

Review Article

Rural Entrepreneurship: Interrogating the Deeper Issues, Reconciling Conflicting Shadows Through a Systematic Review

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Abstract

While there is a growing research focus on rural entrepreneurship, being an emerging aspect of entrepreneurship, empirical and theoretical evidence remain inadequate or sparse on its conceptual and contextual dynamics. To provide a nuanced understanding in this regard, this study deconstructs the phenomenon using a systematic literature review of 119 articles selected using established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The systematic review was structured on the bases of journal types, titles of articles, names of authors, publication dates and findings. Particularly, articles were extracted from five (5) major databases: Web of Science, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, and Scopus. Various queries were carried out on the various database search engines of the stated five electronic databases above using various combinations of the research keywords. Articles between 1979 and May 2023 were considered. Amongst others, findings indicated a growing scholarly interest in the field of rural entrepreneurship considering the volume of articles published within the period under review. Analysis also showed that existing rural entrepreneurship literature is highly contextually skewed in the direction of high income economies, hence the growing call by experts for more rural centric studies reflecting the everydayness of entrepreneurship through a micro lens. The systematic literature review also revealed an upward trend in the volume of studies central-studying rural entrepreneurship in developed countries which further attests to its growing importance. This study will push back the domain of ignorance and arbitrariness by providing nuanced understanding that may guide policy formulation, rural entrepreneurship research and enrich overall entrepreneurship literature.

Keywords

Rural Entrepreneurship, Deconstruct, Conflicting Shadows, Systematic

1. Introduction

Rural entrepreneurship as an emerging field of conventional entrepreneurship is gaining traction in the entrepreneurship literature. Research has demonstrated that rural entrepreneurship is essential for the mitigation of multi-dimensional poverty and the resolution of socioeconomic

challenges, including unemployment, through the development of MSMEs [1-5]. It has also been recognised that the development of rural entrepreneurship contributes to sustainability by generating employment opportunities, improving livelihood standards, and offering long-term so-

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cio-economic advantages [6, 7]. Additionally, it has the potential to mobilise domestic savings for investments, reduce inequalities, promote efficient resource utilisation through vertical integration that links participants in the supply chain, and animates the overall rural economic system and sustainability [8, 9].

Consequently, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the development of rural entrepreneurship as a means of fostering local, national, and regional socio-economic development at all levels of public policy formulation. As a result of the extensive socio-economic significance of rural entrepreneurship to national growth and sustainability, public policy actors are increasingly seeking strategies to actualise its development [10-14]. It is an effective tool for promoting sustainability and alleviating poverty in rural areas, as it bridges the inequality gap within the developing low-income rurality context, which is typically characterised by weak institutional frameworks [15-17]. In a similar vein, it has been discovered that rural entrepreneurship increases economic growth and development while simultaneously decreasing poverty in the rural context [18, 19].

In addition, it has the potential to be transformative for rural entrepreneurial practitioners in their pursuit of value creation and resilience building as well as promotes sustainability and inclusivity in emergent economies [20-23]. In the same vein, empirical evidence has shown that rural entrepreneurial activities facilitate economic sustenance, which in turn enhances the quality of life, financial independence, and well-being of communities, thereby promoting sustainable development and addressing the needs of rurality [24-26].

However, despite the growing interest and awareness on the relevance of rural entrepreneurship, existing literature remains sparse regarding its contextual and conceptual dynamics, leaving the discipline with fragmented and conflicting understanding across conceptual lines. Therefore, the author profiles the dynamics of rural entrepreneurship, through a systematic literature review involving 119 selected articles to provide a nuanced and unified understanding of the phenomenon. This systematic review was structured on the bases of journal types, titles, authors, name of authors, publication date and findings. Particularly, articles were extracted from five (5) major databases as indicated in table 2 above: Web of Science, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect,

EBSCOhost, and Scopus. Various queries were carried out on the various database search engines of stated five electronic databases above using various combinations of the research keywords contained in table 2 below. Articles between 1979 and May 2023 were considered. Exclusion criteria which limited the articles to only peer-reviewed articles to keep the review within context was utilised.

2. Systematic Review

This style of review allows the researcher to follow a defined, organised, and reproducible path in search for relevant literature for the study and synthesizing same along construct lines to espouse elaborate conceptual clarity. Part of the uniqueness of this review typology is that it promotes reflexivity in research as it reduces the chances of research outcome manipulation on the part of researchers and has veritable potency to meaningfully contribute to conceptual and theoretical developments and testing, research gap identification and possible suggestions for future studies [27, 28]. SLR is also regarded for its reliability, Systematic reviews have become regarded as a highly reliable method due to its rigorous nature, transparency, and replicability.

It is believed that systematic review follows an array of protocols which ensure transparency and methodological clarity while producing a reliable and replicable output, [29, 30]. Systematic review has been adjudged by scholars as a unique and critical contributory element in theoretical formation, testing, and research gap identification, [31]. In this study on ecosystem perspective to rural entrepreneurship development, the review is specifically targeted at aligning contextual factors or constructs with extant literature in order to give ontological expression to the study. The Systematic Review is targeted at espousing understanding on the conceptual framework of this study which fundamentally centres round a nexus between a capacity-based rural entrepreneurship development in a BoP rurality context through an ecosystem lens. Fundamentally, the SLR begins with a conceptualisation of rural entrepreneurship as different from traditional entrepreneurship.

The table below presents selection criteria used for the SLR.

Table 1. Search criteria for selection of articles for review.

