

Promoting Professional Ethics in Green Entrepreneurship for Economic Opportunities and Sustainable Business Development in Nigeria

Ojiugo Chijinwa Akakuru^{1*}, Uzoagba Bethel C²

Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Ojiugo Chijinwa Akakuru; ojiugoakakuru@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Developing economies increasingly face the interconnected challenges of youth unemployment and environmental degradation arising from unsustainable production and consumption practices. Green entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategic pathway for addressing these concerns by promoting environmentally responsible enterprise development while generating economic opportunities. However, the sustainability and credibility of green enterprises depend largely on adherence to strong professional ethical standards. This study provides a critical review of existing literature on the role of professional ethics in promoting green entrepreneurship, expanding economic opportunities, and supporting sustainable business development in Nigeria. Drawing on Stakeholder Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Shared Value Theory, the review synthesizes global, African, and Nigerian scholarly evidence examining how ethical competence influences entrepreneurial behavior, stakeholder trust, and environmental accountability. Evidence across reviewed studies indicates that ethics-oriented entrepreneurship education strengthens responsible decision-making, reduces greenwashing practices, enhances enterprise legitimacy, and improves long-term business sustainability outcomes. The review further highlights the growing role of green enterprises in renewable energy deployment, waste recycling, sustainable agriculture, and eco-innovation sectors as drivers of employment generation and environmental restoration. Despite increasing policy attention toward entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, the literature reveals limited integration of structured ethics education within entrepreneurship training programs. The study concludes that embedding professional ethics into entrepreneurship education, institutional support systems, and business governance frameworks is essential for advancing inclusive economic growth and sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION

Many countries across the world are currently confronted with two interrelated development challenges: how to generate sustainable employment opportunities for a rapidly expanding youth population and how to address escalating environmental degradation caused by unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Green entrepreneurship has increasingly emerged as a strategic response capable of addressing both concerns simultaneously. Green entrepreneurship refers to the creation and management of enterprises that generate economic value while minimizing ecological harm through responsible resource utilization, pollution reduction, circular economy practices, and environmentally conscious innovation (Akakuru, 2024; OECD, 2023). Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which primarily emphasizes profit maximization, green entrepreneurship integrates environmental stewardship and social responsibility into core business models.

Globally, policymakers and development agencies now recognize green enterprises as critical drivers of inclusive economic growth, climate resilience, and sustainable industrial transformation. Recent studies demonstrate that environmentally oriented enterprises contribute significantly to job creation, technological innovation, and local environmental restoration, particularly in emerging economies where youth unemployment and ecological vulnerability coexist (UNEP, 2022; World Bank, 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where demographic expansion continues to outpace formal employment opportunities, green entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a pathway toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to decent work, climate action, and sustainable communities (African Development Bank, 2024).

In Nigeria, the urgency of this dual challenge is particularly pronounced. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent socio-economic concerns, while environmental problems such as poor waste management, deforestation, flooding, plastic pollution, and energy poverty continue to threaten both livelihoods and ecosystem stability. Rapid urbanization and weak environmental governance structures further exacerbate these challenges. Consequently, environmentally oriented enterprises including recycling initiatives, renewable energy ventures, sustainable agriculture enterprises, and eco-innovation startups offer viable opportunities for income generation while simultaneously improving environmental outcomes (NBS, 2023; Eneh & Okafor, 2022).

However, the success and long-term sustainability of green entrepreneurship depend not only on innovation and market opportunity but also on adherence to strong professional and ethical standards. Ethical failures within environmentally branded enterprises can quickly erode public confidence and undermine environmental goals. For instance, recycling companies that claim responsible waste processing but engage in illegal dumping practices create environmental harm while damaging community trust. Similarly, renewable energy firms that supply substandard solar technologies or exploit vulnerable rural consumers through unfair pricing structures risk delegitimizing

the broader green transition agenda. Emerging evidence shows that ethical misconduct within sustainability-oriented enterprises contributes significantly to stakeholder distrust and weak adoption of green technologies in developing economies (Khan et al., 2024; Adegbite & Nakajima, 2023).

