such as public tertiary institutions are sometimes constrained by the political will of the government as well as lack of autonomy to engage in collaboration with other institutions even in the process of ensuring students' self-employment and this poses a challenge to the employment prospect of students from these institutions.

In a similar manner, Rakšnys et al., (2020) pointed out that the absence of appropriate networking, lack of creativity and unification of resources are among the challenges that can be faced in the process of collaboration. Therefore, no matter how prepared tertiary institutions are in resolving the employment crisis of graduate students through collaboration, this strategy will not yield the required outcome except these challenges are addressed. Several researchers have investigated how institutional collaboration assist tertiary institutions in the achievement of their short and long term goals and Abebe (2015) conducted one of such studies on the attitudes of undergraduate students towards self-employment in Ethiopian public universities and the study's findings indicate that a sizable portion of graduating class members preferred government or private employment as their first choice of employment after graduation, and the majority of students did not have any immediate plans for short-term self-employment.

Similarly, Godpower and Anireh (2021) conducted a study on collaborative training and problem-based solving learning for institutions and industries for business education graduates' employability which revealed that collaboration between institutions and industries will help business education students acquire employable skills to become self-reliant or self-employed after graduation. The study by Sule et al., (2020) on institutional variables and student's employability skills development in Public Universities in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, Nigeria also revealed that institutional factors did not substantially lower participants' employability abilities after years of participation in different programs. The issues of institutional collaboration and students' employment is therefore viewed in different ways among researchers.

However, the aim of this study was to investigate the barriers to institutional collaboration for students' self-employment in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State while the specific objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain the benefits of institutional collaboration to students' self-employment in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State
2. determine the factors limiting institutional collaborations for students' self-employment in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the benefits of institutional collaboration to students' self-employment in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State?
2. What are the factors limiting institutional collaborations for students' self-employment in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted convergent mixed method approach as it combined both qualitative and quantitative instruments for data collection. The population of the study consisted of all private employers of labour in small and medium scale businesses in Bayelsa State as well as Directors, lecturers and students in the various Entrepreneurship Centres across all the State owned tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. The sample size for the study was 192 respondents which was 50% of the projected 384 participants targeted among the respondents using the Cochran formula from an unknown population size. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the selection of study respondents. First, three tertiary institutions in the State were randomly selected and secondly, the three Directors of the entrepreneurship centres in each of these institutions were selected purposively. In the third stage, five lecturers in the entrepreneurship centres were randomly selected for the study totaling 15 lecturers in these three institutions. Similarly, ten employers of labour around the perimeter of each of these institutions were randomly selected for the study which totaled 30 employers of labour. Furthermore, random sampling method was used to select 48 (twenty-four first year and twenty-four final year) students from the three randomly selected tertiary institutions totaling 144 students. The employers selected were CEOs of selected STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) industries. These selections made up the total of 192 respondents drawn for the study. The 192 respondents consisted of three Directors, 30 CEOs of STEAM industries, 15 lecturers and 144 students within and around the selected institutions. The study adopted primary and secondary sources of data collection for the study. The primary sources were questionnaire (quantitative) and Key Informant Interview (qualitative) which were administered to the students and lecturers while the Directors of centers and CEOs were interviewed while the secondary sources were bulletins, magazines and other periodicals from the selected institutions. Data for the study were collected by the researcher with the aid of five trained enumerators. Three enumerators were deployed to assist in the collection of data from the students in each institution while one enumerator assisted in the collection of data from the lecturers and the last enumerator assisted in collecting data from the CEOs. These enumerators were trained on the data collection process before they were assigned in the data collection process. The data collected quantitatively was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean scores as well as standard deviation while the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