Name of Database	Key Words Used	Exclusion Criteria
Web of Science	Rural, or Rural Entrepreneurship, or Capacity Building, or Ecosystem or practice or theory	Articles not listed in SSCI-indexed journals and outside the research scope were excluded.
EBSCOhost	Rural, or Rural Entrepreneurship, or Capacity Building, or Ecosystem	Articles not listed in SSCI-indexed journals and outside the research scope were excluded.
Scopus	Rural, or Rural Entrepreneurship, or Capacity Building, or Ecosystem	Articles not listed in SSCI-indexed journals and outside the research scope were excluded.

Name of Database	Key Words Used	Exclusion Criteria
Sage Journals	Rural, or Rural Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial Capacity Building, or rural entrepreneurship Ecosystem	Articles not listed in SSCI-indexed journals and outside the research scope were excluded.
ScienceDirect	Rural, or Rural Entrepreneurship, or Capacity Building, or Ecosystem	Articles not listed in SSCI-indexed journals and outside the research scope were excluded.

A PRISMA diagrammatic representation was used to design and document the overall process of this systematic review (see, Figure 1).

Table 2. Distribution of Search results and selected articles.

Aggregate no. of articles displayed using key words	19,892
No. of Articles selected after applying exclusion/inclusion	722
No. of articles selected after reading through abstracts & introduction	129
No. of articles excluded due to duplication	10
Total number of articles listed in the SSCI – indexed journals selected for use	119

2.1. Extraction / Review Process

This systematic review was structured on the bases of journal types, titles of article, name of authors, publication date and findings. Particularly, articles were extracted from five (5) major databases as indicated in table 1 above: Web of Science, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, and

Scopus. Various queries were carried out on the various database search engines of stated five electronic databases above using various combination of the research keywords contained in table 2 above. Articles between 1979 and May 2023 were considered. Exclusion criteria which limited the articles to only peer-reviewed articles to keep the review within context.

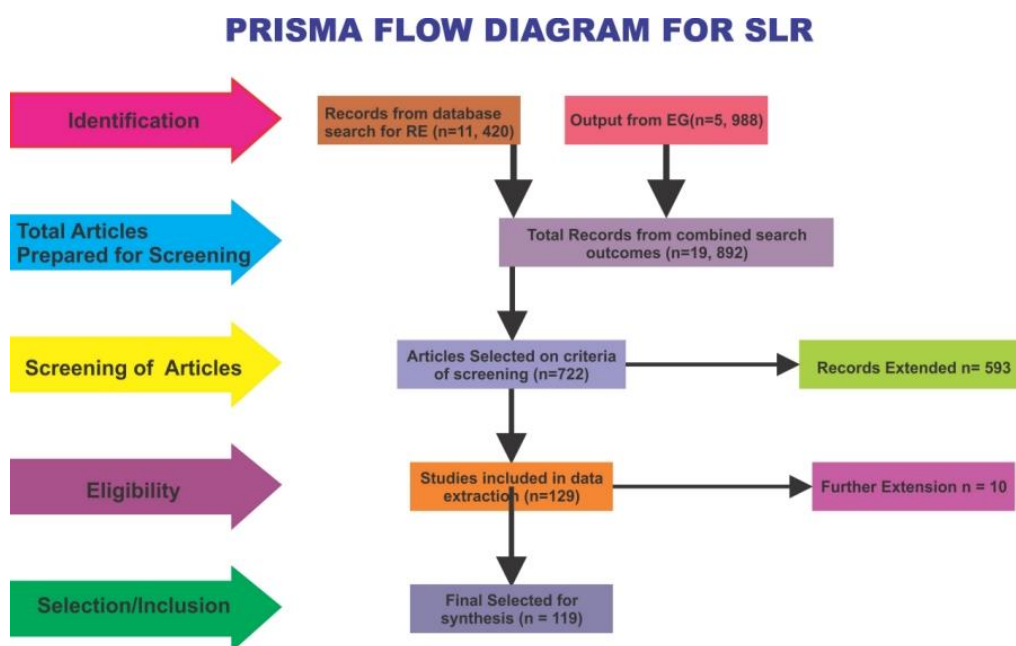


Figure 1. Prisma Flow Diagram constructed by author.

This review is therefore based on 119 articles which meets the minimum sufficiency guideline for systematic literature review. The rule of thumb related to the minimum threshold value states, "A domain with 70 articles or more indicates that the domain has reached sufficient maturity for review." Hence, this rule enables this SLR to contribute significantly to overall body of literature on rural entrepreneurship and overall entrepreneurial ecosystem with threshold value of 119 articles as the final sample size [32].

2.2. Conceptualisation and Contextualisation of Rural Entrepreneurship

To have a better understanding of the phrase, 'rural entrepreneurship', it is important to deconstruct the terminology, 'entrepreneurship' and in doing so, researcher began the SLR by establishing a nuanced understanding about the etymology of the word. The word entrepreneur originated from an action word, 'entreprendre', a French word which means to undertake or perform [33]. Today, what is currently known as entrepreneurship which has gained considerable prominence both in theory and is a cumulative result of various scholarly efforts. And very instructive to this history, is the imprint of Jesseph Schumpeter, through his book, 'Theory of Economic Development', where he laid an integral part of the foundation that contributed significantly to the theory of entrepreneurship. Despite being published as early as 1934, the book has remained relevant in contemporary discuss on entrepreneurship due to its importance. In Schumpeter's view, entrepreneurship is a powerhouse of economic development with innovation as a major operational tool [34].

2.3. Who is a Rural Entrepreneur

According to Schumpeter, an entrepreneur is a person who has the ability to invent or develop something completely new or via combinations, making them a dynamic force for social or economic change [35]. Schumpeter's conceptualisation is open-ended and has implications on several levels. For example, the combination element could be the creation of a new product, the identification of a new market, the identification of a new supply method, the discovery of new production methods, or the introduction of new, advantageous changes into an organization's operational procedure [36] and [37]. This knowledge offers entrepreneurship a multifaceted perspective, leading to a variety of conceptualisations and definitions in the attempt to give it a unique character. Since there is currently no widely recognised description or conceptualisation of the phenomena, this identity crisis still seems to persist around 80 years after Schumpeter's publication [21].