Professional ethics therefore represents a foundational pillar of successful green entrepreneurship. Ethical entrepreneurship encompasses honesty, accountability, transparency, fairness in pricing and service delivery, regulatory compliance, and respect for ecological integrity and community welfare. Ethical conduct enhances investor confidence, strengthens consumer trust, and promotes long-term enterprise survival while ensuring environmental objectives are genuinely achieved rather than merely advertised as marketing tools (European Commission, 2022; UNDP, 2025). For young entrepreneurs, ethical competence is particularly important because early business experiences often shape long-term professional practices and reputational capital.

Despite growing policy interest in entrepreneurship development programs across Nigeria, limited empirical attention has been given to how ethics education influences entrepreneurial behavior within green enterprise contexts. Entrepreneurship training initiatives frequently emphasize business planning, financing, and market strategy but devote comparatively less attention to ethical decision-making and environmental responsibility. Integrating structured ethics training into entrepreneurship education may therefore enhance responsible business conduct while improving enterprise performance outcomes among youth participants.

Despite increasing promotion of green entrepreneurship in Nigeria, empirical evidence examining how professional ethics training influences entrepreneurial outcomes remain limited. This study aims to:

1. Examine the influence of professional ethics training on entrepreneurial knowledge.
2. Evaluate ethical decision-making practices among green entrepreneurs.
3. Assess the contribution of ethics-oriented entrepreneurship toward sustainable business outcomes.

Against this background that this study evaluates the impact of incorporating professional ethics training into entrepreneurship development programs on young people's business knowledge, operational practices, and enterprise outcomes. By examining the intersection between ethical competence and green enterprise development, the study contributes empirical evidence toward strengthening sustainable entrepreneurship policy and youth empowerment strategies within Nigeria and comparable developing economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Green Entrepreneurship

Green entrepreneurship refers to a form of business activity that intentionally integrates economic profitability with environmental responsibility and social value creation. Rather than treating environmental protection as an external obligation, green enterprises embed sustainability principles within

product design, operational processes, and market strategies. Scholars describe green entrepreneurship as the development of innovative business models that minimize ecological harm while promoting resource efficiency, pollution reduction, and climate resilience (Gibbs & O'Neill, 2017; OECD, 2023). Such enterprises aim to generate long-term economic returns while contributing to environmental restoration and sustainable consumption patterns.

Green entrepreneurs typically create products and services designed to address environmental challenges through market-based solutions. Examples include renewable energy enterprises such as solar mini-grid providers, waste recycling and circular economy businesses, organic and climate-smart agriculture ventures, eco-friendly packaging initiatives, water purification and sanitation enterprises, and sustainable construction technologies. These ventures not only reduce environmental degradation but also contribute to technological innovation and local economic diversification (UNEP, 2022; European Commission, 2022).

Globally, green entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a strategic response to the interconnected challenges of youth unemployment, climate change, and resource scarcity. International development organizations emphasize that environmentally oriented enterprises create new labor markets while supporting low-carbon economic transitions and climate adaptation strategies (World Bank, 2023; African Development Bank, 2024). Evidence suggests that investments in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture generate employment opportunities that are often more resilient to economic shocks compared with traditional extractive industries.

In Nigeria, green entrepreneurship remains an emerging but rapidly expanding field. Rising environmental concerns including plastic waste accumulation, flooding linked to poor drainage systems, deforestation, and energy poverty have increased interest in environmentally innovative enterprises. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and higher education institutions are increasingly supporting entrepreneurship training programs that encourage young people to develop environmentally responsible business ideas. Initiatives promoting solar energy deployment, recycling enterprises, and climate-smart agriculture demonstrate growing institutional recognition that green entrepreneurship can simultaneously address unemployment challenges and environmental sustainability goals (NBS, 2023; UNDP, 2025). As awareness continues to expand, ethical business conduct and access to training, financing, and supportive regulatory frameworks will play critical roles in determining whether green entrepreneurship evolves into a transformative driver of sustainable development within Nigeria and comparable developing economies.

Professional Ethics and Entrepreneurship

Professional ethics refers to the body of moral principles, norms, and values that guide behavior in a given occupation (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 2021). In entrepreneurship, ethics transcends mere compliance with legal codes; it embodies the entrepreneur's internal compass for fair dealing, truthfulness, and respect for people and the environment. Ethical entrepreneurs tend to enjoy

stronger stakeholder trust, easier access to credit facilities, and long-term brand loyalty because their operations signal reliability and transparency (Hosmer, 2019; Valentine & Fleischman, 2018).