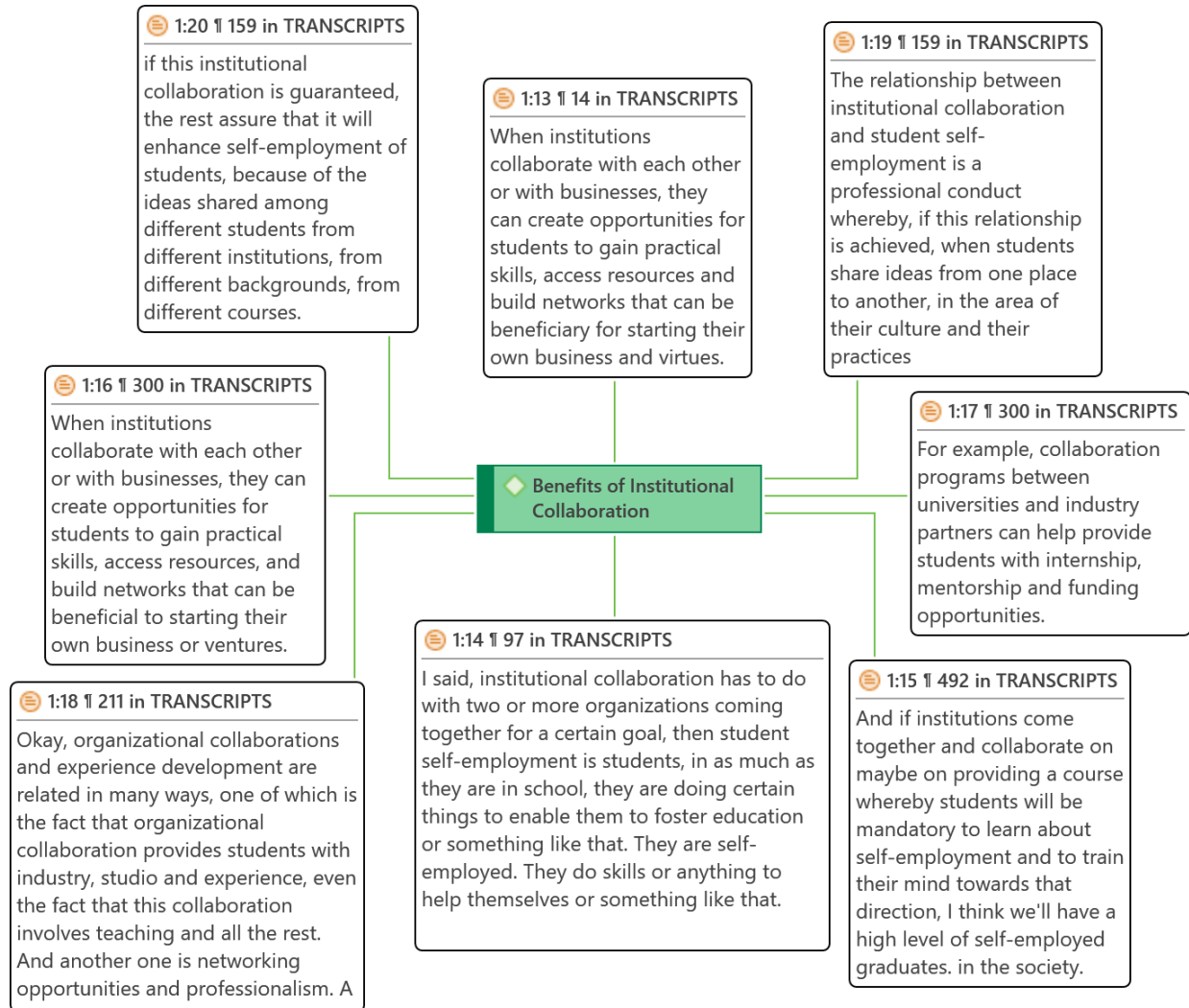
**RESULTS****Table 1: Benefits of institutional collaboration to students' self-employment**

S/N	Benefits of institutional collaborations for students' self-employment	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		%	%	%	%
1	Promotes business networking	2.6	5.8	42.4	49.2
2	Guarantees career development	2.1	8.9	54.2	34.9
3	Provides access to scarce business resources	4.2	13	42.7	40.1
4	Enhances innovativeness	4.7	6.3	53.1	35.9
5	Contributes to job creation process	6.3	8.9	44.8	40.1

Table 1 indicated the benefits of institutional collaboration to students' self-employment. It was agreed that such collaborations will enhance business networking, contribute to career development, provide access to scarce business resources, enhance innovativeness and contribute to the job creation process. The major benefit identified was in the area of business networking and then access to scarce business resources and job creation which had the highest number of respondents who strongly agree in that order. However, while the respondents agree with the other benefits, the contribution to job creation process also has the highest number of respondents who strongly disagree which implies that the job creation benefit may remain elusive unless some necessary conditions are put in place which are essential for students' self-employment.

