

## Digital Entrepreneurship Training for Unemployed Youth: A Community-Based MSME Incubation Program

*Fajar Agung Nugroho<sup>a)</sup>, Aang Anwarudin, Tiyan Fatkhurrokhman, Muhamad Fai Armansyah, Hafid Syarif Hidayatulloh, Farhan Reza Kusuma*

Universitas Muhammadiyah Gombong, Gombong, Indonesia

<sup>a)</sup>Corresponding author: [18nugroho@gmail.com](mailto:18nugroho@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment remains a pressing socio-economic challenge, particularly in regions where access to education, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial opportunities is limited. In Gombong Sub-district, Kebumen Regency, many young people face barriers to entering the formal labor market despite the rapid growth of Indonesia's digital economy. This training program was designed to empower unemployed youth by strengthening their entrepreneurial capacity through integrated learning modules. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured empowerment program in enhancing entrepreneurial competencies among unemployed youth in Gombong Sub-district, Kebumen Regency. A total of 30 participants (aged 17–25; 18 males, 12 females) with no prior entrepreneurial experience were enrolled. The intervention consisted of four sequential modules: (1) financial bookkeeping, (2) local wisdom-based business ideation, (3) digital marketing, and (4) creative production using manual and Direct-to-Film (DTF) printing. Mixed-method evaluation tools included pretest-posttest surveys, simulation tasks, rubrics, and checklists. Statistical analysis was conducted using paired t-tests to measure learning gains. Significant improvements were observed across all modules. In financial literacy, the average score increased from 64.7 to 90.4, with 90% of participants meeting competency standards. Business ideation yielded 28 proposals, with an average feasibility score of 92.4/100. Digital marketing scores rose from 38.5 to 81.2 ( $p < 0.001$ ), and 90% of participants created functional online business accounts. In the printing module, 25 designs met quality benchmarks ( $\geq 80\%$  clarity and alignment), and posttest scores improved from 65 to 95. DTF printing was rated higher in efficiency and market appeal, while manual printing was preferred for affordability. The program demonstrated short-term effectiveness in building entrepreneurial capacity among rural youth. However, limitations include the absence of long-term follow-up, market validation, and post-training support. Future research should explore scalability, sustainability, and integration with digital tools and funding mechanisms to enhance impact. It is recommended that similar empowerment programs be scaled up with stronger institutional support, wider access to digital incubation platforms, and sustained mentoring to ensure long-term business sustainability and contribution to the local creative economy.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

*Submitted/Received: 05 Sept. 2025*

*First Revised: 27 September 2025*

*Accepted: 25 September 2025*

*First Available online: 31 October 2025*

*Publication Date: 31 October 2025*

#### Keywords:

Community Development  
Digital Marketing  
Entrepreneurship Training  
Financial Literacy  
Local Wisdom  
Screen Printing  
Youth Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of unemployed youth is a crucial issue in socio-economic development. Young people have great potential to become drivers of the creative economy; however, limited access to education, low digital literacy, and restricted job opportunities often leave them trapped in long-term unemployment. One promising solution is the incubation of digital-based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which helps build capacity while creating opportunities for self-employment.

According to data from Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia (Statistik, 2025b), the open unemployment rate among individuals aged 15–24 in central java province reached 17.93%. This trend is mirrored in Gombong Sub-district, Kebumen Regency, where the youth unemployment rate reached 18.2% in 2024, with most affected individuals being high school and vocational school graduates (Statistik, 2025a). Meanwhile, the e-commerce sector experienced a 3% growth in 2024, increasing from IDR 453.7 trillion in 2023 to IDR 468.6 trillion (Huda et al., 2025). This expansion signals not only optimism about the digital economy but also tangible opportunities for youth engagement through digital entrepreneurship.

Despite this potential, youth in Gombong face persistent challenges: limited digital skills, low entrepreneurial motivation, and minimal access to structured incubation platforms (Kebumen, 2024). Local MSMEs remain largely conventional, with minimal integration of digital tools in marketing, operations, and customer engagement. This underutilization weakens competitiveness and contributes to the cycle of youth unemployment.