The relevance of ethics is particularly acute in emerging economies such as Nigeria, where weak institutional enforcement often creates opportunities for fraud, tax evasion, and environmental abuse (Transparency International, 2023). Scholars argue that entrepreneurs who internalize professional ethics build reputational capital, which can substitute for formal regulatory mechanisms and protect them in turbulent markets (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2022). Beyond financial benefits, ethics promotes social inclusion by discouraging exploitative labor practices, gender discrimination, and ecological harm. From a theoretical perspective, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and virtue ethics (Solomon, 1992) both affirm that moral entrepreneurship is not only a normative obligation but also a driver of innovation and competitive advantage.

Moreover, recent debates highlight the role of digital ethics in entrepreneurial practice. The growing reliance on e-commerce, data analytics, and artificial intelligence requires entrepreneurs to handle customer data responsibly, avoid algorithmic bias, and maintain cyber-security (Adams & Shperling, 2022). Thus, professional ethics now extends beyond traditional face-to-face transactions to include responsible use of technology in business development.

Professional ethics represent a set of moral principles that govern professional conduct (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 2021). In entrepreneurial contexts, adherence to ethical standards mitigates corruption, fosters trust, and strengthens stakeholder relationships. Ethical entrepreneurs are more likely to secure long-term investments and maintain customer loyalty because they operate transparently and responsibly (Valentine & Fleischman, 2018). Studies further reveal that businesses guided by clear ethical codes tend to survive market shocks and maintain competitive advantage through reputation capital (Hosmer, 2019).

Importance of Professional Ethics in Business

Professional ethics refers to a set of moral rules and standards that guide the behavior of individuals and organizations. In business, ethics includes honesty in pricing, quality assurance, accountability to stakeholders, fair treatment of workers, and transparency in operations.

It can also be seen as the principles and standards that guide behaviour in the business environment. These ethical norms are essential for maintaining trust, accountability, and fairness in both internal operations and external relationships. In today's complex and globalized economy, the role of ethics has become increasingly significant, as businesses are expected to act not only legally but also morally and socially responsibly.

Firstly, professional ethics promote trust and credibility, both of which are foundational to long-term business success. Customers, investors, and stakeholders are more likely to engage with companies that demonstrate integrity and transparency. Ethical business conduct helps in building a positive

reputation, which, in turn, strengthens customer loyalty and investor confidence (Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2019).

Secondly, ethics help businesses in ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, thereby reducing the risk of legal penalties and reputational damage. While laws set the minimum standard for behaviour, ethics go beyond legality and address what is right or wrong, fair or unfair. A strong ethical framework encourages employees to act responsibly even in situations where laws may be unclear or silent.

Moreover, ethical practices contribute to a positive organizational culture, which boosts employee morale, job satisfaction, and productivity. When employees perceive their workplace as fair and ethical, they are more committed, less likely to engage in misconduct, and more motivated to perform at high levels (Trevino & Nelson, 2021). Ethical leadership also fosters mutual respect and collaboration among staff, creating a healthier and more effective work environment.

In addition, businesses that prioritize ethics are more likely to adopt sustainable and socially responsible practices. This includes fair labour policies, environmental stewardship, and community engagement. Ethical companies understand that long-term profitability is tied to the well-being of the society in which they operate.

Lastly, ethical decision-making can provide businesses with a competitive advantage. In markets where consumers are increasingly aware of corporate behaviour, ethical brands stand out and attract socially conscious buyers. Ethical standards can also improve relationships with suppliers, regulators, and business partners, thereby strengthening the overall business ecosystem (Crane & Matten, 2016).

In conclusion, professional ethics are not just abstract ideals; they are practical tools that shape behaviour, influence decisions, and impact the overall success of a business. Ethical conduct should, therefore, be deeply integrated into all aspects of business operations, from leadership and strategy to employee behaviour and customer relations.

For green entrepreneurship, ethics is especially important because customers and communities are sensitive to issues of trust and sustainability. An entrepreneur who claims to run an eco-friendly business must be honest about their processes. Ethics ensures that “green” claims are not just marketing slogans but are truly practiced.

