

Empirical Review of Entrepreneurial Youth Empowerment Initiatives in South-Western Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: Youth empowerment prepares candidates for new venture initiation by transferring knowledge and developing relevant skills that improve the self-efficacy and effectiveness of the potential entrepreneur. Entrepreneurial opportunity recognition is a relevant vehicle for economic development contributing to youth employment worldwide. Over a 50-year period, the Federal, State Government and Private Institutions have established many initiatives with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship. Examples of these Federal youth empowerment initiatives are N-power, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), Youth Empowering People (YEP), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), African Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN), TraderMoni, Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISAN) and Presidential Youth Entrepreneurship Support (P-YES). The entrepreneurial components of the youth empowerment programmes of the state government are merely underplayed. Youth empowerment coordinators have not been able to engage empowerment beneficiaries to create and connect entrepreneurial components into an interactive and sustainable business start-up. The study adopts empirical study explored the entrepreneurial youth empowerment initiatives of youths to become self-employed after their initiatives from various empowerment schemes. Qualitative research is concerned with gaining an in-depth understanding of human issues. Findings show that business opportunity recognition influences business sustainability of small-scale businesses. This implies that impact of identifying business opportunities, entrepreneurial knowledge, spotting a particular business industry, transforming business ideas into reality and empowerment initiatives structures influence business sustainability of youth empowerment candidates. The study concludes that entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives have to prepare candidates for new venture opportunities by transferring knowledge and developing relevant skills. The study recommended that state government and private organizations (empowerment organizers) need to create an environment where youth empowerment beneficiaries can identify business opportunities. This will improve the performance by improving business sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Business Opportunity Recognition, Business Sustainability, Empowerment Initiatives, Entrepreneurship and Nigerian Youth

INTRODUCTION

Youth that are untrained and alienated become agents of anti-social activities such as political thuggery, communal crisis (conflicts), vandalization of oil pipelines, raping, drug abuse, human trafficking, syndicates impersonation, document racketeering, cyber-crime, and other social vices. Therefore, empowering the youth in any given economy particularly Nigeria can reduce the rate of crime and poverty in the society. Youth empowerment prepares candidates for new venture initiation by transferring knowledge and developing relevant skills that improve the self-efficacy and effectiveness of the potential entrepreneur. Business opportunity recognition involves identifying business areas and establishing start-ups which will lead to sustainability of the small-scale businesses. The pathetic state of Nigeria's economy has no doubt led to widespread poverty and youth employment becoming the most daunting development challenges hindering the Nation from achieving sustainable development goals, (Segun-Alalade, Ibitoye, Alalade, Adeshina & Elisha Nissi, 2021). However, Nigerian youths have not been able to identify business opportunities through the empowerment programmes. Entrepreneurial opportunity recognition is a relevant vehicle for economic development contributing to youth employment worldwide. Opportunity recognition inspires youth to be creative in setting up

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Their business through good education, leadership skills and planning for financial independence. It explores youth talent through business direction and developing their pathways to become an entrepreneur.

Over a 50-year period, the Federal, State Government and Private Institutions have established many initiatives with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship. According to Walter, Offiong & Udoka, (2021), Examples of these federal youth empowerment initiatives are N-power, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), Youth Empowering People (YEP), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), African Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN), TraderMoni, Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISAN) and Presidential Youth Entrepreneurship Support (P-YES). While the various examples of state youth empowerment initiatives are Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF), Ogun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (Ogun-YES), Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme (O-YES) and Youth Empowerment Scheme Oyo State (YES-O), Ijebu Development Initiatives for Poverty Reduction (IDIPR), Agric-YES Programmes on Fish and Poultry (A-PFP) Epe, Lagos State. The examples of private youth empowerment initiatives are Tony Elumelu Empowerment Foundation, International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA)

Agric-preneurs.