According to r a new product or service, bundle of products or services, or price/value relationship that adds value to markets within that community or beyond, [40].

2.4. Rural Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship in Rural Area: Are they the Same

Going by the high impact factor associated with entrepreneurship as a socio-economic developmental tool as evident in the Silicon Valley, its replicability is increasingly being advocated for within the rurality context with a view to driving rural economic development and sustainability, especially within the base of the pyramid], [46, 47]. The rural area, in the opinion of Stathopoulou et.al., brings to mind a picture of a geographical location or territorial domain characterised with specific physical and socio-economic attributes [39]. There has been a significant and progressive the SLR, entrepreneurship has a diverse face and is influenced by a number of factors, including innovativeness, risk-taking, market establishment ability, and the creation and management of micro, medium, and small businesses [38, 39, 21]

In Willian and Fortunato, the question, who is an entrepreneur? Was particularly raised. [40]. Acknowledging this fragmented characteristic of entrepreneurship, scholars have described entrepreneurship research as suffering from identity crisis [41].

Be that as it may, the word entrepreneur has made a remarkable imprint in business lexicon as it is widely and commonly engaged and appropriated (formally and informally) across diver spectrum of human endeavour signifying the popularity of the jargon [41, 42]. However, there has not been a clear cut or generally adopted definition for it, reason being that entrepreneurship, not until recently never had a standalone disciplinary status. The literature for entrepreneurship has been fragmented for a long time due to its inter disciplinary nature which has made it difficult to gain traction identity wise.

The implication of this fragmented nature of the discipline is that it encapsulates gamut of behaviours, attitudes, and activities which has made it very difficult to evolve a generic definition for entrepreneurship or to achieve a satisfactory description of who an entrepreneur is. This position aligns with Davidson who argued that it is difficult to defined who an entrepreneur is in real sense as no sociological and psychological characteristics have been found that predicts with precision, a potential entrepreneur, or someone who will excel as an entrepreneur or not [41].

This fragmented or multi-disciplinary nature is very important in entrepreneurship discuss in that it influences the various perceptions that invariably shape researcher's conceptualisation or definition of the phenomenon. For instance, entrepreneurship theories inspired by mainstream economists defines an entrepreneur in a manner that, reveals and pictures the entrepreneur as an economic agent primarily inspired by the quest for profit and exploitation of opportunity for personal financial gains, [42].

However, this diversity in perception notwithstanding, an effective definition of an entrepreneur in rurality context must be all inclusive and reflective of the diversity of associated attributes and business types that characterises the area. Davidsson was more interested in creating an understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon round a domain of vital attributes that must be seen or evident to qualify any definition as sufficient. This domain includes the processual logic inherent in launching a new business which begins with opportunity identification or creation and investment of resources (materials and time) to generate a productive output (products or services) of economic or social values. This position by Davidsson resonates significantly with the findings from Gartner that for any business to be seen within the purview of entrepreneurship, it must be a new and value-oriented product offering. [43]. Though the term, value as contained in the findings of Gartner, akin to the 'combination' element in earlier definition of Schumpeter, seem open ended with implication of attracting different colouration by scholars. [44, 45] However, Davidsson led a pathway for clarity by deconstructing the new offering as a new product or service, bundle of products and services. [41]

Connecting these various perspectives, an entrepreneur may holistically be defined as an individual (or part of a group of individuals) who has created a new business venture within a place (which may be rural or urban) to off-fegrowth in scholarly attempt to conceptualise rural entrepreneurship. However, the study of Wortman occupies a significant space in body of literature as part of the maiden effort to conceptualise the phenomenon where rural entrepreneurship was conceived as a process of creating new organisation(s), targeted at introducing new products, services or new market creation or engagement of new technology in a rural area or environment, [21, 49]. In line with the forging, some researchers such as Lafuente et al., Vaillant and Lafuente, have appropriated the concept as synonymous to creation of firms or businesses in rural areas [47, 50]. Consequently, some researchers have see rural entrepreneurship from the perspective of new business development in rural areas [51, 52].

However, for conceptual clarity, it is strategically important to differentiate between rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in rural areas. While many firms or businesses reflect or effectively capture the characteristics of the rurality in terms of its embeddedness and relational dynamics with host communities, others simply appear fortuitously situated or cited in the host communities or rural space of operation without any form of company-community identification. [53]. Here lies the fundamental difference between rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in rural areas. Aligning with the foregoing, a rural entrepreneur has also been defined as an individual who lives in a rural area, whose entrepreneurial activities or business is domiciled within the community and highly influenced by socio-economic characteristics of the rurality [39, 54, 48].

Taking a lead from the above, in this study, author draws on the conceptualisation of rural entrepreneurship by [55]. By this definition, Rural entrepreneurship is construed as a business activity that interacts and impacts, socio-economically on its environment by way of local job creation through localised employment, utilisation of local resources and demonstrate appreciable concern for social responsibility and community development while generating income profitably. [56]

This implies that the study focuses on rural entrepreneurship rather than entrepreneurship in rural area as it excludes the businesses that are in a rural setting, whose activities have no direct impact on their immediate environment by way of employment opportunities for the local people, corporate social responsibility and otherwise [55].

Contrary to the focus of this research, it has been observed that existing studies on enterprise and entrepreneurship within the rurality context were majorly contextualised in sense of entrepreneurship in rural areas instead of the reverse which better justifies the concept. This observation presents a unique gap in research which this study hopes to fill, [57]

2.5. Space and Place Logic in Rural Entrepreneurship

Understanding rural entrepreneurship depends critically on the ideas of space and location. Because of its geographical qualities, rural entrepreneurship is unique among other kinds of entrepreneurship. Although the area of entrepreneurship has paid somewhat little attention to the ideas of space and location, they are well established in the field of human geography where they are used to investigate the nature of the socio-spatial and how it affects social processes [58-60]. They therefore help to investigate the function of spatial context in general and rural setting in particular in relation to entrepreneurial activity [59].