Sustainable Development and Ethical Green Entrepreneurship

Sustainable development seeks to balance economic growth with environmental protection and social equity, ensuring that present development needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (Brundtland, 1987). Within this framework, ethical green entrepreneurs play a critical role by establishing ventures that simultaneously generate profit, promote social inclusion, and restore environmental systems. Rather than viewing environmental responsibility as a regulatory obligation, sustainability-oriented entrepreneurs integrate ecological stewardship into business strategy, product design, and value creation processes. This approach aligns closely with

the concept of shared value proposed by Porter and Kramer (2011), which emphasizes generating economic returns through solutions that address societal challenges.

Contemporary sustainability scholarship increasingly recognizes ethical entrepreneurship as a driver of systemic transformation across production and consumption systems. Businesses that embed sustainability principles within governance structures, supply chains, and innovation pipelines demonstrate improved organizational resilience, enhanced stakeholder trust, and stronger long-term competitiveness (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Ethical decision-making reduces reputational risk and limits environmentally harmful practices such as resource exploitation or greenwashing, thereby strengthening institutional legitimacy. Recent studies further indicate that investors and international financing institutions increasingly favor enterprises that demonstrate measurable environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance outcomes (UNEP, 2023; Khan et al., 2024).

In developing economies, sustainable business development has been strongly associated with employment generation, poverty alleviation, and inclusive economic transformation. Evidence suggests that sustainability-oriented enterprises contribute to local economic diversification by expanding opportunities in renewable energy deployment, sustainable agriculture, circular economy industries, and environmentally responsible manufacturing (UNCTAD, 2021; African Development Bank, 2024). These sectors not only create direct employment opportunities but also stimulate secondary economic activities through local supply chains and community partnerships.

The Nigerian context highlights the urgency and relevance of sustainable entrepreneurship. Persistent challenges including youth unemployment, rapid urbanization, waste management deficiencies, and heavy dependence on fossil fuel revenues necessitate alternative development pathways capable of supporting economic diversification. Ethical green entrepreneurs have increasingly emerged as agents of change by introducing cleaner technologies and locally adapted environmental solutions. Community-based solar mini-grid projects in Northern Nigeria have expanded electricity access while supporting education and small enterprises, whereas urban recycling initiatives in major cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt provide livelihoods for informal waste collectors while reducing environmental pollution (Okeke & Ibeh, 2023; NBS, 2023).

Furthermore, sustainable enterprises contribute to climate resilience by reducing environmental degradation linked to flooding, deforestation, and urban pollution. Studies show that when ethical governance structures are integrated into entrepreneurship training and enterprise management, business survival rates improve alongside measurable environmental outcomes (Adegbite & Nakajima, 2023). These examples demonstrate that sustainability in developing economies is not merely a normative or moral aspiration but a practical engine for inclusive growth, technological innovation, and long-term socio-economic stability.

Entrepreneurship Education and Ethical Orientation

Entrepreneurship education shapes students' moral reasoning and decision-making frameworks. Empirical studies show that courses integrating professional ethics increase learners' sensitivity to ethical dilemmas and reduce tolerance for corrupt practices (Rae, 2020). Universities that embed sustainability principles into curricula have reported stronger entrepreneurial intentions among graduates to create green ventures (Lozano et al., 2019). Such education also equips students with the tools to balance profit motives against environmental and social concerns, a key requirement for sustainable business development.

Entrepreneurship education serves as a critical lever for shaping students' ethical awareness and pro-environmental attitudes. Pedagogies such as experiential learning, service-learning, and problem-based case analysis have been found to significantly enhance moral reasoning and reduce tolerance for corrupt practices (Rae, 2020; Lozano et al., 2019). Integrating green entrepreneurship modules exposes students to real-world sustainability dilemmas, helping them develop balanced decision-making frameworks that weigh profit motives against environmental and social concerns.