There is a need for an investigation to reassess the empirical review of entrepreneurial youth empowerment initiatives in South-Western Nigeria. The requirement therefore arises to determine whether the Youth Empowerment Schemes have the capacity to produce beneficiaries to establish small-scale businesses. Therefore, it is against this background that this study made an in-depth and critical analysis of entrepreneurial business opportunity recognition. Sequence to the forgoing, this study conceptualized the view of knowing its influence on the business sustainability of start-ups in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The entrepreneurial components of the youth empowerment programmes of the state government are merely underplayed. What we have is business as usual. Youth empowerment coordinators have not been able to engage empowerment beneficiaries to create and connect entrepreneurial components into an interactive and sustainable system to business start-ups, (Wood, 2021). The participants are not trained to be entrepreneurial but to start small-scale businesses without entrepreneurial contents. To be entrepreneurial, there's need to be highly skilled in business opportunity recognition, there is a general absence or near complete absence of how to recognize and exploit entrepreneurial opportunity in these empowerment programmes. Participants come up with poorly conceived business structures and politicians count the number of such business to gain a point. Majority of these business enter an already congested industry and find it difficult to compete at onset. They cannot be sustained due to the crowded environment where they are competing. Empowerment initiative has not been able to prepare youth to identify entrepreneurial opportunities to establish a small-scale business after their empowerment programme.

There are no quality empowerment platforms designed for Nigerian youths to identify lucrative opportunities to set-up, manage and sustain their business. The youth have not been branded in business opportunity recognition areas where they can learn to manage business successfully. According to Forbes, 90% of the start-ups fail, all we need to know about is what is different with

the other 10%, (Ren, Raghupathi & Raghupathi, 2021). Majority of the youth empowerment candidates are not qualified to be entrepreneurs who can sustain business prospects. There is not enough capacity to develop and implement empowerment strategies to channel Nigerian youth into identifying entrepreneurial business establishments. These factors have resulted to majority of Nigerian youths experiencing diminished self-esteem, frustration, social exclusion, and life of crime.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been seen as vision of progress, innovations, developmental pillar of nation's capacity building and a key to a robust economy. Entrepreneurship shows the skills to supervise or monitor the business environment, identify opportunities, assume economic risk and initiate change, based on recent realities. Ossai (2018) posits entrepreneurship as the process of creating some new or different values by developing the necessary time, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards of most personal satisfaction. Entrepreneurship is a lifelong learning process, starting as early as elementary school and progressing through all levels of education, including adult education. Barba-Sanches and Atienza-Sahuguillo (2016) encouraged the teaching of entrepreneurship in schools to have better insights and perspectives. In this way, youths will have progressively more challenging entrepreneurial activities; experiences that will enable them to develop the insight needed to discover and create entrepreneurial opportunities; and the expertise to successfully start and manage their own

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businesses to take advantage of these opportunities. Olowu and Aliyu (2015) echoed that the success or failure of entrepreneurship depends on capacity and competence.

Business Opportunity Recognition

Entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives have become a strategy in economic transformation of developing economies given the successes recorded in the developed economy. The opportunity-recognition is critical in new investment creation. In the field of entrepreneurship, opportunity lies at the heart of the theory of entrepreneurship (Salamzadeh & Roshandel Arbatani, 2020). Entrepreneurship initiatives that include ethical mindset prevalent in a locality and the learning trajectories would emphasize the promotion of entrepreneurship and enterprising characteristics. Entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives as an emerging field of study and as an area of human endeavour, has received increasing interest of researchers, academicians, and policy makers' the world over. Recent review studies on entrepreneurship revolve around the concept of opportunity, and they have also increased in number (Healey, Bleda, & Querbes 2021). They contend that there is no entrepreneurship without opportunity; to them, a potential entrepreneur who is creative and hardworking cannot start an entrepreneurial activity if he does not aim for a certain opportunity.

Business Sustainability

Youth empowerment involves different ways through which the youths could be empowered to achieve self-sustained national development instead of depending on government for provision of empowerment opportunities. Firms that survive and reach sustainability are products of the pursuit of opportunity rather than necessity (Gohmann & Fernandez, 2014). It is believed that training through skill acquisition scheme will enhance the business sustainability of the youths in different fields of trade. In advanced economies, development has been successfully sustained over a long period of time but has proved difficult in developing economies. Though different strategies to empower youths have been put in place in Nigeria, the resulting effects are not sustaining their business with the rate of poverty and unemployment still on the high side. Thus, there is the need to review the application of sustainable of empowerment concepts and its practicability in Nigeria. The situation where the graduates wait for assistance from friends and relatives to enable them to embark on their own businesses is not healthy for the sustainability for entrepreneurial initiatives