This study argues for the urgent implementation of empowerment programs that foster innovation-driven digital entrepreneurship. Digital MSME incubation offers more than technical training—it cultivates entrepreneurial mindsets, self-reliance, and long-term business sustainability. These initiatives align with the Gombong Village Medium-Term Development Plan (2020–2024), which prioritizes human resource development and digital economic transformation.

This situation demonstrates the urgent need for empowerment programs that reduce youth unemployment through innovation-driven digital entrepreneurship. Digital MSME incubation not only provides technical skills but also develops entrepreneurial mindsets, self-reliance, and business sustainability (Kebumen, 2024). Such programs also align with the priorities of the Gombong Village Medium-Term Development Plan (2020–2024), especially in strengthening human resources and promoting the digital economy.

Theoretically, this study draws on Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment framework, which emphasizes enhancing individual agency and control over life circumstances, and Nambisan's (2017) theory of digital entrepreneurship, which highlights how digital technologies foster innovation and expand market access (Jakešová & Kalenda, 2015). National and regional data further reinforce the urgency of technology-based entrepreneurial interventions for youth.

Previous research has shown that incubation programs enhance entrepreneurial motivation (Judijanto & Widyatmoko, 2024), and that digital literacy is a key determinant of MSME success in e-commerce adoption (Prasetyo et al., 2023). Community-based empowerment has also been linked to improved business networks and competitiveness (Sikiru, 2014). However, few studies have explored integrated models that combine digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, and localized incubation tailored to the socio-economic realities of Gombong. This gap highlights the novelty and significance of the present study.

## METHOD

This community empowerment initiative employed a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design to evaluate the effectiveness of a digital entrepreneurship training program for unemployed youth in Gombong District, Kebumen Regency, Central Java. The intervention was conducted over a two-week period, from August 18 to 30, 2025, and consisted of structured capacity-building modules combining theoretical instruction, practical application, and product development.

### Participant Selection and Demographics

A total of 30 participants were recruited through an open call disseminated via local youth networks, village offices, and social media platforms. Inclusion criteria were: Aged 17–25 years; Unemployed (not engaged in formal employment); Graduated from senior high school or vocational school; Residing in Gombong District; Not currently running a registered business

Applicants completed a registration form and underwent a brief screening interview to assess motivation and digital readiness. The final cohort consisted of 18 males and 12 females, with diverse educational backgrounds and no prior entrepreneurial experience.

### Intervention Structure and Timeline

The training program was divided into four core modules, each facilitated by qualified professionals with relevant academic and industry expertise. Daily sessions ran from 08:00 to 16:00, combining lectures, group work, and hands-on practice. The schedule was as Table 1.

**TABLE 1.** Schedule of community service

| Week      | Module Title                            | Facilitator Qualification                        |
|-----------|---|--|
| Aug<br>23 | Basic Financial Bookkeeping             | Lecturer in Accounting, Universitas Muhammadiyah |
|           | Local Wisdom-Based Business Ideation    | MSME Practitioner & Entrepreneurship Educator    |
| Aug<br>30 | Basic Digital Marketing and Design      | Certified Digital Marketer & Graphic Designer    |
|           | Manual Screen Printing & DTF Techniques | Local Creative Industry Expert                   |

All training materials were standardized and reviewed by a panel of academic experts prior to implementation to ensure consistency and quality control.

### Evaluation Framework and Instruments

Program effectiveness was assessed using a pretest-posttest approach, measuring changes in knowledge, skills, and entrepreneurial readiness. The following validated instruments were used:

- Financial Literacy Test: A 10-item multiple-choice questionnaire developed by the research team
- Digital Literacy Assessment: Scenario-based test evaluating platform usage and content creation
- Entrepreneurial Motivation Scale: Likert-scale survey measuring confidence, initiative, and goal orientation
- Knowledge of screen printing: a 10-item multiple-choice questionnaire developed by the research

team

Data were collected on the first day of the activity (pretest) and the last day of the activity (posttest). Improvement in participants' abilities was measured by comparing pretest and posttest scores. Success was defined as achieving a minimum score of 75% on the posttest assessment and completing all assigned practical tasks. Based on facilitator evaluations, 90% of participants met these criteria.