**Benefits of institutional collaboration**

Participants interviewed further shared the various benefits that can be accrued from institutional collaboration (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1: Benefits of institutional collaboration**

One participant emphasized that when institutions collaborate with each other or with businesses, they create opportunities for students to "*gain practical skills, access resources and build networks.*" These opportunities are particularly beneficial for students who are looking to start their own businesses or ventures, indicating that collaboration is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Another participant discussed institutional collaboration in terms of two or more organizations coming together for a specific goal. The participant pointed out that students engage in self-employment activities while in school, stating that "*they do skills or anything to help themselves,*" which supports their education. This suggests that institutional collaboration directly contributes to students' ability to support themselves financially and professionally during their

studies. A different participant argued that if institutions collaborate to provide mandatory courses on *self-employment*, it would lead to a higher number of self-employed graduates. He believed that such initiatives could "train their mind towards that direction," implying that structured educational programs are essential for fostering a self-employment mindset among students.

Another participant reiterated that collaboration between institutions and businesses allows students to gain practical skills, access resources, and build networks. They viewed these benefits as "beneficial to starting their own business or ventures," emphasizing that collaboration directly impacts students' ability to become entrepreneurs. Another participant linked organizational collaborations to experience development, noting that such collaborations provide students with "industry, studio and experience." Also mentioned the added benefits of "networking opportunities and professionalism," indicating that collaboration helps students build professional connections and enhance their career readiness. It was described by a participoants that the relationship between institutional collaboration and student self-employment is "a professional conduct," suggesting that effective collaboration leads to the sharing of ideas among students from different cultural and academic backgrounds. They emphasized that this exchange of ideas is crucial for enhancing self-employment. A participant asserted that if institutional collaboration is guaranteed, it will "*enhance self-employment of students*" through the sharing of ideas among students from diverse backgrounds and courses. This highlights the role of collaboration in fostering a diverse and innovative environment that supports student entrepreneurship.

Summarily, all the participants recognized the significant benefits of institutional collaboration, particularly in fostering student self-employment. They identified practical skills development, resource access, and networking as key advantages that collaborations between institutions and businesses can offer. Some emphasized the importance of structured programs, such as mandatory courses on self-employment, in shaping students' entrepreneurial mindsets. Additionally, participants noted that collaboration facilitates professional connections and the exchange of ideas, which are essential for innovation and self-employment. Overall, the discussion reflects a strong belief in the value of collaboration as a critical driver of student success in entrepreneurship.

