

TERTIARY EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTORING IN TRANSLATING ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS TO ACTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to examine the perception of tertiary education students on the effectiveness of entrepreneurial mentoring in translating the entrepreneurial intentions of transiting graduates to actions. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique by focusing on the final year students in the four schools represented at the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria. Data was collected through a field survey by the self-administration of questionnaires to a sample of 291 students. Findings from the study reveal that skills and capacity required by the students to function optimally have been acquired and hence, influence their willingness and desire to take on entrepreneurship as a career. However, in line with the main objective of the study, outcome further shows that due to the visible harsh business environment in Nigeria, a right-in-time mentoring is imperative for translating the intentions of the would-be entrepreneurs to actions. Otherwise, the enthusiasm generated by entrepreneurship education may rapidly dissipate over time leading to rising unemployment in the country. Appropriate recommendations that will ensure the adoption of entrepreneurial mentoring required for translating intentions to entrepreneurial actions are made.

Key Words: Entrepreneurial Mentoring, Graduates' Intentions, Business Environment, Actions, Unemployment

1 INTRODUCTION

The growth and development of any Nation lie in its youths and how productive and creative they are to contribute to the national output. Hence, it is the responsibility of every government to ensure that its youths are productive and engaged in productive activities in the country. The problem with Nigerian educational programme is too much emphasis on the value of certificate rather than the skills acquired by the carrier of such certificate. In other words, individual students struggle hard through any means to attain the Golden Fleece which is the certificate instead of the knowledge and skills which will make them to be productively employed and/or self-reliant (Florence, 2015).

The rate of unemployment among Nigerian youths is becoming alarming. Recent reports from the National Bureau of Statistics, NBS (2019) revealed that unemployment rate in Nigeria has spiked to its all time high at 23.10% in the last quarter of 2018 from 21.8% in 2017 and an average of 13.3% from 2006 to 2016. Unemployment among the youths is the highest at 36.4% in 2018. This prompted the attention of the Government and major stakeholders in the education sector to review the education curriculum in order to produce quality and skilled graduates that will be self-reliant.

According to Lemo (2013), given the worsening situation of unemployment among the Nigerian youths entrepreneurship remains the viable option to become self-employed, reduce unemployment, poverty, and empower the youths to develop their businesses, pursue their dreams and contribute to the overall productive capacity and national economic growth and development (Efe-Imafidan et al, 2017). This necessitated the introduction of entrepreneurship education into the curricula of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The main objective of the policy is to enable the undergraduates in the Polytechnics and Universities to acquire skills that will make them to be self-reliant and job creators rather than job seekers after graduation.

Implementation of the policy has commenced across the Nigerian universities and polytechnics, but the major challenge confronting the progress of the policy which seems to have defeated its primary objective is that skills acquired by students during their entrepreneurial programmes are not often translated into actions after graduation. Therefore, effective mentoring of the undergraduates in the Nigerian tertiary institutions on entrepreneurial skills

acquisition has become necessary for them to translate the skills acquired during their studies into actions after graduation.

Mentoring plays a critical role in the success of students on their carrier development not only in the knowledge and skills that are shared but also because of the many other aspects of professional socialization and experiences that are needed to facilitate success in life activities after school (University of Michigan, 2015). Mentoring is well recognized as a strategy for personal and carrier development and is commonly used in progressive business enterprises and learning institutions. It is the empowering of mentee by developing his or her abilities through the instilling of “can do” spirit by the mentor (Judy & Mack, 2007). Mentoring usually provides guidance and advice to the mentee on real life situations. This will enable the mentee to cope with the challenges that may cross their path on their carrier development. Mentors are those people who through their deeds and thoughts help others to develop their skills and realize their potentials. Given the Nigerian business environment, mentoring will help transiting students to be familiar with challenges associated with their chosen businesses and build confidence on how to succeed within the business environment (Tikloba & Holienka, 2016). Mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs can provide students with a greater level of confidence and inspiration. This is because it will be inspiring for students to hear how a successful business was created directly from its founder, and can be more effective than been mentored by a mere employee (Afolayan, 2016; Chukwu & Uzochukwu, 2013).