Entrepreneurial Empowerment Initiatives in Nigeria

Emerging nations with increased entrepreneurial resourcefulness tend to have experienced greater decrease in unemployment rates as well as recorded sustained increase in standard of living. Timmons, Eisenman and O'Conno (2015) postulated that propagators of entrepreneurial policies and practices would adapt to the local needs of the society. Entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives are a development that emerges out of people's desire to create wealth, create employment, and reduce social vices, (Godwin & Simon, 2021). Entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives are always of benefit to entrepreneurs and a country at large. People exposed to entrepreneurial initiatives express that they have more opportunity to exercise creative freedoms, higher self-esteem, and an overall greater sense of control over their own lives. Edoho (2015) advocated for a paradigm shift from entrepreneurial initiatives of necessity to entrepreneurship, which is more innovative and enhances productivity. Nigeria needs to implement its entrepreneurial policies, practices, initiatives to conform to global best practices (Abimbola, Olowu & Paul, 2016). Entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives have been conceived by successive government as a programme of activities to enhance the knowledge, skill, behavior and attitudes of individuals or group who seek to assume the role of an entrepreneur.

Empowering Nigerian Youth

Empowering Nigerian youths will energize their determination and enlightened position to disseminate information. The importance of youth entrepreneurship lies in its role in the process of economic development and economic growth (Ćoćkalo, Đorđević, Nikolić, Stanisavljev, Terek, & Bakator, 2019). There is a need to create political awareness and consciousness against evil and selfish political machination. Failing to meet this need is a waste of human potential and economic power necessary to make changes in developing a nation. Ifaturoti (2016) remarked that "unemployment compounds the problems the youths are facing in Nigeria: by being idle, they are prone to such vices as prostitution, armed robbery, and rape.

Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) is aimed at addressing the endemic incidence of joblessness, as well as providing laudable solution to the challenge of unemployment among the youth in Nigeria. OYES is grassroots driven youth empowerment scheme that seeks to direct the bursting energy of this army of unemployed youth towards the good of the society. The scheme was inaugurated on 7th December 2010 by former Governor of Osun State Rauf Aregbesola where he declared to engage 20,000 youths across the state in a blend of community service and social welfare models. Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) is strategic youth's management for social support operation in public work fare - source (www.osunstate.gov.ng).

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It aims at empowering youths by equipping them with positive work ethics and culture, thus making them employable or employers of labour, with respect for the environment. It is designed to develop youths with Character, Innovation and Competence (CIC), infusing them with honour and integrity in life (Ifaturoti, 2016). The OYES scheme also runs a community service in the state. Community service is the core of the empowerment scheme. Through various work cadres such as, The Green Gang, The Sanitation Czars, The Paramedics, The Traffic Marshalls, The Sheriffs, The Teachers Corp and the Public works gang, the volunteers render selfless services to their communities (Ifaturoti, 2016). The scheme also has an effective empowerment policies and concise skills development component, to arm the volunteers with the functional skills to prosecute a productive life once they exit the scheme.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The Empowerment Theory (TET)

Empowerment theory was developed by Rappaport (1987) who anchored his developments of the empowerment theory on individual business strength. In his study, Rappaport argued that empowerment theory was rooted in the notion that people gained power from having a sense of their personal influence. Empowerment theory is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors. Empowerment theory also addressed chances leadership roles for the youth to participate in (Chinman and Linney, 1998), which have supported the development of valuable leadership skills amongst the youth. The empowerment theory confers that empowerment will not be possible where lack of awareness to the invisible and visible processes and structures in social institutions are not taken care of fully. The youth should be supported by business leader to attain self-dependent, which is important for youth empowerment (Jennings, 2008).

Empowerment-oriented interventions enhance wellness while they also aim to ameliorate problems, provide opportunities for participants to develop business knowledge and skills, and engage professionals. Therefore, without the capability of the youth to address the social values, structures, processes, and practices of the issues at hand, then they are not justly empowered. Empowerment theory could be understood that creating and implementing empowerment initiatives regarding entrepreneurial initiatives would enhance youth development and raise their entrepreneurial skills, assets, and motivate them to effectively apply the skills and knowledge so acquired to become positive agents of change in their communities and country at large (Ledford, Lucas, Diavaghi & Ravel, 2013). This would make Nigerian youths to utilize and recognize business opportunities through their entrepreneurial activities and as such engage in start-ups that lead to speedy growth and development of the Nigerian economy.