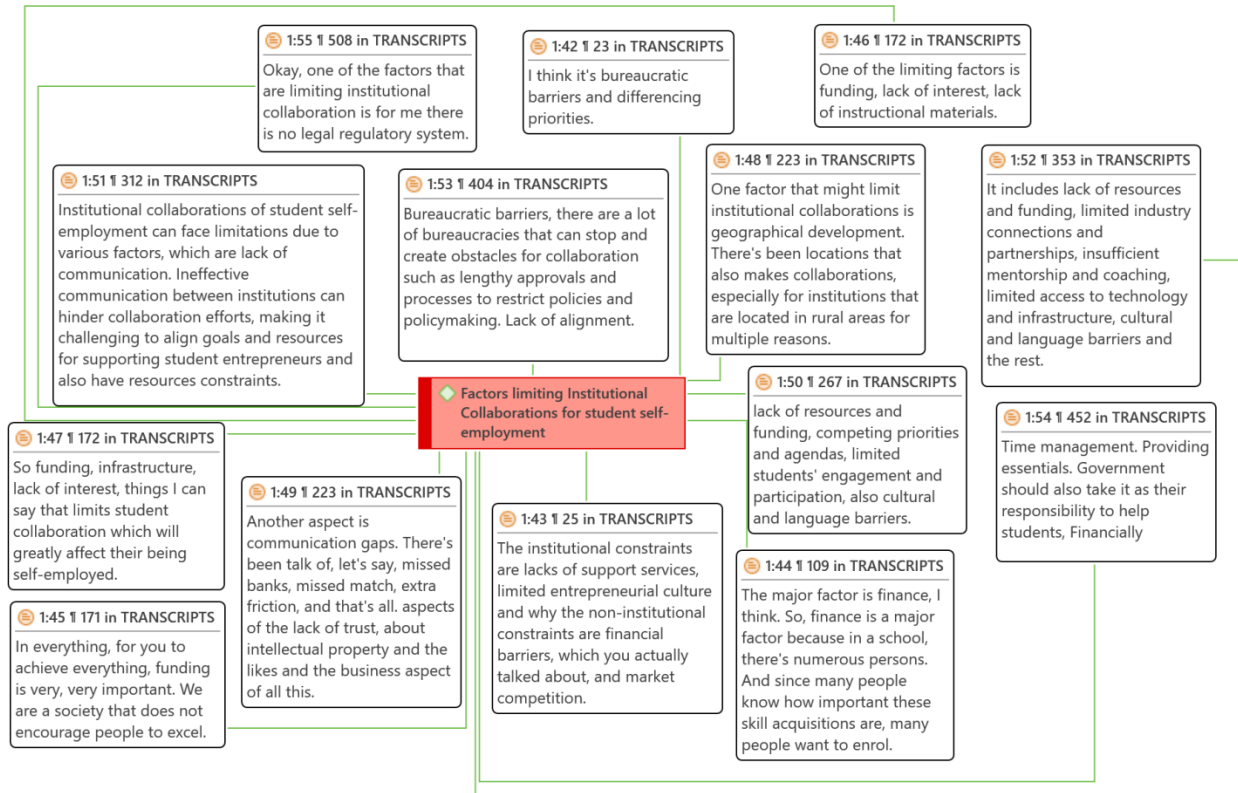
**Table 2: Factors limiting institutional collaborations for students' self-employment**

S/N	Factors limiting institutional collaborations for students' self-employment	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		%	%	%	%
1	Differences in organizational goals/objectives	5.7	21.9	53.6	18.8
2	Organizational culture of the partnering institutions	3.6	24	49.5	22.9
3	Government regulations	4.2	23	47.6	25.1
4	Lack of incentives for the partnering institutions	3.7	14.1	50.3	31.9
5	Absorptive capacity of the collaborating institution	6.3	16.3	46.3	31.1

Table 2 revealed the factors limiting institutional collaboration for students' self-employment and from the response of the respondents, difference in organizational goals/objectives, organizational culture, government regulations, lack of incentive for partnership and absorptive capacity of the collaborating institutions are identified barriers. However, the respondents strongly agree that lack of incentives for partnering institutions, absorptive capacity of partnering institutions and government regulations are the major challenges in that order in addition to differences in organizational goals and culture. However, more respondents strongly disagree on the absorptive capacity of the collaborating institutions which indicated that this may not be a major barrier. In summary, the respondents agreed that these issues are barriers that can hinder institutional collaboration for students' self-employment.

During the interview sessions, participants identified a range of factors that limit institutional collaborations aimed at fostering student self-employment. Key barriers include bureaucratic hurdles, financial constraints, and a lack of support services. Participants also highlighted issues such as ineffective communication, limited resources, and geographical challenges, particularly for institutions in rural areas. Additionally, cultural and language barriers, as well as the absence of a legal regulatory system, were cited as significant obstacles (Figure 2).