This study therefore seeks to examine the role of mentoring in ensuring that the entrepreneurial skills acquired by students during their entrepreneurial programme as tertiary education undergraduates are translated into actions after graduation. In order to achieve this objective, the paper is divided into five sections. Following this introductory section is section 2 which conducts a brief overview of previous works that are relevant to the study. This is closely followed by section 3 which focuses on the methodology of the study. Section 4 analyses the data and discusses the findings while section 5 which is the last section concludes the study with some recommendations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Although, studies on mentoring in educational development abound in the literature few of these however, examine the relationship between mentoring and entrepreneurial development in the educational context. The impact of mentoring in entrepreneurship development has been summarized from many researches.

Tikloba and Holienka (2016) investigate the experiences associated with entrepreneurship mentoring in Slovakia and findings from the study revealed that mentoring significantly impact business expansion, creates new jobs and increases the rate of employment. This subsequently enhances the development of individual regions of Slovakia. This implies that a nation that adopts entrepreneurial development is likely to experience a multiplier effect that can leapfrog the development of such country’s economy.

Chuck and Yanbo (2014) posit that mentorship from experienced entrepreneur increases the likelihood of students to engage in entrepreneurship after graduation. The study also examines how the likelihood of students embracing start-up career is affected by entrepreneur mentor. The outcome shows that students who are opportune to be mentored by entrepreneurs take up entrepreneurship as a career choice after graduation. The outcome further reveals that parental mentorship equally has a positive significant influence on students’ choice of entrepreneurship after graduation. Obviously, the collaboration of mentoring from both the experienced entrepreneurs and that of the parents has an influence on the decisions of the students to consider entrepreneurship as their choice of career.

Illesanmi and Lasisi (2015) examine the role of mentoring in business development and the outcome reveals that mentorship provides a wide range of benefits such as welfare, satisfaction, development, progress, rejuvenated feelings in career development, knowledge on how to use new technologies, becoming aware of business issues, methods, strategies or perspectives that are vital to busuness.

Peter and Geartjan (2013) investigate the benefits and impact of mentoring for entrepreneurs; the results show that the benefits of mentoring are determined by the psychosocial support the entrepreneur provides, the amount of trust and the intensity, while the long term impact is determined by the experienced benefits and not by mentoring activities. The study analyses psychosocial support as that which enhances and assists in building a mentee’s self worth by offering protection. The outcome of their study corroborates the finding of Kirchmeyer (2005) that psychosocial support-type of mentoring enhances a mentee’s performance.

In the same vein, Florence (2015) conducts a research work titled “Entrepreneurship skills acquisition and the benefits among the undergraduates in Nigeria”. The findings of the study revealed that entrepreneurship education is a vital

tool in solving the endemic problem of youth unemployment. It gives young people the opportunities to develop their skills and become job creators rather than job seekers after graduation.

Similarly, Ben and Jack (2014) execute a study on mentoring and facilitation in entrepreneurship education by combining classroom observations with semi-structured interviews from mentors and students. The data provides a complete view of mentoring behaviours and their salience within an entrepreneurship learning environment. Their findings reveal that mentoring creates student-mentor relationship that helps students learning process. It also shows that role modeling provides a concrete vision of what students are seeking to learn and establishes the mentor's credibility in a way that enables students to learn from their experiences.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted purposive sampling technique with a focus on the cross-section of the final year students in the various faculties represented at a selected polytechnic in Ogun State, Nigeria. The Polytechnic of study is the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro. Purposive sampling technique and the choice of the final year students are informed by the fact that these categories of students have taken part in entrepreneurial education, and are also at the last stage of their educational pursuit prior entry into the labour market to face their professional career choice. Thereafter, a simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the departments that make up the studied faculties in the selected institution. This is with a view to avoiding the challenge of selection bias. To arrive at the sample size, Raosoft sample size calculator was employed (Chimucheka, 2013) to give 291 elements.

Data were collected through the administration of questionnaires to the selected sample of 291 final year students (who are the focus of the study) drawn from the departments in the four faculties that make up the institution. These are the schools of Applied Sciences, Engineering, Environmental Studies and Management Studies respectively. The questionnaire was adapted from the previous studies on entrepreneurial intentions (Aslam, Awan & Khan, 2012; Ekpoh & Edet, 2011; Fatoki & Oni, 2014). To achieve the objective of study, the survey questionnaire was categorized into three sections. Section 'A' probed career intentions and the skills acquired by the students through entrepreneurial education. Section 'B' comprised 18 item questions with a 5 point Likert-Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5 points) to Undecided (1 point). Items 1-10 examined the students' perceived barriers to starting a business while items 11-18 investigated the benefits of entrepreneurship education. Section 'C' (which is the major contribution to the body of knowledge) sought the perceptions of students on: (1) whether and how effective mentoring can moderate students' entrepreneurial intentions to affect entrepreneurial actions; and (2) identify the type of mentoring they considered more efficient and effective.

