

# Beyond Precarious Hustling: An AI-Oriented Curriculum Framework for Sustainable Creative Entrepreneurship in the Global South

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## ABSTRACT

Creative economies worldwide are recognized as vital engines for inclusive growth, job creation, and cultural innovation. Yet, in the Global South, creative entrepreneurs operate within ecosystems marked by persistent precarity: informal employment, limited access to capital, weak infrastructure, and educational systems misaligned with digital realities. While generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) presents transformative potential for creative production and entrepreneurship, its benefits risk exacerbating existing inequalities without intentional educational scaffolding. This paper synthesizes research from Ghana, alongside broader scholarship on creative work in emerging economies, to argue that the transition from precarious hustling to sustainable creative entrepreneurship requires a fundamental reimagining of education. We propose a globally relevant yet context-sensitive framework for an AI-oriented curriculum. This framework moves beyond technical skill acquisition to integrate critical GenAI literacy, humane-oriented entrepreneurial mindsets, and an understanding of the political economy of creative work. Designed for adaptability across diverse Southern contexts, the framework emphasizes glocalization—the fusion of global technological competencies with local cultural knowledge and economic conditions. It positions education not as a peripheral support, but as the central infrastructure needed to convert creative potential into dignified labour, resilient enterprises, and equitable participation in the global digital economy. The paper concludes with strategic implementation principles for educators, policymakers, and international development partners.

**Keywords:** Creative entrepreneurship, Global south, Generative artificial-intelligence, Curriculum design, Precarity, Digital divide, Informal economy, Glocalization

## INTRODUCTION

### The Global Promise and the Paradox of Creative Economies

The creative economy, encompassing cultural production, digital content, design, and media, is widely heralded as a cornerstone of 21st-century sustainable development. International frameworks, from UNESCO's conventions to the UNCTAD Creative Economy Programme, champion its potential for driving inclusive growth, generating youth employment, and fostering cultural diplomacy (UNCTAD, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). This promise, as professed earlier by Banks (2020) holds particular resonance in

the Global South, where rich cultural heritage intersects with a burgeoning, digitally native youth population searching for meaningful economic opportunity. Beneath this optimistic macro-narrative, however, lies a profound and enduring paradox. Despite high-level recognition, creative work in many Southern contexts remains entrenched in conditions of extreme precarity, a state of chronic socioeconomic insecurity characterized by informal, poorly remunerated, and unprotected labour (Alacovska, 2018; Langevaang et al., 2022; Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2020). Entrepreneurs frequently operate as “hustlers”, piecing together livelihoods through constant improvisation, spiritual coping mechanisms, and juggling multiple income streams, all while navigating systemic barriers such as inadequate policy, limited access to finance, and digital exclusion (Kilu, Alcovska and Sanda, 2024; Sanda, Kilu and Alacovska, 2024). This precarity extends beyond economics; it is a psychosocial condition that actively shapes the aspirations, well-being, and identities of creative workers (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

### **An Educational Imperative for the AI Age**

Concurrently, the generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) revolution is rapidly restructuring global creative value chains. According to a CULTAI Independent Expert Group Report (2025), complemented by Deuze and Prenger (2025), while these tools can democratize aspects of production, they also centralize power within the platforms and algorithms that govern them, raising acute risks of cultural homogenization and new forms of digital dependency. For Southern creative entrepreneurs, this technological shift presents a dual challenge: a significant educational gap leaves them ill-equipped to harness AI proactively, while pre-existing structural inequities within their ecosystems limit their capacity to compete or negotiate fair value (Micheli et al., 2023). This paper contends that bridging the chasm—between the macro-level promise of the creative economy and the micro-level reality of precarious hustling—requires a new educational paradigm. We argue for the development and implementation of contextually grounded, AI-oriented curricula as critical infrastructure for fostering sustainable and sovereign creative entrepreneurship in the Global South.

### **THE SOUTHERN CONTEXT: PRECARITY, INFORMALITY, AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS**

Ghana’s creative economy shows promise but faces challenges typical of the country’s broader entrepreneurial landscape. Sackey, Sanda and Fältholm (2013) note that many policies and initiatives to support entrepreneurship have often been inadequate. The creative industry in Ghana is viewed as an engine for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, capable of generating income, increasing trade, fostering employment, and enhancing skill development (Kilu and Sanda, 2025; Sanda et al., 2024). As such, Sanda et al. (2024) posits that there’s a clear opportunity for new wealth creation, cultivation of local talent, and the generation of creative capital, which can lead to sustainable jobs and poverty reduction. Despite this recognition and the efforts to

institutionalize the sector, creative entrepreneurs in Ghana face substantial challenges that hinder their ability to turn creativity into sustainable business ventures. Key issues include ineffective policies, structural inconsistencies, a gap between business education and practice, the effect of wider economic policies and unfavorable regulatory policies, and a need for more human-focused technological, educational, and training frameworks (Sanda et al., 2024). These ongoing hurdles reflect persistent difficulties in Ghana's educational curriculum and entrepreneurship development. Understanding the necessary curriculum begins with diagnosing the environment it must address. Research-based diagnostic analysis of the operating environment across regions reveals the following three interconnected shared challenges.