FIGURE 1. Steps of Training

## RESULTS

### Session-by-Session Analysis and Evaluation Results

This community-based empowerment program involved 30 unemployed youth (18 males, 12 females; aged 17–25) from Gombong Sub-district, Kebumen Regency. All participants were senior high

school or vocational school graduates with no prior entrepreneurial experience. Before the intervention, participants completed a pretest survey and competency assessment to establish baseline data across four domains: financial literacy, business planning, digital marketing, and creative production.

### **Session 1: Basic Financial Bookkeeping**

Participants were trained to enhance their skills in recording and analyzing basic financial transactions. Assessment was conducted using 10 Financial Literacy questions (a multiple-choice instrument developed by the research team) and a Bookkeeping Simulation Task (manual recording of income, expenses, and cash flow). Preliminary data indicated a significant improvement, with the average pretest score rising from 64.7 to a posttest average of 90.4. Based on the success criteria (score  $\geq 75$  and completion of the simulation task with  $\leq 2$  errors), 26 participants (90%) met the standard. Those who achieved the target demonstrated competencies such as accurate categorization of expenses and preparation of a simple cash flow report, indicating the effectiveness of the training intervention.



**FIGURE 2.** The participants presented their work after successfully creating the basic financial budget

### **Session 2: Local Wisdom-Based Business Ideation**

The session aimed to develop business ideas rooted in local cultural and economic assets. Participants were assessed using a Business Plan Rubric, which evaluated feasibility, innovation, market relevance, and alignment with local wisdom, alongside a SWOT Analysis Worksheet. Initial findings revealed that only six participants (20%) had prior experience in business planning, indicating limited baseline capacity in this area. Nevertheless, the session generated 28 simple business proposals, including cassava-based snacks, batik-patterned handicrafts, and herbal beverages. A total of 30 participants successfully articulated entrepreneurial ideas. The expert review yielded an average feasibility score of 92.4 out of 100, indicating that the majority of proposed ideas were considered practically implementable and culturally relevant.



**FIGURE 3.** The participants prepare the products they bring to sell on e-commerce platforms

### Session 3: Digital Marketing Design

The training aimed to equip participants with fundamental skills in digital branding and content creation. Evaluation was conducted using a Digital Literacy Scenario Test (8 items), a Content Quality Rubric (assessing visual clarity, branding strength, and engagement potential), and a Platform Functionality Checklist. Baseline data showed an average pretest score of 38.5/100, which significantly increased to 81.2/100 in the posttest ( $p < 0.001$ ). A total of 27 participants (90%) successfully created functional business accounts on Instagram, Shopee, or TikTok Shop, each featuring at least one promotional post. Of these, 22 posts met the quality threshold ( $\geq 70/100$ ), demonstrating effective use of storytelling, product photography, and brand identity.



(a)



(b)

**FIGURE 4.** The participants showcased the e-commerce platforms they owned (a), The participants showcased the products they sell on an e-commerce platform (b)

### Session 4: Manual Screen Printing and DTF Printing

The fourth session introduced participants to low-cost creative production techniques, specifically manual screen printing and Direct-to-Film (DTF) printing. Evaluation was conducted using a Practical



Skills Checklist (covering design alignment, print clarity, and material handling) and a Cost-Efficiency Comparison Matrix. Each participant produced two printed T-shirts—one using manual screen printing and one using the DTF method. A total of 25 designs met the quality standards ( $\geq 80\%$  in clarity and alignment). DTF printing was rated higher in terms of efficiency and market appeal, while manual printing was preferred for its affordability. Participants' knowledge of manual and DTF printing was assessed using a researcher-developed questionnaire consisting of 10 multiple-choice questions. The average pretest score was 65, which increased significantly to an average posttest score of 95.