The questionnaires were administered to all the sampled students by the researchers in their various classes with the assistance of their lecturers, filled and returned thereby, making it possible to retrieve all the distributed questionnaires with a 100% response rate. The descriptive method was adopted to analyse the collected data using frequencies and simple percentages.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the presentation of findings of the study using frequency tables and simple percentages, as well as the discussion of the findings.

4.1 Responses on Research Questions

4.1.1 Students' Career Intentions and Skills Acquired from Entrepreneurship Education

Out of the 291 respondents, 46.05% (134) which is in the majority indicated self employment as their immediate carrier choice after graduation, 25.8% (75) indicated further studies and part-time business, 13.4% (39) further studies, 8.9% (26) wage employment and part-time business while 5.8% (17) indicated wage employment. Table 1 outlines the career intentions of students and acquired skills while undergoing entrepreneurial education. As shown in the findings in Table 1, majority of the respondents indicated their intentions for self-employment after graduation. Their preference for starting businesses of their own is an indication that entrepreneurial education has positively impacted them to even consider self-employment as a career option contrary to the usual norm of preference for remunerative jobs in the formal sector. However, it is not unlikely that the experience of those who have graduated in the past but without jobs, and the rising rate of unemployment in the country might have influenced their decisions.

Apparently, the study reveals that 25.8% indicated their willingness for further studies and part time business most probably to enhance their knowledge and competence, as well as have a source of income to support them. Equally revealing is the intentions of 39 (13.4%) to further their studies, 26 (8.9%) preferred joint career intentions (that is, wage employment and part time business) while 17 (5.8%) showed a preference for wage employment. The preference for a joint career can be associated with the strategy to diversify and provide a buffer in case of any unexpected happenings. Another plausible explanation is the strategy for generating funds from the wage employment to finance and grow business. Afolayan (2016); Ekpoh and Edet (2011) in their various studies submitted that affordable and appropriate access to finance is a challenge to business (both newly-starting and the existing ones) in Nigeria. Findings from the study reveal that wage employment is the least preferred (5.8%) by the respondents contrary to Ekpoh and Edet (2011) who conducted a similar study in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states, Nigeria in 2011 respectively. Outcomes from the study of Ekpoh and Edet clearly show that wage employment in the formal sector is the most preferred. The outcome of this study may not be unconnected with the reality on ground where the labour absorptive capacity of the economy has reduced drastically and seems not to match the graduates' turn-out from the educational institutions. The rising rate of unemployment coupled with the large exodus of labour-intensive industries out of the country may have totally changed the orientation of youths from remunerative job seekers in the formal sector to that of job creators.

Equally revealed in Table 1 is the level of skills acquired in the course of taking entrepreneurial education as rated by the sampled students. A significant proportion of the respondents is shown to acquire a moderate level of skills (57.4%), 23.7% indicated high skills while 18.9% reveals that low skills are acquired. Implied from this outcome is that entrepreneurial education to a large extent, has impacted positively on the respondents and has enhanced their level of skills. This finding supports that of Ekpoh and Edet, 2011; Fatoki and Oni (2014).

Table 1: Career Intentions and Acquired Skills by the Respondents

Questions	Responses				
	Further studies	Self employment	Wage employment	Further studies and part-time business	Wage employment and part-time business
Immediate carrier choice after graduation	39 (13.4%)	134 (46.05%)	17 (5.8%)	75 (25.8%)	26 (8.9%)
	Low	Moderate	High		
Rate the level of skills acquired during the education	55 (18.9%)	167 (57.4%)	69 (23.7%)		

