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SKILLS ACQUISITION AND STUDENTS' ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION: MODERATING ROLE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Skills acquisition is seen as the most important instrument of any fundamental change, particularly with regards to the university curriculum and mentorship. Alas, unemployment among university graduates has posed a serious threat. Consequently, prevalence among Nigeria graduates calls for the identification of a measurement to solve the problem. The study was conducted through an in-depth interview and the responses were analysed thematically. The thematic analysis showed that students can create job for the other people by establishing a business where people can work or by providing opportunities for them to establish their own business. The university curriculum has been designed to be a form of education that helps people in acquiring skills and knowledge needed in business startup which will lead to job creation. The study also concluded that students' intentions are challenged by creativity and innovation and mentorship by the university curriculum. The study therefore recommends that the students' entrepreneurial mindset should be enhanced through career team building; the schools should encourage undergraduates to attend workshops, and acquire vocational skills. The schools should also encourage the students on holiday jobs and skills acquisition. Also, creativity and innovation is found to have positive effect on self employment, hence students should be encouraged to perform creativity and innovation activities to enhance their willingness to be self employed.

Keywords: Mentorship, Skills Acquisition, Students' Intention, and University Curriculum,

Introduction

Several studies have examined the impact of entrepreneurship education and development courses and its importance to economic growth and developments. The contribution of Nigerian tertiary institution cannot be over looked as it has also added value to entrepreneurship education by making it a compulsory course of study in the Nigerian university. Although, virtually all the courses offered by Nigerian university students have potential for career prospects due to the introduction of

entrepreneurship education. This affords students offering these courses, double opportunities for self-employment and white collar jobs. Unfortunately, a larger percentage of graduates fail to make use of entrepreneurial aspect of their training but are left in the world of work either searching for employment or being underemployed despite their exposure to entrepreneurial education. In the light of this, an investigation into factors which influence such students" entrepreneurial intention to be job creators is needed. Furthermore, the introduction of entrepreneurial education into the Nigerian tertiary education curriculum is relatively recent. Therefore, focus of research into this field of study is also relatively fresh although there are large numbers of research efforts into students" entrepreneurial intention and career prospect in the developed societies.

Adequate entrepreneurship development courses and training is assumed to be the only solution to reduce unemployment and also equipping youth and students with skills that can make them productive. Thus, in order to create opportunities for self-employment, add value to the economy and reduce youth restiveness, the federal government directed institutions of higher learning to include entrepreneurship education in their academic programme as a way of addressing these challenges and promoting self-employment among the youth. The popularity of entrepreneurship courses in various institutions has increased dramatically among both graduate and undergraduate students (Samuel, Pradeep & Bingwen, 2020). Entrepreneurship education and training is seen as the process of providing individuals with knowledge and skills to recognize opportunities that others have over-looked to have insight, self-esteem and knowledge to act where others have hesitated. It includes institution of opportunity recognition marshalling resources in the face of risk and initiating a business venture. Entrepreneurship training and education enhances creativity in technical and vocational skills and inculcates in the individuals the abilities that are necessary for them to be self-reliant through formal education.

Entrepreneurship mentorship can be a major determinant of student's consideration of entrepreneurship as a career. University initiatives and entrepreneurial mentorship may largely affect the expression of innovativeness and job creation (Morris, Kuratko, & Cornwall, 2013). These initiatives motivate knowledge sharing among students culminating in innovations (Morris, *et al*, 2013). The growing incidence of unemployment among professionals such as accountants, engineers and other graduates from universities and other tertiary institutions has become a topical issue in government circles and scholars. (Bassey & Atan, 2012). Every year graduates leave private and public universities to join the army of unemployed graduates who graduated in previous years. Entrepreneurship education is a sort of intervention programme which was introduced into Nigeria's tertiary education sub-sector in 200 to remedy the unemployment challenge and redirect the attention of o youths/graduates towards job generation by instilling in them relevant entrepreneurial skills through entrepreneurial mentoring/ mentorship program th will positively grow and develop the economy. Nevertheless, a critical task to explo in the Nigerian context is to examine the role of entrepreneurship mentorship

motivating knowledge sharing into job creation among students. In line with this, the researcher intends to evaluate the relationship between entrepreneurship mentorship and job creation among students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State.