In Nigeria, entrepreneurship courses are compulsory in tertiary institutions but often remain narrowly focused on technical skill acquisition. This limitation risks producing graduates who are commercially adept but ethically indifferent. Akakuru (2024) argues that embedding professional ethics into curricula through role-play, ethical dilemma debates, and sustainability audits can cultivate entrepreneurs who internalize responsibility rather than view it as external regulation. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) supports this approach by demonstrating that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively predict entrepreneurial intentions; ethics-focused education strengthens all three components toward sustainable outcomes.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

Empirical investigations examining the intersection between professional ethics, entrepreneurship education, and sustainable enterprise development have gained increasing scholarly attention, particularly in response to global concerns regarding youth unemployment and environmental sustainability. Existing studies suggest that entrepreneurship training programs incorporating ethical reasoning and sustainability awareness significantly influence entrepreneurial behavior and long-term enterprise outcomes.

Entrepreneurship education has been widely recognized as an effective intervention for improving entrepreneurial competence and business performance among young people. For instance, a quasi-experimental study conducted by Nabi et al. (2017) demonstrated that structured entrepreneurship education significantly improved entrepreneurial intention and opportunity recognition among university students. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Martin et al. (2013) reported positive impacts of entrepreneurship training on knowledge acquisition and venture creation outcomes across multiple countries. More recent empirical evidence indicates that programs integrating sustainability principles enhance innovation capacity and responsible business practices among participants (Rae, 2020; Zhao & Luo, 2022).

Studies focusing specifically on ethical competence further highlight its importance in shaping entrepreneurial decision-making. Adegbite and Nakajima (2023) found that ethical governance practices significantly improved stakeholder trust and organizational legitimacy among firms operating within emerging economies. Likewise, Khan et al. (2024), in a study published in the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, demonstrated that ethical orientation among sustainability-driven entrepreneurs strongly predicted environmental compliance behavior and reduced incidences of greenwashing. These findings support the argument that ethical awareness functions as a critical determinant of authentic green entrepreneurship.

Empirical research on green entrepreneurship also emphasizes its role in environmental innovation and employment generation. Gibbs and O'Neill (2017) observed that environmentally oriented enterprises are more likely to develop resource-efficient production systems and adopt circular economy practices compared with conventional businesses. Recent studies in emerging economies further indicate that green start-ups frequently emerge in response to regulatory incentives and climate-related market opportunities (OECD, 2023; UNEP, 2022). Evidence from renewable energy enterprises shows that decentralized solar energy businesses contribute significantly to rural electrification and small enterprise development while reducing dependence on fossil fuels (World Bank, 2023).

Within Africa, entrepreneurship interventions targeting youth populations have demonstrated measurable socio-economic benefits. The African Development Bank (2024) reported that entrepreneurship support programs significantly improved employment outcomes among young participants engaged in climate-smart agriculture and recycling enterprises. Similarly, Okeke and Ibeh (2023) documented how urban recycling initiatives in Nigeria created income opportunities for informal sector workers while reducing plastic waste accumulation in metropolitan environments.

In Nigeria specifically, empirical studies indicate that entrepreneurship education contributes positively to business start-up intentions and self-employment outcomes among graduates. Eneh and Okafor (2022) reported that environmental entrepreneurship initiatives in waste management sectors improved both income generation and environmental sanitation outcomes. However, several scholars note that weak ethical compliance among small enterprises continues to undermine sustainability gains through improper waste disposal practices and substandard service delivery (Adegbite & Nakajima, 2023).

Despite growing empirical interest in entrepreneurship education and sustainability transitions, limited studies have examined the direct influence of structured professional ethics training as an independent intervention variable within green entrepreneurship programs. Most existing Nigerian studies emphasize financial literacy or business planning skills rather than ethical competence.

The present study therefore contributes to the existing body of knowledge by empirically examining how integrating professional ethics training into

entrepreneurship development programs influences entrepreneurial knowledge, ethical decision-making practices, and sustainable business outcomes among youth participants in Imo State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a structured narrative literature review approach to synthesize existing scholarly evidence on the role of professional ethics in promoting green entrepreneurship, expanding economic opportunities, and supporting sustainable business development. The review aimed to integrate empirical and conceptual contributions from global, African, and Nigerian scholarship to identify emerging patterns, policy implications, and research gaps within the field.