Tuan defines place as fixation or halt and space as essentially processes of movement and motion [62, 61]. Place is perceived through close interactions with surrounding things and people, best shown by the experience of the young kid regarding the mother as a "safe place" [62]. Space is the network that develops between locations defined by movement. Space is therefore more abstract; locations are a sort of object to which values, meaning, personal experience, and attachment apply [62, 63]. For academics concentrating on social and economic dimensions of space and location, space usually refers to the mobility and flow of capital, labour, resources, and knowledge [63, 64].

New communication and transit technologies have fast expanded the breadth and density of this movement and flow. Economic issues of the maximisation of profit or accumulation of economic value for businesses, nations, and regions predominate in space. Echoing Tuan, a place is more than just a place of capitalist production; while the flow of capital, labour, resources, and information is always an exchange

between places, capitalist production must take place somewhere. Consequently, sites can be distinctive, possess special characteristics, and become significant to people who feel connected to them. Space and place have clearly complicated interactions. Particularly in big cities, the growing mobility in space has resulted in development in some regions.

Space seems to be posing threats to other locations. As the movement moves away from or around these periphery locations, capital, labour, resources, and information gather at centres and leave the periphery exhausted [65]. Furthermore, the spread of global products and culture seems to threaten the diversity and uniqueness of particular places, growing or declining, as seen by the substitution of local variety with, for example, businesses like 7-Eleven and McDonald's, or what Mitchell describes as a phase of early destruction of the rural idyll, [66]. Scholars have underlined how locations are essentially created socially and materially [55]. Places are produced and constantly rebuilt by interaction and meaning given by people; they are not there to be discovered [55].

These interactions establish and redefine locations; occasionally, places turn into the site of dispute over value and identity. Therefore, a place is more than just a place; it is formed by the activities carried out in a place and the interactions among the place such that social practices are affected by the place and the place shapes itself. Thus, the natural and material surroundings of locations both support and restrict localised activities. Re-creation of places therefore happens in complicated interrelations between the social and the material, neither materially nor socially dictated.

2.6. Rural and Urbanised Contextual Debate

There is a growing empirical and theoretical evidence that policies and practices in urban and rural areas are not the same as they share obvious differences in approaches (see Feld, 2012 for a critique of the Silicon Valley model of high-growth, high-tech entrepreneurship becoming a universal role model for development), [67].

In establishing clarity between the rurality and urbanised context of entrepreneurship, it is worthy of note that entrepreneurship principle is basic or generic. It is the context in which it is applied (e.g. gender, rural, institutional, etc) that shapes its form or identity per time. For instance, the entrepreneurial characteristic of innovativeness and opportunity recognition is equally important to overall success in both the rural and urbanised context [68]. However, the significant difference between the two scenario is seen in terms of prevalent opportunities and overall ecosystem configurations. Aligning with the above position, Bhattacharyya and Anderson opined that rural entrepreneurship is a distinct type of entrepreneurship with enormous potential for growth stemming from its unique resource opportunities and flexible ecosystem regarding ease of doing business, [69, 70].

This differentiation is very strategic and instructive for conceptual clarification. Gaddefors and Anderson, particu-

larly criticised the arbitrary appropriation of the rurality concept by many researchers who according to them, often, appropriate the wrong attributes or characteristics to the phenomenon [71]. The concept of Rural Entrepreneurship compounded implies two distinct possibilities which could only be delineated: either from a perspective of entrepreneurial activities that are context based or a distinct form of entrepreneurship that arises uniquely in rural areas, [71].

In an enquiry into the differences between rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship as an academic discipline, some researchers have focused on reviewing literature on entrepreneurship and rural economic development in the United States of America [72-74]. Some of the results can be best summarised in three conclusions which are fundamental to this study. First, that entrepreneurship is contextual in nature and its identity per time becomes a function of the context upon which it is appropriated. This observation elucidates the differences between rural and traditional entrepreneurship which appears to be more urban inclined. Second, they observed that the reason for the differences is multifaceted and can be seen from, not only nature of businesses that exist in the rural area but also in the attitudinal disposition or enterprise culture of the people as well as resource availability. Thirdly, the result of their study revealed that entrepreneurship development is gaining traction as a viable developmental tool within the rurality context or base of the pyramid in terms of its low-cost implication and high employment potency. Consequently, Gaddefors and Anderson argued that an understanding of the researcher's conceptual domain of entrepreneurship is of strategic importance to the overall research outcome as there is always a potential risk of attributing causality to characteristics that are essentially descriptive in nature [71, 75].

This distinction is particularly important in that it determines outcome of whatever form a study adopts. Therefore, if the research aligns with a paradigm that the rurality shapes a phenomenon under study within a given context, it follows that findings from such study would not be generalisable beyond the context wherein it was situated. Alternatively, if the researcher pictures rural entrepreneurship simply as entrepreneurial activities in rural surrounding, it automatically views entrepreneurship through a broader perspective. Today, due to the importance of entrepreneurship as a developmental mechanism, it is being appropriated in various context such as rural, social, ethnic or even female entrepreneurship, [71, 75].