Education is considered as one of the effective tools for human capital and societal development, because no nation can attain an appreciable level of development beyond the level of her education (Onuma, 2016). Education is very central to the training and development of human resources in any nation through impartation of suitable skills, knowledge, capacity building, attitude and value re-orientation employed in the transformation of individuals, communities and nations at large (Badariah, Abdulrahim, & Mariana, 2016). Therefore, education is seen as the most important instrument of any fundamental change, particularly with regards to the achievement of economic goals such as entrepreneurship development, job creation and poverty eradication, especially in the Nigerian context (Mustafa, Michael, Ernesto, Mahon, & Kei, 2016). The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (2019), gives credence to the role of education in the development of self-reliant abilities and entrepreneurship skills in individuals. Therefore, the role of education as regards entrepreneurship development in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The study therefore examined the role university education plays in skills acquisition and students' expression of entrepreneurial intentions in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Skill acquisition can be defined as the form of training by individuals or group of individuals that can lead to acquisition of knowledge for self sustenance. It involves the training of people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainers and the trainees for certain duration and under certain conditions. Skills acquisition is the ability to learn or acquire skills. It involves the development of a new skill, practice of a way of doing things usually gained through training or experience. The word skill is one of the relative terms with various definitions; depending on what one feels it is. Mustafa, Michael, Ernesto, Mahon, and Kei, (2016) defined skill as expertness, practical ability, handiness and tact, and organized system of actions, proficiency executed and usually displayed in flexible but systematic sequential pattern. He further viewed skill as manual dexterity through repetitive performance of an operation. Skill therefore, is an entrenched habit of doing something. It involves the attainment of performance capability. To acquire or possess a skill is to demonstrate the habit of acting, thinking and behaving until a process becomes natural to the individual through practice. Similarly, Cisneros and Mihai, (2019) is of the view that skill acquisition is the expression of idea and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals, the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful development. He stressed that if individuals are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills needed for self sustenance in the economy, it will promote their charisma in any work environment. He further maintains that skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people.

The acquired skills and competencies can manifest in the life of the students to assist them improve on higher standard of life in the community (Ugwu & Ijomas, 2016). Skill is the ability *to do something expertly and well (Musa, & Adewale, 2015). It is an organized order of actions*, proficiently executed and usually displayed in flexible but systematic temporal patterning, (Mohammed & Dandago, 2014). Skill can be looked at as the ability to acquire an expert knowledge in the formation of a process and it is usually expected that the acquisition takes the process of learning. Skill acquisition is one of the surest ways through which graduates (youths) can find ways to the labour market either in the public or private sector. Skills acquisition is key to reduce poverty rate, unemployment and insecurity as well as low level of technological development in the society. It is one of the proactive ways of ensuring the survival of individuals and consistently, economic growth and development of the nation. Hamzah, Zahirah, AbdulGhani, and Yasmin, (2016) affirm that skill acquisition has emerged as one of the most effective development strategies that most African countries need to embrace in order to train and streamline the technical workforce for rapid industrial development and national development. Hamzah, *et al.* (2016) also emphasizes that adequate management of employment challenges in Nigeria will have to be based, to a large extent, on a sustained strategy and policy that empower the citizens to acquire relevant skills to become self-reliant. According to Ajike, and Nwakoby (2017) entrepreneurial skill acquisition requires the accumulation of different skills that enhances task performance through the integration of both theoretical and practical forms of knowledge.

According to Mohammed and Dandago (2014), poor entrepreneurship practices have been identified as an abrupt reason why business in developing countries fails to start or progress in their operation. Entrepreneurship means more than starting a new business, it includes the whole process whereby individuals become aware of the opportunities that exist to empower themselves and take personal responsibility and initiative. Moreover, unemployment of university graduates is a serious threat to the individual, the economy and the educational sector. Its prevalence among Nigeria graduates calls for the identification of a measurement to solve the problem. Ajike, and Nwakoby (2017) report that unemployment was a threat to Nigerian economy with, its attendant social problem of armed robbery, youth restiveness, prostitution and female trafficking. However, every effort by the Federal Government to solve the problem has failed because of the following challenges:

The solution to the problems of youth unemployment lies with effective delivery of entrepreneurship education by Nigerian institutions of higher learning and the introduction of entrepreneurship into the curricula of senior secondary and tertiary education. An educational system entrenched with entrepreneurship practices that will assist undergraduates and graduates to develop a focus on job creation at the early stage (15-25 years) of their lives will produce independent and resourceful youths. Curriculum issue is an enormous challenge to entrepreneurship education, developing a comprehensive curriculum that will incorporate and address entrepreneurship education from the secondary to tertiary levels of education is

another major challenge. Also, the non- or poor implementation of curriculum issues is major limitation.