Source: Authors' Compilation

Further revealed by the study is the fact that a number of obstacles hinder business start-up as perceived by the respondents. Evidence from Table 2 reveals that major amongst the barriers as agreed to by the sampled students include lack of social connections to resource providers in entrepreneurship (78.6%), lack of access to financial resources (73.5%), (70.1%) poor infrastructural facilities (such as electricity, bad road networks, etc.), lack of good policies and effective regulations (64.6%), fear of failure (57.8%), inability to explore business opportunities (57.7%), concerns about entrepreneurial ability or efficacy (57%), lack of business/entrepreneurial mentoring (55.4%) and lack of information about business start-up (47.7%) amongst others. This outcome supports the earlier findings of Owusu-Ansah (2004); Ekpoh and Edet (2011) who reported that many students and graduates perceive diverse obstacles that relatively affect the outcomes of entrepreneurial programmes. On the contrary however, majority (69.7%) of the respondents disagree with the opinion that lack of business ideas is a barrier to business start-up. This contradicts the finding of Ekpoh and Edet (2011) which showed that lack of business ideas is major among the barriers to starting a business venture.

Table 2: Perceived Barriers to Business Start-Up

Questions	Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided
Lack of access to financial resources	106 (36.4%)	108 (37.1%)	23 (7.9%)	37 (12.7%)	17 (5.8%)
Poor infrastructural facilities (e.g electricity, bad road networks, etc)	91 (31.3%)	113 (38.8%)	42 (14.4%)	35 (12.0%)	10 (3.4%)
Lack of business ideas	32 (11.0%)	51 (17.5%)	99 (34.0%)	104 (35.7%)	5 (1.7%)
Fear of failure	38 (13.1%)	130 (44.7%)	74 (25.4%)	36 (12.4%)	13 (4.5%)
Lack of information about business start-up	24 (8.2%)	115 (39.5%)	118 (40.5%)	19 (6.5%)	15 (5.2%)
Lack of business/entrepreneurial mentoring	52 (17.9%)	109 (37.5%)	108 (37.1%)	16 (5.5%)	6 (2.1%)
Concerns about entrepreneurial ability or efficacy	69 (23.7%)	97 (33.3%)	63 (21.6%)	28 (9.6%)	34 (11.7%)
Inability to explore business opportunities	57 (19.6%)	111 (38.1%)	107 (36.8%)	13 (4.5%)	3 (1.0%)
Lack of good policies and effective regulations	61 (21.0%)	127 (43.6%)	62 (21.3%)	25 (8.6%)	16 (5.5%)
Lack of social connections to resource providers in entrepreneurship	111 (38.1%)	118 (40.5%)	33 (11.3%)	23 (7.9%)	6 (2.1%)

Having established the intentions of the students of entrepreneurial programme to take up entrepreneurship as a career after graduation as well as identified the perceived barriers to starting business in Nigeria, the study specifically examines the role of entrepreneurial mentoring as perceived by the respondents in translating intentions to actions after graduation being the core objective of the study. The findings are reported in Table 3 as shown:

Table 3: Students' Perceptions about the Role of Entrepreneurial Mentoring

Question	Responses			
	Strength-based mentoring	Building mentee's self-worth (Psychosocial Support)	Protection-enhanced	Career support through mentor-acting
Which type of mentoring do you personally prefer	73 (25.1%)	44 (15.1%)	21 (7.2%)	153 (52.6%)

Questions	Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided
In your opinion, effective mentoring will assist students put their acquired skills during entrepreneurship into action after graduation	151 (51.9%)	128 (44.0%)	6 (2.1%)	5 (1.7%)	1 (0.3%)
Effective mentoring will help reduce the rate of unemployment among youths in Nigeria	126 (43.3%)	131 (45.0%)	23 (7.9%)	10 (3.4%)	1 (0.3%)
Entrepreneurial education helps to develop creativity	132 (45.4%)	117 (40.2%)	31 (10.7%)	8 (2.7%)	3 (1.0%)
Creating awareness of business opportunities	144 (49.5%)	102 (35.1%)	33 (11.3%)	9 (3.1%)	3 (1.0%)
Building of self-confidence	120 (41.2%)	115 (39.5%)	29 (10.0%)	25 (8.6%)	2 (0.7%)
Giving exposure to entrepreneurial process	93 (32.0%)	149 (51.2%)	20 (6.9%)	17 (5.8%)	12 (4.1%)

Developing resourcefulness	85 (29.2%)	168 (57.7%)	22 (7.6%)	11 (3.8%)	5 (1.7%)
Awakening my entrepreneurship awareness making me entrepreneur oriented	121 (41.6%)	122 (41.9%)	32 (11.0%)	13 (4.5%)	3 (1.0%)
Giving motivation to start my own business	131 (45.0%)	103 (35.4%)	37 (12.7%)	18 (6.2%)	2 (0.7%)
Giving financial management skills	108 (37.1%)	120 (41.2%)	42 (14.4%)	14 (4.8%)	7 (.4%)