However, according to Fortunato, the primary characteristic that sets rural entrepreneurship apart from mainstream entrepreneurship is viewed from a spatial or location perspective [74]. However, there is empirical evidence that suggests there is a boundary between RE and entrepreneurship in rural areas that should be noted in contextualisation [59]. At its core, RE is thought of when entrepreneurial practice is visualised through the lens of activities occurring within a rural context. For example, some experts have high-

lighted this difference by arguing that rural entrepreneurship reflects a more intimate or profound connection with rurality with a deliberate focus on well-being or entrepreneurial outcomes of the local ecosystem, whereas urban entrepreneurship is perceived more in light of its activities within a spatial context in which rurality becomes a mere location or entrepreneurial ecosystem where entrepreneurs carry out their everyday profit-seeking activities [74, 76]. More so, this distinction may also be comprehended through a micro-to-macro perspective [76].

Essentially, rural entrepreneurship encompasses a blend of the geographical component, the variety of entrepreneurial endeavours that prioritise it, and sociological and economic factors focused on making an effect [77]. In other words, rural entrepreneurship is impact driven as it investigates the entrepreneurial ecosystem in order to achieve a virile rural entrepreneurial outcome, such as poverty reduction, bridging the inequality gap, improving the drive for financial independence, economic diversification, and better livelihood at the base of the pyramid, and creating jobs through the development and growth of SMEs [78-82].

2.7. Major Sub-Themes or Contextual Factors in Rural Entrepreneurship

With respect to rural entrepreneurship, SLR shows that existing literature emphasis has been more on quite distinct but interrelated themes that traverses a wide range of contextual diversities. Pato and Teixeira identified eight unique areas in this regard which includes: entrepreneurs' demographic and psychological traits; organisational characteristics; embeddedness; rurality; growth and development, policy measures, institutional frameworks, and governance [20].

Under the demographic and psychological traits, factors such as gender, age, ethnicity or geographical location of the individual entrepreneur are placed in context. Examining the effect of the demographic element on entrepreneurial outcomes, Meccheri and Pelloni acknowledged that element such as age of an entrepreneur can significantly shape his or her entrepreneurial intention or culture [83]. Specifically, they noted that younger entrepreneurs are generally more entrepreneurial with higher dynamic inclination to risk taking which suggests they have higher needs for financial resources. In the same vein, Akgün *et al.* tied entrepreneurs' origin to overall efficiency of entrepreneurial process [84]. Based on their study's conceptual framing, they argued that new comers are relatively older and better educated than incumbent in establishment of non-agricultural businesses. Also included in their findings was that newcomer contribute more significantly to capital formation even though they do not directly instigate economic development. are not directly instigators of rural economic development.

More so, a considerable amount of progress has been recorded in area of gender related research. One of such studies is the one conducted by Rijkers and Costa, which was central

studied entrepreneurial intention of women in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka [85]. Their finding revealed a very low likelihood to become non-farm entrepreneur as their educational backgrounds, more often than not, doesn't seem to resonate with their educational backgrounds. Also, they found that firms run by women are usually smaller and less likely to be viable and productive than those run by their male counterpart with exception of Indonesia women who tend to be proactive with higher entrepreneurial intention.

Furthermore, Pagán, in his study within the rural area of Guatemala, uncovered a wide margin in the ratio of men to women within the labour force which showed men as being more in population both in public and private employment [86]. While on his part, focusing exclusively on female entrepreneurship, Fuad *et al* made a discovery which appear quite similar to that Hisrich and Brush that most female entrepreneurs tend to be preoccupied with sociological and self-actualisation concerns such as making children and educational pursuit and as such consider setting up business as last option which most of them usually do at age 40. [87, 88]

On the other hand, the entrepreneurial psychological traits contextualisation primarily foregrounds, the implication of an entrepreneur's psychographics and psychodynamics on overall entrepreneurial activities or outcomes. The psychological trait has also received much of research attention. Gladwin *et al.* conducted an enquiry into effect of motivation on entrepreneurship where he found that motivation stems quest for autonomy, a new challenge, money or income, the sudden appearance of a good opportunity and even the loss of a job or farm [89]. More so, various studies have been conducted in this regard using various components as context such as lifestyle entrepreneurship. [90-92].

Another fundamental sub-topic that is currently drawing research attention is capacity building of the individual entrepreneur. Research emphasis is gradually shifting towards capacity of the individual entrepreneur. Emphasising the importance of capacity building Sousa *et al.*, suggested in their conclusion that vicissitudes in terms of ecosystem volatility is such that requires every entrepreneur to acquire relevant entrepreneurial skills to enable them stay profitably in business. In this respect, Anderson and McElwEe also made a remarkable contribution, especially in area of sustainability in agriculture, when he noted that the most challenging demand for farmers or agricultural practitioners is being able to develop requisite vocational and entrepreneurial skills to enable them to succeed in the highly dynamic and challenging business environment of today, [93]. Moreso, Skuraset *al.* suggested that, education and training stimulates entrepreneurial capacity which culminates in better entrepreneurial outcomes, [94].

The organisational characteristics or element of rural entrepreneurship centres round an interplay of innovativeness and creativity with respect to galvanising competitive advantages for organisational overall growth and development. This could be by way of exploiting new and smart ways of

doing business. Today, the business environment is increasingly presenting new opportunities and challenges to entrepreneurs such that only those who develop alongside the vicissitude would remain in business. North and Smallbone established a five-dimensional parameter for measuring innovative behaviour which includes: product and service innovation, market development, marketing methods, process technology and innovation and the use of information technology in administration. [95]

Polo-Peña *et al.* examined relevance of marketing to rural entrepreneurship development wherein they made concluded that adapting objective specific marketing strategies for rural enterprise stimulates entrepreneurial outcomes [96]. The social context of rural entrepreneurship is a logical shift from research standpoint that beams its lens solely on the entrepreneur as a conceptual factor. This logic suggests that rural entrepreneurship research should not just revolve round the entrepreneur only but also the sociocultural and political environment wherein the business is domiciled. In this regard, many authors have conducted research relevant social contextual factors of strategic importance to rural entrepreneurship development some of which includes embeddedness, network, entrepreneurs' social capital, [97-100]. Basically, the concept of networks and embeddedness suggests primarily, that entrepreneurs who give adequate attention to building social ties within rural communities of operation and that are more involved to network building and less inclined to exploitative institutional assistance have higher chances of success within the rurality context.