**Fig. 2: Factors imitating against intuitional collaboration**

One participant identified *bureaucratic barriers* and differing priorities as significant obstacles to institutional collaboration. The participant believed these factors complicate and hinder the collaborative efforts needed for fostering student self-employment. Another participant highlighted both institutional and non-institutional constraints, noting that a "*lack of support services*" and a "*limited entrepreneurial culture*" are key barriers. They also mentioned financial barriers and market competition as external challenges that can further limit collaboration. A participant emphasized the importance of *finance*, stating that it is "a major factor" in limiting institutional collaborations. They explained that the demand for skill acquisition programs is high, but financial constraints often prevent many students from enrolling, thereby limiting the effectiveness of these programs. Another participant stressed that funding is "very, very important" for achieving success in any endeavor. They expressed concern that societal attitudes do not encourage people to excel, which could further inhibit the availability of resources and support for student self-employment initiatives. *Funding* is a critical limiting factor as identified by another participant, adding that a "*lack of interest*" and "*lack of instructional materials*" also pose significant challenges. They believed these factors directly affect the ability of students to collaborate effectively, which in turn impacts their potential for self-employment. The same

participant expanded on their previous statement, adding that infrastructure issues and a general lack of interest further limit student collaboration. They suggested that these limitations have a detrimental effect on students' ability to become self-employed.

It was pointed out by another participant pointed that *geographical development* can be a limiting factor, especially for institutions located in rural areas. They believed that these locations create additional challenges for collaboration due to limited resources and accessibility. The same participant also mentioned communication gaps as a barrier to collaboration. They referred to issues such as "missed banks, missed match, extra friction," and a lack of trust, particularly concerning intellectual property and the business aspects of collaboration. A different participant identified several barriers to collaboration, including a "*lack of resources and funding*," "*competing priorities and agendas*," and "*limited student engagement and participation*." He also mentioned cultural and language barriers as additional challenges. Another participant focused on the impact of ineffective communication between institutions. They noted that "*lack of communication*" can hinder collaboration efforts, making it difficult to align goals and resources, which ultimately affects support for student entrepreneurs.

A participant reiterated the importance of resources and funding, stating that limited industry connections, *insufficient mentorship and coaching*, and limited access to technology and infrastructure are all factors that restrict collaboration. They also mentioned cultural and language barriers as additional obstacles. *Bureaucratic barrier* was identified by a participant as a significant limitation, pointing out that "lengthy approvals and processes" can create obstacles for collaboration. They believed that restrictive policies and a lack of alignment between institutions further complicate efforts to collaborate effectively. Another participant mentioned *time management* and the need for providing essentials as factors limiting collaboration. They argued that the government should take responsibility for helping students financially to overcome these barriers. A participant expressed concern about the *absence of a legal regulatory system*, which they believed is a major factor limiting institutional collaboration. They suggested that without clear regulations, it is difficult to establish and maintain effective collaborations.

Overall, the discussion reflects a broad consensus that while institutional collaboration has great potential, it faces numerous challenges that need to be addressed to support student entrepreneurship effectively.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data collected from the respondents were collected and analyzed on respondents' perceptions of how industry-education collaborations influence various aspects of business and career development. The data shows that a significant majority (91.6%) of respondents believe that industry-education collaboration promotes business networking, with nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) strongly agreeing. This indicates a broad consensus that these partnerships

are highly effective in fostering business connections among students. A substantial 89.1% of respondents agree or strongly agree that industry-education collaboration guarantees professional or career development. This finding agrees with that of Godpower and Anireh (2021) which indicated that this kind of collaboration will instill employability skills in students and make them more self-reliant. This outcome simply highlights the perceived value of such collaborations in supporting students' career paths.

Most respondents (82.8%) agree or strongly agree that these collaborations provide access to business resources, with the responses split relatively evenly between agree (42.7%) and strongly agree (40.1%). However, 17.2% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that while the majority see value, some perceive gaps in resource accessibility. A significant majority (89.0%) agree or strongly agree that industry-education collaboration enhances innovativeness, with more than half of the respondents (53.1%) agreeing and 35.9% strongly agreeing. This suggests that these partnerships are widely viewed as catalysts for innovation.

Most respondents (84.9%) agree or strongly agree that these collaborations contribute to job creation, with a slightly higher percentage agreeing (44.8%) compared to strongly agreeing (40.1%). However, 15.2% disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that while the majority see positive impacts, some believe that these collaborations could be more effective in driving job creation.