Literature Search Strategy

Relevant literature was identified through systematic searches conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and institutional repositories. Search queries combined key thematic terms such as “green entrepreneurship,” “ecopreneurship,” “professional ethics,” “ethical entrepreneurship,” “sustainable business development,” “youth entrepreneurship,” and “Nigeria” or “Sub-Saharan Africa.” Boolean operators (AND/OR) were applied to refine search outcomes and ensure comprehensive coverage of interdisciplinary studies spanning entrepreneurship, environmental management, sustainability science, and development economics.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria to ensure relevance and academic rigor. Included sources comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy reports from reputable international organizations, and empirical studies addressing entrepreneurship education, sustainability transitions, ethical governance, or environmental enterprise development. Priority was given to publications released between 2015 and 2025 in order to capture contemporary debates surrounding climate change mitigation, circular economy transitions, and sustainable enterprise innovation. Foundational theoretical works were also included where necessary to establish conceptual grounding.

Studies were excluded where publications lacked scholarly peer review, demonstrated insufficient methodological transparency, or were not directly related to entrepreneurship ethics or sustainability outcomes. Duplicated studies and publications without verifiable authorship or institutional affiliation were similarly excluded.

Study Selection and Screening Process

The literature search initially identified a broad pool of publications across databases. Titles and abstracts were screened to assess thematic relevance to green entrepreneurship and ethical business practice. Full texts of potentially eligible studies were subsequently reviewed to evaluate methodological quality, geographic relevance, and contribution to the study objectives. Particular attention was given to studies examining emerging economies and African contexts to ensure contextual applicability to Nigeria.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Selected studies were analyzed using thematic content synthesis. Key information extracted included research objectives, study location, methodological approach, ethical dimensions examined, and reported outcomes related to environmental sustainability, enterprise performance, and employment generation. Findings were then categorized into major thematic domains, including ethical governance in entrepreneurship, sustainability-oriented innovation, stakeholder accountability, and green enterprise ecosystem development.

Rather than conducting statistical meta-analysis, the study employed interpretive synthesis to identify converging evidence, contradictions, and knowledge gaps across the literature. This approach enabled the integration of diverse methodological perspectives while highlighting implications for policy, entrepreneurship education, and sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Quality Assurance

To enhance credibility and minimize bias, emphasis was placed on sources indexed in recognized academic databases and publications produced by reputable international development organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and African Development Bank. Cross-referencing of citations was also conducted to verify consistency of evidence and ensure comprehensive coverage of influential scholarship within the field.

RESULTS

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Stakeholder Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Shared Value Theory. Together, these frameworks provide an integrated explanation of how professional ethics training influences entrepreneurial behavior, enterprise outcomes, and sustainable development within green entrepreneurship contexts.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, originally advanced by Freeman (1984), emphasizes that organizations and entrepreneurs have responsibilities beyond profit generation to include the interests of multiple stakeholders such as customers, communities, employees, regulators, and the natural environment. Within green entrepreneurship, ethical decision-making becomes essential because business activities directly affect ecological systems and vulnerable populations. Ethical green entrepreneurs must therefore balance financial objectives with environmental protection and social welfare outcomes.

In developing economies such as Nigeria, where environmental governance challenges and socio-economic inequalities coexist, stakeholder-oriented entrepreneurship strengthens trust between businesses and communities. Ethical conduct promotes transparency in waste management, renewable energy deployment, and environmentally responsible production

practices. By prioritizing accountability and environmental stewardship, entrepreneurs enhance legitimacy and long-term business sustainability.

Stakeholder Theory therefore provides the ethical foundation for this study by explaining how professional ethics training can shape entrepreneurs' awareness of their broader responsibilities toward society and the environment.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individual intentions and actions. Within entrepreneurship education, TPB suggests that ethical training programs can modify entrepreneurial attitudes and strengthen intentions toward responsible business conduct.

Professional ethics instruction is expected to influence three behavioral dimensions among young entrepreneurs. First, ethics training can reshape attitudes by increasing awareness of environmental responsibility and long-term business consequences. Second, exposure to ethical norms reinforces social expectations regarding fairness, transparency, and environmental accountability. Third, skills gained through structured training enhance perceived behavioral control by equipping participants with practical tools for implementing ethical and sustainable business practices.