Growth and development is another fundamental sub topics in rural entrepreneurship. Various research effort has been made to address issues arising from this area with each making meaningful contribution to the body of literature. For instance, Fuller-Love *et al.*, in their study, were concerned about policy development and renovation towards improved rural entrepreneurial practice, [101]. Specifically, they suggested scenario planning as a means for building strategic foresight for improvement of operational policy framework.

However, for Goetz *et al.*, their interest was in studying various entrepreneurship types or forms (necessity and opportunity) to understand their driving principles in order to make informed decision on the requisite pathway to rural entrepreneurship development [102]. Also motivated by curiosity and quest to make impact in this regard, Rena, made a strong case for entrepreneurial orientation and capacity building as fundamental requirement for rural entrepreneurship development.[103]

On the policy sub-element of rural entrepreneurship, SLR showed that there are subsequent amount of literature in that regard some of which include that of [104, 105]. The prime commonality in these studies is usually towards improved policy development for effective and efficient rural entrepreneurship practice. This position dovetails that of Drabenstott *et al.*, which opined that the fundamental aim of entrepreneurial policy formulation is to create a healthy en-

trepreneurial ecosystem within a rurality [105]. Today, there exist huge number of policy programs aimed at rural entrepreneurship development, but these programs are often not able to achieve their aims [106]. This discovery constitutes part of the research gaps which this study hopes to fill. The failure of these policies has been attributed to various possibilities some of which include their configurational complexities in terms of ease of institutional challenges, and most importantly, they mostly alien to the rurality context for which they are formulated. [107].

The institutional frameworks and governance have been a major agenda in global entrepreneurship debate which has berated a lot of research insights. The institutional framework and governance is one of the most important elements of rural entrepreneurial ecosystem as it affects every other components of rural entrepreneurship outlined above as well as the overall rural entrepreneurial ecosystem. For instance, every policies aimed at rural entrepreneurship development is affected by the political and governance system of the area. [108]. In fact so much body of evidence exist in literature that attributes the stagnation of rural entrepreneurship to poor sociocultural and political institutional frameworks. [109].

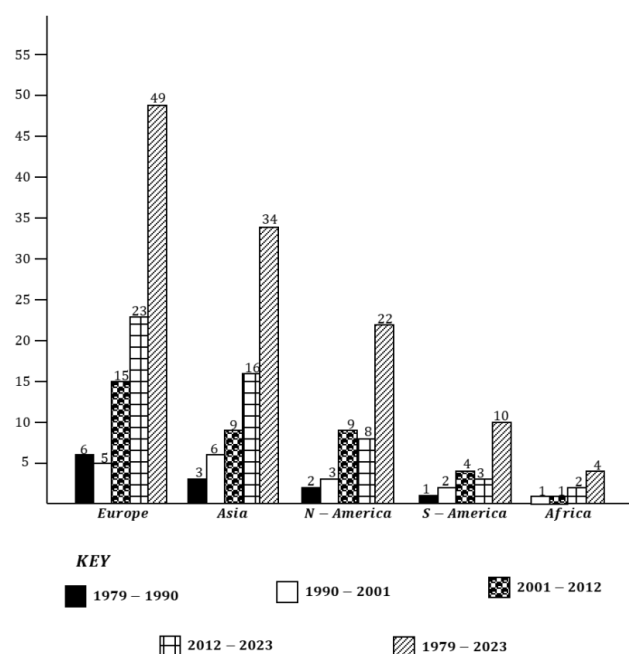


Figure 2. Continental Distribution of Articles on RE from 1979 TO 2023.

Avramenko and Silver emphasized the importance of putting in place effective rural governance system as well as the need to broaden the scope of rural entrepreneurship operations so as to improve its effectiveness and efficiency [108]. By rural governance, it implies the operational procedure and collaborative effort between government and non-governmental agencies to improve the effectiveness of rural governance in terms of policy formulation for entre-

preneurial development. Particularly, poor institutional framework, (formal or informal) as well as lack of mentorship or entrepreneurial role models have been cited as fundamental hindrance or barriers to rural entrepreneurship development. [110, 111]

The statistical chart (Figure 3) represents a continental distribution of articles under review from period 1979 to 2023. Evidence in this regard shows that the empirical research lens within period under review, focused more on developed economies with about 72% of articles focusing on urbanised regional contexts. SLR revealed that European countries (especially, North and Western Europe) such as United Kingdom and France, Germany and Finland have higher impact on rural entrepreneurship literature with United Kingdom being at the echelon. Asia came second with China clinching 68% of the overall articles associated with the continent from database searched amidst countries such as Bangladesh, Japan, North Korea, Philippine, Singapore, Indonesia, and India. Furthermore, North America came third with higher volume emanating from the United States of America while the South America also recorded increasing cases of empirical studies on the phenomenon. The SLR shows that Africa has a very low and negligible focus as the two of the four articles were particular to South Africa, one to Ghana and the other to Nigeria. On the overall, the SLR indicated a progressive or growing trend in rural entrepreneurship literature, except for the observation that the trend is more in direction of developed economies. This presents a very significant gap to be considered by researchers.