1. **The Informal Precarity Trap:** Creative work is overwhelmingly informal. It lacks social safety nets, standardized contracts, and career pathways. This informality fosters resilience through “hustle” but traps practitioners in survivalist modes, constraining long-term investment, innovation, and scaling (Alacovska, 2018; Kilu et al., 2024).
2. **The Systemic Support Gap:** A persistent disconnect exists between policy rhetoric and practical support. Entrepreneurs face fragmented intellectual property regimes, a scarcity of patient capital (i.e., financing suited to creative sector timelines), and critical deficits in both physical and digital infrastructure (Sackey et al., 2013).
3. **The Epistemic Justice Deficit:** Dominant theories and pedagogical models in creative industries education are frequently imported from Euro-American contexts, failing to capture the lived realities, communal logics, and alternative economic practices of Southern entrepreneurs (Kilu and Sanda, 2025; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). This underscores the urgent need for “theories of the South” built from situated, ex-centric realities (Alacovska 2018; Connell, 2020).

### **Expanding the Frame: Epistemic Justice as Foundational Imperative**

The “Epistemic Justice Deficit” is not merely an academic concern; it is a foundational power dynamic that shapes every other challenge. Epistemic injustice, as theorized by Fricker (2007), occurs when an agent is wronged in their capacity as a knower. This manifests in two key forms relevant to the creative economy: testimonial injustice (the dismissal of a creator's voice or account due to prejudice) and hermeneutical injustice (the absence of shared social tools to make one's experiences intelligible to others, or even to oneself). In the Global South, creative economies often operate on multiple, coexisting systems of value, knowledge, and social organization that diverge from the universalizing, neoliberal market model (Mignolo, 2011; Escobar, 2018). For instance, concepts of ownership may be collective or custodial rather than individual (Shand, 2018). This implies that value may be rooted in social cohesion and ritual significance as much as in market price; and innovation may follow lineages of tradition and adaptation rather than disruptive paradigms (Shand, 2018). The uncritical importation of Euro-American creative industries pedagogy constitutes a form of epistemic violence

(Spivak, 1988). It risks imposing a hermeneutical framework that renders Southern practices “informal,” “inefficient,” or “needing formalization,” rather than understanding them as sophisticated adaptations to specific historical and material conditions (Mbembe, 2016). A GenAI-oriented curriculum that does not first engage with this epistemic dimension risks becoming a tool for assimilation, teaching Southern creators to “play the game” of a global market on terms that systematically devalue their foundational knowledge systems. Therefore, the pursuit of epistemic justice—the fair distribution of intellectual authority and the recognition of diverse knowledge ecologies—is not an add-on but the essential precondition for any educational intervention that claims to be emancipatory (Santos, 2015). The curriculum framework proposed herein must be understood as an exercise in epistemic democratization.

### **The Generative AI Imperative**

The growing influence of AI, particularly GenAI, is reshaping educational landscapes worldwide, prompting urgent calls for reform in curriculum design, assessment practices, and the role of educators. The white paper by Chatfield (2025) provides a critical foundation for understanding this transformation, advocating for a thoughtful and human-centered adaptation of education systems to GenAI’s expanding capabilities. Chatfield (2025) proposes that, effective AI integration must be rooted in the enduring principles of human learning, informed by lessons from past educational technologies and supported by ethical, transparent pedagogical frameworks. Central to Chatfield’s (2025) proposition is that educators must be empowered as designers and facilitators of AI-enhanced learning rather than replaced or overshadowed by technological tools. Chatfield (2025) further highlights the need to safeguard essential human skills such as, critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and research literacy, so that they are not diminished by automated processes, while still promoting AI literacy that encompasses both technical understanding and its broader social implications (Chatfield, 2025).