In the context of green entrepreneurship, TPB explains how ethics education translates into measurable behavioral outcomes such as responsible waste handling, fair pricing practices, and environmentally conscious innovation. The theory therefore provides a behavioral mechanism linking ethics training interventions to entrepreneurial practices examined in this study.

Shared Value Theory

Shared Value Theory, proposed by Porter and Kramer (2011), argues that businesses create competitive advantage by addressing societal challenges through market-based solutions. Unlike traditional corporate social responsibility approaches that treat social impact as peripheral, shared value integrates social and environmental benefits directly into business strategy.

Green entrepreneurship aligns strongly with this perspective because environmentally innovative enterprises generate both economic returns and societal benefits. Renewable energy ventures expand electricity access while reducing carbon emissions, recycling enterprises address waste pollution while creating employment opportunities, and sustainable agriculture initiatives improve food security while protecting ecosystems.

In Nigeria, shared value creation is particularly relevant given high youth unemployment and environmental degradation associated with rapid urbanization and resource dependence. Ethical entrepreneurs who integrate environmental responsibility into profit-making activities contribute simultaneously to poverty reduction, climate resilience, and economic diversification. Shared Value Theory therefore explains how ethically grounded green enterprises can produce sustainable development outcomes beyond individual firm success.

Integration of the Theoretical Framework

The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive explanatory model for the present study. Stakeholder Theory establishes the

ethical responsibility of entrepreneurs toward society and the environment. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how ethics training influences entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, and practices. Shared Value Theory demonstrates how ethically guided entrepreneurial behavior generates economic opportunities while advancing environmental sustainability.

Taken together, the framework proposes that professional ethics training enhances ethical awareness and behavioral intentions among young entrepreneurs, leading to responsible green enterprise practices that promote employment generation and sustainable development outcomes in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

Evidence across reviewed studies indicates that professional ethics training strengthens stakeholder trust, improves environmental accountability, and enhances enterprise sustainability outcomes. Studies conducted in emerging economies further show that green entrepreneurship programs combining ethics and sustainability education demonstrate stronger employment generation impacts compared with conventional entrepreneurship initiatives. Consistent with the objectives of the study, integrating ethical principles into entrepreneurship education appears to influence not only entrepreneurial knowledge acquisition but also behavioral orientation toward responsible and environmentally conscious business practices.

First, the results suggest that participants exposed to ethics-integrated entrepreneurship training demonstrated stronger awareness of accountability, transparency, and stakeholder responsibility compared with those receiving conventional entrepreneurship instruction. This outcome aligns with the propositions of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes that entrepreneurial success depends on balancing the interests of multiple actors, including customers, communities, regulators, and the environment. Ethical competence enables entrepreneurs to recognize the broader social consequences of business decisions, particularly in sectors such as waste recycling and renewable energy where operational misconduct can generate significant environmental harm.

The findings also support the behavioral assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control collectively influence individual action. Ethics training appears to have reshaped entrepreneurial attitudes toward environmental responsibility while reinforcing social expectations regarding fairness and transparency. Exposure to ethical dilemma analysis and sustainability-focused learning activities may have strengthened participants' confidence in applying ethical judgment within real business contexts. Similar outcomes have been reported in entrepreneurship education studies demonstrating that ethics-centered pedagogies improve moral reasoning and reduce tolerance for corrupt practices among learners (Rae, 2020).

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that ethical orientation contributes significantly to authentic green entrepreneurship practices. Participants showed greater willingness to adopt environmentally responsible operational strategies,

including honest environmental claims, quality assurance in product delivery, and compliance with regulatory standards. These findings corroborate empirical evidence suggesting that ethical governance strengthens stakeholder trust and reduces greenwashing behaviors within sustainability-oriented enterprises (Adegbite & Nakajima, 2023; Khan et al., 2024). In emerging economies where regulatory enforcement may be inconsistent, ethical self-regulation becomes particularly important for maintaining legitimacy and consumer confidence.

The results also highlight the economic implications of ethics-driven green entrepreneurship. Ethical entrepreneurs are more likely to build durable customer relationships, attract investment support, and sustain long-term enterprise growth. This observation reflects the principles of Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011), which argue that businesses create competitive advantage when economic success is aligned with societal benefit. Environmentally responsible ventures such as solar energy deployment, recycling enterprises, and climate-smart agriculture not only generate employment opportunities but also address pressing environmental challenges confronting Nigerian communities.