This observation is consistent with the hegemony of United Kingdom authors, regarding the phenomenon, which was revealed in Masoomi and Rezaei-Moghaddam and findings in Pato and Teixeira, where the trend was attributed to evolving surge in macroeconomic policy targeted at institutional renovations and activism in skills, technology, and educational development by these developed nations [112, 21]. And in this vein, the report by the United Nations Development Program added that the concern for rural entrepreneurship in the developed economies is both for the urban and rural areas, an observation that will take further review of literature across other databases to validate. Be that as it may, the SLV further indicated that in recent years rural entrepreneurship development effort in the Europe is spreading into regional divide of the urban and rural areas as rural entrepreneurial development programs such as skills acquisition, incubators and start-up programs are increasingly being established in the rural areas. Hence, Stathopoulou *et al.* observed that these changes are majorly targeted at strategic policy reforms in area of agriculture, business funding, liberalisation of international trade, localisation, and globalisation through technological reformation. [39]

More so, from the SLR, it is obvious that the focus on entrepreneurial trait or demographic characteristics of the entrepreneurs is reducing (Henry and McElwee, with overall ecosystem concerns taking the centre stage of rural entre-

preneurial development [113]. To a large extent this finding explains the importance of the macroeconomic ontological dimension to rural entrepreneurship development perspective. Hence, Embeddedness and relational dynamics as a macro-micro concern or theme has grown from 4% (1979–1990) to 16% (2012–2023) as revealed by the SLR.

From the trend analysis above (Figure 4) representing a statistical percentage distribution of research methodology based on the one hundred and nineteen (119) mined articles from various databases, it is obvious that qualitative method has been the most popular approach engaged in rural entrepreneurial research within the period under review based on data set under review.

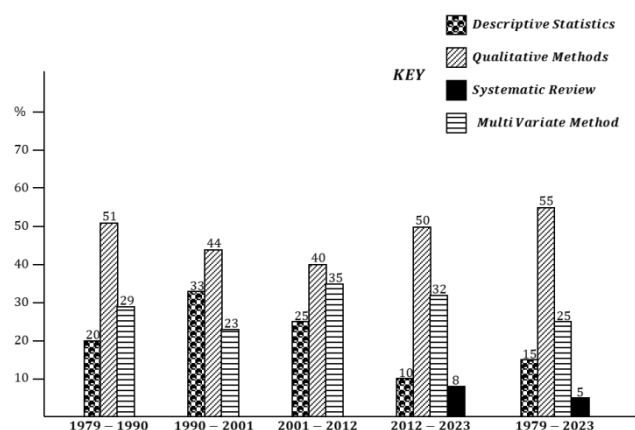


Figure 3. Methodological Trend in Literature from 1979 – 2023 as at July 2023 based on articles under review.

2.8. Rural Entrepreneurship in Developing Countries

Research has been conducted in developing nations to examine the ‘regulation and implementation of rural development programs, particularly regarding women and youth. Cho and Honorati examination of several entrepreneurship programs in developing nations revealed significant disparities in their efficacy, contingent upon beneficiary kinds, results, and national context [114]. To address the deficiency in credentials and skills, some rural policymakers have implemented entrepreneurial development programs aimed at enhancing individual competencies. Entrepreneurship programs positively influenced adolescents and enhanced business understanding and practices.

Nevertheless, the accomplishments did not promptly result in the establishment or growth of enterprises, nor did they enhance revenue. Research indicated that promotional packages integrating training and funding were more efficacious in enhancing company activities, with money proving more beneficial for women's business performance and training being more advantageous for established businesses. Significant findings from Mexico emphasised the necessity for

entrepreneurial training programs for rural producers to enhance essential skills, including marketing, finance, networking, and logistics, while also stressing the importance of well-structured policies that facilitate effective communication between the community and the government [115]. Research from Iran indicates that offering training opportunities for enterprises enhances profitability [116].

The literature has also highlighted the efficacy of experiential learning, which happens through active engagement rather than traditional educational methods [117]. Their literature research verifies the rising prevalence of women entrepreneurs in emerging nations, including Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, therefore recognising their role in economic growth and social development through job creation and the alleviation of poverty and unemployment. In some cases, women face disproportionate challenges due to family obligations, conventional gender roles in work, insufficient education (which impairs their access to information and expertise), and obstacles to securing financing and financial assistance. The above study also indicates that the entrepreneurial training for female farmers in Uganda was significantly impeded by the same difficulties that affected the performance of the UK researchers' entrepreneurship curriculum [117]. The result indicated that further training programs, inclusive of males, are necessary to mitigate the long-term impacts of the hurdles [118], therefore enhancing women's knowledge and abilities throughout the entrepreneurial process. This finding is corroborated by others who underscore the need of providing women with technical knowledge, skills training, and marketing strategies. Economic progress is unattainable without the participation of women [118].

SLR also found that there is a scarcity of literature about rural entrepreneurship in South Africa. Watters et al.'s study underscores the necessity of a comprehensive strategy in executing rural interventions, although it restricts its focus to emotional and continuous support for growth [119]. A study by de Mink on the connections between theory and practice in the W&R sector in South Africa is somewhat relevant. She analysed the experiences of learners who finished a W&R "leadership," a program that integrated organised college-based education, practical work-based training, and the synthesis of theory and practice. She discovered that South Africa's multi-tiered National Qualifications Framework accommodates both academic and vocational training while advocating a "multi-faceted" skills development plan [120].

This indicates that the learners had amalgamated theory with practice, hence enhancing their proficiency. The study indicated that the organised college-based education facilitated learners in applying their acquired knowledge in the job. It was concluded that skills development programs play a crucial role in empowering rural entrepreneurship to enhance the lives of participants. Hence, it was recommended that strategies aimed at advancing rural entrepreneurship should integrate theoretical and practical components, viewing the entire intervention as a learning process. The strategy must,

evidently, consider the distinct requirements and location, while facilitating access to financing as a means of integrating sustainability. As the global economy advances digitally, the information technology and physical infrastructure in rural villages must progress accordingly, or their residents will descend farther into poverty.