**FIGURE 5.** The participants were practicing manual screen printing (a), experimenting with applying DTF printing using a sliding press machine (b), and showcasing the results of their DTF printing work (c).

## DISCUSSION

The training program demonstrated that unemployed youth in Gombong Sub-district possess both the willingness and the potential to develop entrepreneurial skills when provided with structured guidance and practical opportunities. Each session contributed to building participants' capacity progressively, starting from fundamental financial literacy to more advanced technical skills in digital marketing and printing techniques. Previous research confirms that structured entrepreneurial training enhances youth employability and fosters long-term business sustainability (Kulmie et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024; Rifqiansyah & Hasrul Wijaya, 2025; Wisanggeni Bagus, Tiyan Fatkhurrohman, Wilson Candra Teguh, 2023). Therefore, structured and practical training modules can effectively unlock the entrepreneurial potential of unemployed youth.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the program was conducted over a relatively short duration (four sessions), which may not be sufficient to ensure long-term behavioral change or business continuity. Second, while participant engagement was high, the absence of follow-up mentoring or access to startup capital may hinder the sustainability of their entrepreneurial efforts. These constraints reflect broader challenges in youth entrepreneurship programs, particularly in rural settings where institutional support is limited.

The results of the first module showed that introducing basic financial bookkeeping was highly effective. With 87% of participants able to complete basic financial analysis, it can be concluded that simple and contextualized financial exercises are an appropriate approach for youth with limited prior exposure to bookkeeping. This finding aligns with earlier studies emphasizing the importance of financial literacy as the foundation of entrepreneurial readiness (Endro Dwi Radianto et al., 2019; Khadka, 2023; V. F. Sari et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the module did not include digital accounting tools or mobile-based financial apps, which are increasingly relevant for micro-entrepreneurs. Future iterations should consider integrating such tools to enhance scalability and digital inclusion.

The second module, which focused on local wisdom-based business ideation, highlighted the creativity of the participants in identifying potential products derived from their cultural and environmental context. The generation of ideas such as cassava-based snacks, batik-patterned handicrafts, and herbal drinks illustrates that participants were able to link entrepreneurial opportunities with local resources. Prior studies indicate that entrepreneurship rooted in local wisdom strengthens cultural identity, creates competitive advantage, and enhances community resilience (Annisa Wahdiniawati et al., 2023; Arif et al., 2023; Lila Maria Kaban et al., 2023; Nugroho et al., 2021; Samsudin, 2024; Switaningsih H et al., 2024). Compared to similar youth programs in Yogyakarta and Bali, which emphasize tourism-based entrepreneurship, the Gombong model offers a more agro-cultural approach that may be better suited for non-tourist regions. However, the lack of market linkage and branding support remains a barrier to commercialization.

The digital marketing session further confirmed the adaptability of participants to technology-based entrepreneurship. The fact that 90% of participants successfully created digital business accounts and produced promotional content demonstrates both the feasibility and the relevance of digital literacy training for unemployed youth. Their ability to apply techniques such as storytelling and visual branding suggests that young people can quickly acquire skills needed to compete in the digital marketplace when provided with hands-on practice and clear guidance. Prior studies highlight that digital literacy significantly improves MSME competitiveness and market access in Indonesia (Akbari et al., 2024; Annisa Wahdiniawati et al., 2023; Nur Ihsan et al., 2024; Paradi et al., 2022). However, the program did not include analytics training or content scheduling tools, which are essential for sustaining digital engagement. This gap limits the long-term viability of participants' online businesses.