Empirical Review

Tatiana and Zrc (2021) conducted a study on conceptualizing youth empowerment entrepreneurship in European Union policy discourse. The study examined the formation of young entrepreneurs as subjects in European Union policy and the roles that they have been accorded in policy discourse. The analysis traces the critical lines of policy thinking through select policy documents that portray the evolution of the European Union particular conceptualizations of youth entrepreneurship as well as young entrepreneurs as policy subjects focusing primarily on the overlapping policy arenas of entrepreneurship and youth. The discussion also examines the normative connotations ascribed to youth entrepreneurship in European Union policy discourse, focusing on the links made between youth entrepreneurship and the economic crisis in European Union policy. The study concluded that the evolving European Union policy framework is both political and legalistic in nature, based on precedents set by previous documents that are, in turn, laid out in most subsequent documents and serve as a framing mechanism and a tool for demonstrating each new document's relevance. The recommended the adoption of the conceptualization of youth entrepreneurship within this evolving policy network shapes culturally specific understandings of young entrepreneurs (universal concept) in policy terms.

Xavier, Manel, Pere and Jaume, (2020) investigated a study titled exploring the conceptualization and research of empowerment in the field of youth entrepreneurship. The concept of empowerment has become increasingly widespread in recent years. Its use is still, however, somewhat controversial, and diverse, particularly when referring to young people. The study presents a systematic analysis of how empowerment has been conceptualized over the past 15 years and has been applied to young people. A systematic search of the major databases filtered by relevance provided 297 bibliographical references. The results confirm the ambiguous nature of the concept and the imprecision with which it is used, although they do link its use to three common concepts: power, participation, and education. This study has presented a systematic documentary analysis of research carried out over the past 15 years into the concept of empowerment and, particularly, its uses and applications in the field of youth. The study recommends programme formed of ideas such as leadership, self-efficacy, personal well-being

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and participation. In addition, and as a defining trait when compared to the global understanding of empowerment. The study concludes that the unanimity among most authors regarding the current ambiguous, imprecise nature of the concept, the cause of its versatile use in the various disciplines in which it appears and the number of ways in which it can be applied.

Sathyamurthi, (2021) conducted a study titled entrepreneurship on youth empowerment model. In the study, the author tries to theorize 'Slum Entrepreneurship' as a Sociological concept which transcends geographical limitations. Experts view slum not as a homogenous but heterogeneous

entity depending upon the socio-ecological characteristics. The same way the concept of entrepreneurship has been viewed not as generic concept but varies according to the unique characteristics of slums. Taking this as a basis premise an attempt is made here to theorize the 'Slum Entrepreneurship'. A 'Slum Entrepreneurship' scale to measure the entrepreneurship traits was constructed and validated for the specific purpose of the study. Field investigations were carried out to study the relationship between the slum types such as the central city, industrial and

residential slums in Chennai and the level of slum entrepreneurship. Based on the field data, the study developed youth entrepreneurship model for youth empowerment. The study concludes that

age of the slum entrepreneurs is associated with the level of slum entrepreneurship. Also, the study recommends that the start-up capital should be provided for slum entrepreneurship in India.

Brimah, Olanipekun, Wahid, Abu, and Awe, (2021) explored a study on evaluation of youth employment and social support operation programme on unemployment reduction in Ilorin Metropolis. The study emphasized on the need for vocational and entrepreneurship training schemes is one of the pivot measures of reducing the rapid increase in the rate of unemployment. Data for the study were obtained from primary sources with the aid of a structured questionnaire.

The study in its descriptive nature adopted a survey design. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis at 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that

there is significant relationship between YESSO Skills for Jobs programmes and employment generation, economic well-being of beneficiaries and skill job enhancement. The correlation coefficients were all found to be higher than 0.70 hence signifying a strong positive relationship between YESSO and employment generation. Based on the findings, the study concluded that Youth Employment and Social Support Operation Programme significantly impacted on Unemployment Reduction in Ilorin Metropolis. The study recommended a continuous and holistic review of the YESSO scheme in terms of the implementation template, structure and funding strategies to guarantee sustainable employment generation.