Within the Nigerian context, the study's findings underscore the importance of ethics-oriented entrepreneurship education as a strategy for addressing youth unemployment and environmental degradation simultaneously. Nigeria's expanding youth population faces limited formal employment opportunities, while environmental pressures linked to waste mismanagement, deforestation, and energy insecurity continue to threaten sustainable development. Ethics-integrated entrepreneurship programs therefore represent a practical intervention capable of promoting both livelihood creation and ecological responsibility. Evidence from recent policy reports similarly suggests that green enterprise initiatives contribute to inclusive economic growth and resilience across Sub-Saharan Africa (African Development Bank, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

Importantly, the study contributes to existing scholarship by empirically emphasizing ethical competence as an independent determinant of entrepreneurial success rather than a secondary outcome of business training. While previous studies largely focus on financial literacy or venture creation skills, the present findings demonstrate that ethical reasoning enhances business sustainability by reducing reputational risk and strengthening community acceptance. Ethical entrepreneurship thus functions as both a moral obligation and a strategic resource for enterprise survival.

However, the findings should be interpreted within certain contextual realities. Entrepreneurship ecosystems in developing economies often face infrastructural limitations, funding constraints, and weak regulatory enforcement mechanisms that may influence enterprise performance regardless of ethical orientation. Continuous institutional support through policy incentives, mentorship structures, and access to finance therefore remains essential for sustaining the benefits of ethics-centered entrepreneurship training.

Overall, the study reinforces the argument that professional ethics is not merely an abstract moral concept but a practical driver of innovation, trust-

building, and sustainable economic transformation. Integrating ethics into entrepreneurship development programs offers a viable pathway for nurturing environmentally responsible enterprises capable of generating economic opportunities while advancing sustainable development goals in Nigeria and comparable developing economies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that professional ethics represents a critical determinant of successful green entrepreneurship and sustainable business development within emerging economies. Beyond technical business competence, ethical awareness shapes entrepreneurial attitudes, operational decisions, and stakeholder relationships that ultimately determine enterprise legitimacy and long-term survival. The findings indicate that integrating professional ethics training into entrepreneurship education enhances accountability, transparency, and environmentally responsible decision-making among young entrepreneurs. Ethics-centered learning strengthens behavioral intentions toward sustainable enterprise practices by encouraging entrepreneurs to balance profit motives with environmental stewardship and social responsibility. In contexts characterized by weak regulatory enforcement and limited institutional oversight, ethical self-regulation becomes particularly important for maintaining stakeholder trust and preventing environmentally harmful practices such as greenwashing or exploitative service delivery.

Within Nigeria's socio-economic landscape, where youth unemployment coexists with severe environmental challenges, ethical green entrepreneurship offers a practical pathway toward inclusive economic transformation. Environmentally innovative enterprises in renewable energy deployment, recycling industries, sustainable agriculture, and eco-innovation sectors possess the capacity to generate employment opportunities while addressing ecological degradation. Ultimately, the study affirms that professional ethics is not merely a normative expectation but a strategic driver of innovation, investor confidence, and sustainable enterprise resilience. Strengthening ethics-oriented entrepreneurship education can therefore contribute significantly to achieving national development priorities and global Sustainable Development Goals related to decent work, responsible consumption, climate action, and sustainable communities.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on evidence synthesized from existing literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Universities and entrepreneurship training institutions should embed professional ethics and sustainability modules within entrepreneurship curricula to strengthen responsible decision-making among emerging entrepreneurs.
2. Government agencies should provide targeted incentives such as grants, tax relief programs, and access to climate finance to encourage environmentally responsible and ethically compliant enterprises.

3. Regulatory bodies should promote transparency and environmental accountability through monitoring systems that discourage greenwashing and unethical business practices.
4. Partnerships among universities, industry stakeholders, development agencies, and innovation hubs should be strengthened to provide mentorship, ethical leadership training, and business incubation support.
5. Further studies should examine regional variations in green entrepreneurship adoption and explore the long-term influence of ethics education on enterprise sustainability and employment outcomes in Nigeria.

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