The final session on manual and DTF screen printing offered participants not only technical skills but also the chance to compare and evaluate different production methods. The unanimous success in applying both techniques shows that practical, experiential learning is effective in skill transfer. Participants' perception that DTF printing is more efficient and market-oriented, while manual printing remains more affordable and accessible, reflects a balanced understanding of the advantages and limitations of each method. Studies have shown that experiential learning enhances skill acquisition and supports entrepreneurial decision-making by exposing learners to real-world trade-offs (Fatkhurrohman et al., 2024; Ito, 2025; Muh. Farid Ammar et al., 2024; Mulyawati & Pradita, 2018; Safitri et al., 2024). A cost-benefit analysis revealed that manual printing required only IDR 55,000 per unit compared to IDR 85,000 for DTF, making it more feasible for low-capital startups. However, DTF yielded higher market appeal and resale value, suggesting that hybrid models may optimize both affordability and competitiveness.

Overall, the training program underscores the importance of integrated empowerment initiatives that combine financial literacy, local wisdom, digital competence, and practical technical skills. The participants' engagement and achievements suggest that such interventions can play a vital role in transforming unemployed youth into active contributors to the local creative economy. This is consistent with previous findings that holistic empowerment approaches—combining knowledge, technology, and practice—are most effective in fostering youth entrepreneurship and reducing unemployment (Dilanchiev, 2014; Gawel, 2010; Magasi, 2025; A. I. Sari et al., 2019; Suryani et al., 2022). Nevertheless, for long-term impact, future programs must incorporate post-training support, market access facilitation, and digital tools to ensure sustainability and scalability. Comparative analysis with other regional models also highlights the need for context-specific adaptation and continuous evaluation to maximize cost-effectiveness and social return on investment.



## CONCLUSION

This training program provided preliminary evidence that unemployed youth in Gombong Sub-district possess both the motivation and the potential to develop entrepreneurial skills when supported through structured and practical learning. Across four modules—financial bookkeeping, local wisdom-based business ideation, digital marketing, and screen-printing techniques—participants demonstrated measurable progress in knowledge, creativity, and technical competence. However, while the outcomes were promising, they should be interpreted with caution due to several methodological and contextual limitations. The financial bookkeeping module showed that contextualized exercises can improve basic financial literacy, with 87% of participants able to complete simple financial analyses. This suggests that foundational financial training is appropriate for youth with limited prior exposure. Nevertheless, the module did not include digital accounting tools or long-term tracking mechanisms, which limits its applicability in more dynamic business environments. The business ideation module encouraged participants to explore culturally rooted products such as cassava-based snacks, batik-patterned handicrafts, and herbal drinks. These ideas reflect creative engagement with local resources, yet the absence of market validation and prototyping stages restricts conclusions about their commercial viability. Comparative analysis with other youth entrepreneurship programs—such as those in Yogyakarta and Bandung—shows that successful scaling often requires access to mentorship, seed funding, and ecosystem support, which were not part of this intervention.

In the digital marketing module, most participants successfully created and managed online business accounts, indicating a strong adaptability to digital platforms. However, the program did not include analytics training or content strategy development, which are essential for sustaining digital engagement and growth. Similarly, while the screen-printing sessions equipped participants with practical production skills, the evaluation relied primarily on short-term performance metrics without assessing long-term business outcomes.

Overall, the program highlights the potential of integrated empowerment initiatives that combine financial literacy, cultural relevance, digital competence, and technical skills. However, the evidence presented is limited to short-term outputs and lacks longitudinal follow-up. To enhance future program design, we recommend incorporating post-training mentorship, access to startup capital, and digital tools for business monitoring. Additionally, future research should explore the long-term impact of such interventions on income generation, business sustainability, and community-level economic development. A mixed-methods longitudinal study would be particularly valuable in capturing both quantitative outcomes and qualitative shifts in entrepreneurial mindset.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors sincerely thank the Pemuda Mentari Gombong youth community for their active participation and strong commitment, which greatly contributed to the success of this training program. Appreciation is also extended to the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia (KEMENRISTEKDIKTI) for their valuable support and facilitation, enabling this community empowerment initiative to take place. Finally, the authors gratefully acknowledge Universitas Muhammadiyah Gombong for providing institutional guidance, academic resources, and continuous encouragement throughout the program.

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