Source: Authors' Compilation

Evidence from Table 3 reveals that the majority who constitute 52.6% (153) of the respondents show preference for career support through mentor acting (for instance, as a sponsor to his/her mentee) above strength-based (25.1%), psychosocial support (15.1%) which builds mentee's self worth as well as protection-enhanced (7.2%). Kirchmeyer (2005) has claimed that psychosocial support is an indirect help of a mentor which enhances a mentee's performance while career support is a direct help and it is political in nature. Kram (1983) (cited in Afolayan, 2016) identified career and psychosocial supports as the twin concepts which are pivotal to mentoring theory. Findings from the study as shown in Table 3 reveal that majority of the respondents agreed to the fact that entrepreneurial mentoring plays a significant role in assisting graduates transiting from school to cope with a new situation thereby, achieving his aspiration of becoming a successful entrepreneur. This may subsequently reduce unemployment and enhance economic growth.

Specifically, evidence from Table 3 indicates that 95.9% of the sampled students agreed that effective mentoring will assist graduates put their acquired skills during entrepreneurship education into action after graduation. Equally, 88.3% believed that effective mentoring will help reduce the rate of unemployment among youths in Nigeria. Similarly, 85.6% hold the belief that entrepreneurial education helps to develop creativity, creates awareness of business opportunities (84.6%), build self confidence (80.7%), give exposure to entrepreneurship process (83.2%), awaken their entrepreneurship awareness thereby making them entrepreneur-oriented (83.5%), give individuals motivation to start their own business (80.4%), and also that entrepreneurial education gives financial management skills (78.3%). The findings from the study imply that entrepreneurial mentoring can moderate entrepreneurial intentions significantly to positively impact actions especially, when it is perceived that the potential entrepreneur may be faced with challenges/obstacles to entrepreneurial development.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Career intentions of students that have undergone entrepreneurial education are not in doubt as established in the literature and also revealed by the outcomes of this study where majority of the respondents desire to be self employed after graduation. This means that the students are positively influenced by entrepreneurial education and therefore, desire to become entrepreneurs. In other words, it implies that all the necessary skills, capacity, habit and attitude required for job creation and for becoming employers of labour have been acquired by the students. However, in line with the main objective of the study and as evident in the findings, availability of the right-in-time mentoring (either in the form of psychosocial or career support) is crucial for translating entrepreneurial intentions of graduates transiting from school to actions through self-employment with a view to curbing the rising rate of unemployment in Nigeria. Nigerian business environment according to Agboli and Ukaegbu (2006), also evident from the findings of the study is harsh and unfriendly to the development of business hence, an effective mentoring expectedly will encourage and motivate the prospective entrepreneur to be tenacious even in the face of daunting challenges (Bamkole, 2007). Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made:

- (1) The three pronged-factor for entrepreneurial development (which include the government, business owners and educational institutions) entails the collaborative efforts among the three bodies (through the forward and backward integration or linkage) to ensure the development and execution of functional curricular that will promote entrepreneurial development for the achievement of sustainable economic development.
- (2) Provision of enabling environment is essential and indisputable to motivate prospective entrepreneurs and encourage embracing entrepreneurship as a means of livelihood, thereby actualizing the entrepreneurial intentions of the transiting young graduates by allaying fear of failure.
- (3) Informal support in the form of after-school mentoring programme may be considered relevant through the inculcation of same in the institutions' curricula by the regulators of the tertiary institutions (i.e. NUC, NBTE, and other related institutions). NYSC is implementing something similar to this during the graduates' one year compulsory youth service corps (probably in their various camps). This can be augmented by the institutions via their regulators before embarking on the youth service corps. This will expose them to real life experiences and open them up to what is obtainable in the real world of business.

The study is limited because it was conducted using only one tertiary institution. Hence, caution must be exercised while interpreting the findings and making generalisations. Further studies on this topic could consider a larger sample size through a cross-sectional analysis with the investigation involving more tertiary institutions in Nigeria, for larger degrees of freedom. Furthermore, the study relied solely on descriptive analysis using mainly frequencies and simple percentages. Future studies may subject the collected data to statistical test for validation of the claims, in order to ensure robustness and authenticity.

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