According to an OECD (2025) report, education systems worldwide must urgently strengthen their capacity to cultivate adaptable, creative, and technologically competent lifelong learners. The OECD (2025) report stresses that the traditional linear model of “education–work–retirement” is increasingly obsolete as continuous learning, digital fluency, and creative problem-solving become essential to economic participation in the 21st century (OECD, 2025). Furthermore, there is the need for strong learning ecosystems that integrate digital tools, AI literacy, industry-linked curricula, and inclusive access to educational technologies (OECD, 2025). These insights are particularly relevant to Ghana’s creative industry, which is emerging as a high-potential sector but remains constrained by outdated curricula, limited digital infrastructure, and inadequate alignment between education and industry needs (Sanda, 2025).

### **GenAI Opportunities, Risks, and the Educational Void**

As creative work becomes increasingly augmented by AI tools such as, generative design systems, digital media automation, and algorithmic content creation, a reorientation of educational systems toward GenAI-driven,

curricula become vital for nurturing resilient creative talent capable of contributing meaningfully to national development (OECD, 2025). Thus, GenAI is a present force reshaping global creative production, distribution, and consumption. Its integration into Southern creative sectors is inevitable, but its impacts are not predetermined, but could be influenced by the following.

1. **Opportunities for Augmentation:** GenAI can lower technical and cost barriers to production, enable hyper-localized content creation, streamline business operations (e.g., marketing, accounting), and unlock access to new global market niches, serving as a potent tool for innovation from the margins (Nemorin et al., 2023).
2. **Risks of Exacerbation:** Without deliberate and critical intervention, AI threatens to widen existing inequalities through: (i) Algorithmic bias that reinforces dominant western aesthetic and cultural norms (Broussard, 2023); (ii) Skills polarization, rewarding those with advanced digital fluency while displacing others; and (iii) Data extraction, exploiting southern cultural heritage as training data without fair compensation, attribution, or benefit-sharing (CULTAI Independent Expert Group Report, 2025).
3. **The Current Educational Void:** Formal education systems in many Southern countries are chronically under-resourced and slow to adapt. Curricula often lack foundational digital literacy, let alone critical GenAI competency or applied creative entrepreneurship training (Sanda, 2025; OECD, 2025). This void is partially filled by valuable yet often unstructured peer-to-peer learning, which may not provide the systemic, critical, or ethical grounding required for navigating the complexities of the GenAI-driven economy.

## **PROPOSED FRAMEWORK OF A GENERATIVE AI CURRICULUM FOR SOUTHERN CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS**

Our proposed curriculum framework is built on four interdependent pillars, designed for local adaptation rather than wholesale adoption.

### **Pillar One: Critical and Creative Digital Literacy**

The goal of this pillar is to move beyond instrumental “button-pushing” to empowered, critical, and creative use of technology. Its content should enable combining hands-on mastery of relevant AI/digital tools with critical analysis of platform politics, data ownership, digital labor, and algorithmic bias (Pangrazio and Sefton-Green, 2021). Empowers learners to be both savvy producers and discerning critics of technology.

### **Pillar Two: Humane-Centered Entrepreneurial Practice**

The goal of this pillar is to develop resilient, ethical, and self-aware entrepreneurs who can thrive amid uncertainty. Its content should enable the integration of the psychological and social dimensions often absent from

standard business training, including emotional and cognitive governance for decision-making under uncertainty (Sanda and Sallama, 2023); strategies for navigating precarity through mental resilience and community building; and frameworks for ethical entrepreneurship that prioritize cultural integrity, fair labor, and communal benefit.

### **Pillar 3: Glocalized Contextual Intelligence**

The goal of this pillar is to root innovation in local reality to achieve global relevance. Its content should involve profound engagement with local cultural ecosystems, heritage, and materials. Teaches how to leverage GenAI as a partner to innovate within and from these contexts (e.g., using GenAI to design and reinterpret traditional motifs or to scale the storytelling around artisanal craft and market craft stories to niche global audiences). Includes analysis of local policy landscapes and advocacy strategies.

### **Pillar 4: Strategic Ecosystem Navigation**

The goal of this pillar is to equip entrepreneurs to identify, access, build, and leverage support networks. Its content should provide practical skills in financial literacy, intellectual property (with emphasis on collective and community rights), project pitching, and building cross-sectoral networks (e.g., with tech developers, policymakers, exporters). Teaches how to identify and activate resources within often-fragmented support ecosystems.