The data reflects a generally positive perception of industry-education collaborations, particularly in promoting business networking and guaranteeing career development. The areas with the highest agreement are business networking (91.6%) and professional development (89.1%), showing strong support for these outcomes. However, there is a slightly higher level of disagreement in the areas of access to business resources (17.2%) and contribution to job creation (15.2%), suggesting that while most respondents see these collaborations as beneficial, there are perceived areas for improvement. Enhancing these aspects could lead to even more effective partnerships between education and industry, further supporting student success in self-employment and career development.

In a similar manner, further data were collected and analyzed on respondents' perceptions of potential challenges in industry-education collaborations. These challenges are related to differences in organizational goals, culture, government regulations, lack of incentives, and the absorptive capacity of the institutions involved. A majority of respondents (72.4%) agree or strongly agree that differences in organizational goals and objectives pose a challenge to industry-education collaborations. This relate to what Sule et al., (2020) identified as institutional factors which hinder graduates' participation in the labour market. The high agreement suggests that aligning goals between educational institutions and industry partners is a significant issue that needs careful management. However, about 27.6% either disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that some respondents do not see this as a major obstacle.

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Similar to the first item, a large proportion (72.4%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that the organizational culture of partnering institutions is a challenge. The nearly even split between agree (49.5%) and strongly agree (22.9%) indicates that this is a widely recognized issue. The 27.6% who disagree or strongly disagree suggest that this challenge might be more context-dependent, varying by the specific institutions involved. A significant majority (72.7%) agree or strongly agree that government regulations are a challenge in industry-education collaborations. The strong agreement (25.1%) highlights the importance of navigating regulatory frameworks in these partnerships. However, about 27.2% do not see regulations as a major barrier, possibly indicating variability in the impact of regulations depending on the specific context or location.

The lack of incentives is perceived as a significant challenge, with 82.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This is the highest combined agreement in the table, suggesting that incentivizing institutions is crucial for the success of these collaborations. The fact that only 17.8% disagree or strongly disagree underlines the importance of addressing this issue to foster more effective partnerships.

The absorptive capacity of collaborating institutions is seen as a challenge by 77.4% of respondents. This finding lay support to the outcome of the study by Abebe (2015) which indicated that most graduating students prefer to work in government establishments which they believe can accommodate more persons than the private establishments where these collaborations would have been easily built. This suggests that the ability of institutions to absorb and effectively utilize resources and knowledge from partnerships is critical to the success of industry-education collaborations. The 22.6% who disagree or strongly disagree may reflect variability in how different institutions manage this capacity. The data highlights several challenges in industry-education collaborations, with the most significant issues being the lack of incentives for partnering institutions (82.2% agreement) and the absorptive capacity of collaborating institutions (77.4% agreement). Differences in organizational goals (72.4%), organizational culture (72.4%), and government regulations (72.7%) are also widely recognized as challenges.

The high levels of agreement across all items suggest that these are pervasive issues that need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of industry-education partnerships. Tailoring solutions to align goals, manage cultural differences, navigate regulations, and increase incentives could lead to more successful collaborations, ultimately benefiting students and the broader educational and industrial sectors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concluded based on findings that collaboration between tertiary educational institutions and industry has several benefits to students' self-employment such as the creation of professional network and providing access to business resources that can be used by these self-employed

students. However, barriers such as government regulations and difference in organizational culture and goals must first be addressed. The benefits of institutional collaboration to students' self-employment will therefore remain minimal or elusive until decisive actions are taken to address these barriers which is important to assisting graduate students become business owners and job creators in the future.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in line with the findings of the study:

1. Graduate students should be encouraged to register as student members into the different professional bodies that align with their career path as this is important to creating a network that will enable them engage with industry experts that will support their effort towards being self-employed after graduation.
2. The government at the federal and state levels need to relax and reform some of the educational and business policies which hinder institutional collaboration among these agencies. Tertiary institutions should be given full autonomy so as to achieve organizational efficiency which will also improve the employment prospect of students graduated from these institutions.

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