Isiaka, Kadiri, Salman and Alabi, (2017) explored a study on effect of entrepreneurial practices in managing small-scale business or sustainable development in Nigeria, their study was based on empirical evidence. Problems, prospects, and significance of entrepreneurship business in Nigeria were analysed. The study used secondary data, some which are previous research and analyses of scholars, and related journal articles. Findings shown that most SMEs particularly in Nigeria liquidated within their first five years of their operations due to contributing factors such as insufficient capital, lack of focus, inadequate market research, over-concentration on one or two markets for finished products, and lack of succession plan. It is concluded that, the secret behind the success of self-reliant strategy is mainly in peoples' positive attitudes to enterprise, and in the extent to which the right incentive, adequate to make risk worth taking rather than in any political philosophy. Therefore, it is recommended that for government to attain sustainable development through entrepreneurial practices in managing small scale business.

Gaps in Literature

Many studies have been conducted in developed countries on entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives and role of youth in economic development but unfortunately, only very few studies are available in developing countries like Nigeria. All the studies reviewed showed that there are not enough literatures on entrepreneurial youth empowerment initiatives contents in South-western States (Lagos, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo and Ogun State). To the best of our knowledge, studies that have adequate empirical investigation on entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives in South-western Nigeria are very few.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts empirical study explored the entrepreneurial youth empowerment initiatives of youths to become self-employed after their initiatives from various empowerment schemes. Qualitative research is concerned with gaining an in-depth understanding of human issues. The qualitative exploratory case study method was suitable for this study, the design allows a researcher to explore the concept of human understanding through an empirical investigation (Davidson, Paulus, & Jackson, 2016).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Business opportunity recognition has no significant effect with business sustainability of small-scale businesses. Findings show that business opportunity recognition influences business sustainability of small-scale businesses. This implies that impact of

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identifying business opportunities, entrepreneurial knowledge, spotting a particular business industry, transforming business ideas into reality and empowerment initiatives structures influence business sustainability of youth empowerment candidates. In corroboration to the study, Su & Zarea, (2020) research in entrepreneurship has mainly focused on entrepreneurs and how they go through the process of developing a new business, in recent years, the attention of researchers has shifted toward the role of opportunity. However, the empowerment organizers need to create an environment where they can identify business opportunities. They can achieve this by providing entrepreneurial knowledge for candidates to recognize start-up opportunities.

The empowerment candidates have resources to transform their business ideas into reality. The empowerment initiatives are putting up structures to help them establish small-scale business. The empirical review reveals that the empowerment scheme has not really helped them have enough business experience to sustain a business. They have not been fully trained to solve business problems and pilot the affairs of a start-up effectively through the empowerment initiatives. The empowerment structure does not have the capacity to train candidates to coordinate business activities.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives have to prepare candidates for new venture opportunities by transferring knowledge and developing relevant skills. The empowerment programmes have not adopted business opportunity recognition for youths to identify business areas and establishing start-ups. Business partnership platform is missing from the empowerment schemes for communicating and connecting with entrepreneurs for encouraging youth self-dependent. The youth need business advisory services in areas of business registration, formation, business strategies, strategic planning, and legal/tax/accounting issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The state government and private organizations need (empowerment organizers) need to create an environment where youth empowerment beneficiaries can identify business opportunities. This will improve the performance by improving business sustainability. Start-up sustainability can be attributed to quick and effective decision making on business opportunity recognition. Nigerian youths need to be empowered to manage and pilot the affairs of a business successfully, this will reduce the rate of crime in Nigeria.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This study bridges the gap in the existing knowledge because most of the literature review focused on youth empowerment programme on community development. This study examined the entrepreneurial empowerment initiatives on the creation of small-scale businesses by beneficiaries. This study investigated the investment in youth entrepreneurship as turning business opportunities into business sustainability. This study also discussed the ways of instilling an entrepreneurial culture in young men and women, such that Nigerian youth can become entrepreneurs by choice rather than by chance or necessity.

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