3. Discussion of Findings and Summary of SLR

The first segment of the SLR focused on rural entrepreneurship literature particularly with view to establishing understanding on the phenomenon and contextual issues around it. The SLR, amongst others shows an increasing scholarly interest going by the volume of published articles on the phenomena, especially within the last two decades. The growing interest became visible since 1995 even though there has been a somewhat negligible progression from 1980's to 1994 when a debut publication on rural entrepreneurship was made. Be that as it may, Rural Entrepreneurship as a disciplinary concern appears to be on a fast lane to puberty as there has been a hyper or geometric progression in the order of publication being churn out in relevant journals within the last two years with mainly European Authors at the echelon.. Though some databases have higher number of publications central studying rural entrepreneurship, it is observed from the review exercise that this growing scholarly interest reflects across the various databases from where articles were mined for this study signifying a positive trend in rural entrepreneurship development.

Furthermore, the SLR shows higher volume of publication on Rural Entrepreneurship is higher in journal of Rural Studies with 68 articles which represents the highest amongst journals under review while entrepreneurship and regional development journal came second in the ranking with a total of 41. This progressive surge in volume of publication in these two journals, indisputably, correlates with their high impact factors as evident in their indexation as is the case with related journals. [21]

However, it was evident that higher proportion (over 88%) of these publication on rural entrepreneurship were focussed more on subject areas within the social sciences which suggest an advancement in the discipline. In their study 'Evolution, roots, and influence of the rural entrepreneurship literature: a bibliometric account', Masoomi and Rezaei-Moghaddam found that rural entrepreneurship is highly under theorized as less than 2% of the profiled articles (721) drawn from both Web of Science and Scopus databases from 1981 – 2020, was devoted to theory building [121]. This finding aligns with that of Pato and Teixeira which pinpointed lack of theory building as a major lacuna facing the development and progress of the phenomenon [21]. Also resonating with the importance of theorisation, Wortman argued that the conceptualisation of rural entrepreneurship

and its components must be given priority attention for it to attain puberty, though Pato and Teixeira expressed a counter view that the theoretical foundation of rural entrepreneurship as at when Wortman made his submission was then in its infancy [122] and [21]. Due to the observed dearth of theoretical and conceptual studies of rural entrepreneurship, research on the phenomenon has been more empirical in nature which further corroborates this SLR findings that majority of articles reviewed were empirical in nature. In Pato and Teixeira, this observation constituted part of the finding [21].

More so, their analysis showed that rural entrepreneurship research is highly skewed in the direction of high income or developed countries which exemplifies its strategic importance to rural development for these countries [124] and [124]. The analysis also revealed an upward trend in the volume of studies central-studying rural entrepreneurship in developed countries which further attests to its growing importance. They also went further to de-construct the articles under review in terms of countries composition of rural entrepreneurship scholars, where United Kingdom came top in the high-income countries on the chart as having the highest exposure in rural entrepreneurship research, while China also came top in the upper middle-income category, followed by South Africa with India emerging as the only lower middle-income country in the analysis amongst other countries gaining traction in rural entrepreneurship investigations or studies.

As laudable and instructive as the above findings by Masoomi and Rezaei-Moghaddam it amplifies a gap in rural entrepreneurship research that implies worrisome ambivalence in rural entrepreneurship research, especially when viewed against the background of rurality in context of developing economies or countries [121]. This justifies the fears expressed in Fortunato about research lens not focusing adequately on the phenomenon in the context of developing countries which best reflect or defines the rurality concept [74]. This observation also contributed to the inspiration that engendered the thought and submission of Field, in his critique of the evolving high-growth and high-tech inclined entrepreneurship Silicon Valley model which is fast becoming a globally accepted yardstick for development. Masoomi and Rezaei-moghaddam however, acknowledged the implication of the negligible share of articles analysing low income or developing countries, hence suggested that research lens be focused on that regard. [121]

In Pato and Teeixeira, it was observed that adequate theoretical and conceptual research effort has not been made in area of rural entrepreneurship as an emerging concept in traditional entrepreneurship [21]. Evidence from the systematic literature review shows that, researchers have looked at the concept from various perspectives such as Pato and Teixeira, who considered it from psychological attributes of the entrepreneurs and their impact factor within the rural entrepreneurial ecosystem [21]. However, in Lunnan et al.,; Nybakk and Hansen, it was observed that research focus on

entrepreneurial psychological attributes is usually limited to micro scale which usually revolves round the individual entrepreneur [125]. But on the contrary, research focus on rural entrepreneurship sees the entrepreneur through a macro or broader lens of interconnectivity with their business environment in terms of networks with local resources (both human and material,) [77].

Summary/Conclusion of SLR

The first goal of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of the existing literature in rural entrepreneurship literature. The first section focused on conceptualising rural entrepreneurship. Specifically, it extrapolated useful insight on the debate trend along contextual diversity or plurality where various conflicting ontologies such as 'place and space', 'urban and rural', 'rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship in rural areas' and otherwise were reconciled. Secondly, other relevant sub-themes and conceptual factors relevant to the study were discussed along empirical lines. Finally, the author, in recognition of contextual diversity, the author profiled the trend of rural entrepreneurship in developing context.

4. Future Research Area

The Plurality of the rurality context identified in this study calls for conceptual clarity in literature. While not calling for a universal definition (or redefinition) of the rural, this research creates vacuum for more investigations profiling the nuance among different rurality contexts along geographical and regional lines. This is so when considered against the reality that what constitutes rurality is context relative. Future research on rural entrepreneurship should aim at espousing clarity in this regard.

Abbreviations

RE	Rural Entrepreneurship
SLR	Systematic Literature Review

Author Contributions

Marcus Friday Ovovwero Ekure is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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