## **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Beyond Co-Creation to Cognitive Justice**

The principle of “Co-Creation with Communities” requires a rigorous methodological approach to avoid becoming a tokenistic gesture. Moving from extraction to equitable knowledge partnership demands specific frameworks, such as the following:

1. **Participatory Action Research (PAR) as Foundation:** Curriculum development should be structured as a multi-cycle PAR project (Kesby et al., 2007). Local creative entrepreneurs, elders, technologists, and educators would form a Curriculum Council. This council would not just “consult” on pre-designed modules but would lead the iterative process towards the following: (i) identifying locally relevant problems and opportunities at the GenAI-creativity intersection; (ii) prototyping learning activities and tools; (iii) implementing pilot modules; and (iv) outcomes to refine the approach. This will embed praxis, that is, theory informed by action, into the curriculum’s GenAI characteristics and effectiveness.
2. **Ethnographic Sensibility and Asset Mapping:** The development process must begin with deep ethnographic immersion (Pink et al., 2015) and community asset mapping (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). This involves documenting existing, often tacit, knowledge systems: oral histories of craft, indigenous design philosophies, informal apprenticeship models, and local digital platform ecologies (e.g., the use of WhatsApp for

commerce or TikTok for cultural storytelling). These assets become the primary texts and foundational case studies for the curriculum, ensuring they are reflective rather than prescriptive.

3. **Design for Cognitive Justice:** The goal is not to replace local knowledge with “superior” technical knowledge, but to foster a dialogue between knowledge systems. This aligns with Santos’ (2015) concept of ecology of knowledges. Methodologically, this could involve the following:
  - i. *Digital-Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Labs:* Sessions where AI tools (e.g., image generators, audio samplers) are used in conversation with master craftspeople or performers, exploring questions like, “How can this tool help us document a fading technique for our community archive?” or “How can we prompt an AI to generate patterns that respect the sacred grammar of our symbols?”
  - ii. *Scenario Planning and Ethical Dilemma Workshops:* Using participatory foresight methods to model potential AI futures (e.g., deepfakes of cultural icons, mass extraction of local music styles) and develop community-based ethical guidelines and resistance strategies.
4. **Iterative, Context-Responsive Evaluation:** Success metrics must move beyond Western benchmarks of “startups launched” or “revenue increased.” A mixed-methods evaluation framework should co-exist with quantitative data, prioritizing qualitative indicators aligned with local values: strengthened social networks, increased perceived cultural agency, enhanced ability to negotiate with platforms, and the development of community-governed data repositories. Tools like Most Significant Change (MSC) diaries, where participants narrate their own impactful learning journeys, can capture these nuanced outcomes (Dart and Davies, 2003).

This methodological rigor ensures the curriculum is a living, adaptive process, a form of infrastructure (Karasti and Baker, 2008) that builds long-term capacity for communities to continually negotiate technological change on their terms, rather than a static product to be delivered.

### **Implementation Principles: From Framework to Action**

For our proposed framework to move beyond theory, implementation must be guided by the following core principles:

- i. *Co-Creation with Communities:* Curriculum development must be participatory, involving successful practitioners, elders, cultural custodians, and local tech innovators.
- ii. *Modular and Stackable Design:* Offer short, certified modules that allow informal learners to build skills incrementally alongside their work, recognized by both industry and formal education institutions.
- iii. *Hybrid and Low-Bandwidth Delivery:* Combine in-person workshops for community building with asynchronous online content designed for low bandwidth and mobile-first access.
- iv. *Educator-as-Facilitator Training:* Invest in training a new generation of educators who are bilingual in technology and culture, acting as connectors and facilitators rather than sole knowledge authorities (Chatfield, 2025).

- v. *Policy-Education Alignment*: Advocate for educational reforms to be coupled with supportive policies: improved digital infrastructure, innovation grants for creative-tech ventures, and updated IP frameworks.

## CONCLUSION

The pervasive narrative surrounding creative entrepreneurship in the Global South is often one of heroic individual hustle against insurmountable odds. This paper reframes the challenge, arguing that systemic precarity, underpinned by epistemic injustice, demands a systemic and epistemically democratic educational response. A thoughtfully designed, AI-oriented curriculum, developed through the rigorous, participatory methodologies outlined, is more than a training program; it is emancipatory infrastructure. It holds the potential to; (i) convert informal hustle into formalized, strategic practice rooted in local knowledge; (ii) transform cultural assets into sustainable cultural capital on sovereign terms; and (iii) empower Southern creators not merely to participate in the global digital economy, but to actively and authoritatively shape its ethical and cultural contours. The goal is a future where creative work in the Global South is defined not by precarity, but by dignity, innovation, and sovereignty. This future must be built, and a contextually responsive, justice-oriented education is its essential foundation.

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