Creativity and Innovation

Creativity is the generation of novel and appropriate idea and innovation is the implementation of the creative ideas. To prepare students for work as entrepreneurs, it is relevant to design the curriculum of each level of education to be consistent with specific career options. The curriculum should revolve around leadership and organizing ability, positive thinking, strategic action competency, sound judgment and skills (Cisneros & Mihai, 2019). Innovative students of entrepreneurship should have ideas that are unique, novel and relevant. He went further to describe innovation as systematic and rational work, well organized and managed for result. When youths are prepared with innovative or managerial competencies, it assures in-depth knowledge of entrepreneurship that will enable them face the economic realities of the nation and competes successfully with private sectors that are not formally trained. These innovative strategies encourage entrepreneurs to distinguish between what is assumed and what really is and also may enable them strive and measure success by what their efforts can accomplish.

Entrepreneurial Mentorship

Mentorship is the guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or educational institution. Mentorship is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledge person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. The mentor may be older or younger than the person being mentored, but he or she must have a certain area of expertise. It is a learning and development partnership between someone who wants to learn. Faloye and Olatunji, (2018) defined a mentor as the person that facilitates personal and professional growth of an individual by sharing the knowledge and insight that have been learned through the years. Okoro (2014) describes mentoring as a process by which persons of superior rank, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/ or career development of a person.

Mentoring is a close, developmental relationship between two people in which a partner willingly avails him/ herself of the full range of superior experience, knowledge, skills, or status of the other partner in all provinces of human endeavor (Faloye & Olatunji, 2018). Okoro (2014) opined that mentoring is a set of tailor-made advice and incentive that a more experienced staff, in an innovative way can offer less experienced member in a excess way and on a range of competencies. Mentoring is therefore a process in which mature and experienced entrepreneur share their wisdom and experience with the younger entrepreneur or youth on a one on one basis. Mentorship is a method of growing in use for establishing relationship between junior and senior employees, a method gaining popularity in facilitating both employee and management development in the organization (Faloye & Olatunji, 2018). Mentoring

is about mutual trust and respect. It is a two way relationship in which both the mentor and mentee get the chance to learn new things and further their personal development.

Types of mentoring relationship

Four types of mentoring relationship was identified by Jones, Gideon, Stephen, Robert, Daniel, and Harry (2018) which include.

Face-to-face, one-to-one mentoring- The vast majority of mentoring is done face to face and usually on one-to-one basis. This allows the mentor to focus 100% on the challenges and issues of the individual mentee. The advantage of face-to-face individual mentoring is that the mentor can gather an enormous amount of information from both verbal and non-verbal communication. This is very suitable for new entrant into business.

Face-to-face group mentoring (Peer mentoring) - This type of mentoring is becoming more popular in enterprise mentoring and is often delivered as action learning sets. In this format, a small group of between six to eight business owners come together to discuss their challenges and issues. The group acts as a sounding board, taking on the role of the peer mentors to help individual members examine their issues from different perspectives. The advantage of this type of mentoring is that the group of peers can provide a number of different experiences and view points to help and support its members.

Telephone mentoring- Telephone mentoring is usually part of a blended mentoring approach, used in tandem with face-to-face mentoring. It is provided on a one-to-one basis, so has the advantage of being focused on the mentee's specific issues. This method is also extremely flexible.

E-mentoring-Like telephone mentoring, e-mentoring is often part of a blended mentoring approach, but it can also be used on its own. It is provided on a one-to-one basis and has the advantage of being able to focus on specific issues. The mentee can also provide a lot more written information than with other types of mentoring, which may allow the mentor more time to assimilate the information before deciding on potential options for a course of action. The above types of mentoring could be selected by a mentee or as a mentor could be arranged depending on the need.

Theoretical Review

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Human capital entrepreneurship theory was postulated by Becker (1975) and derives its premise primarily on two factors which are; education and experience. The theory postulates that knowledge acquired from education and experience, is considered a resource that is diversely dispensed across individuals, which informs the basis for

understanding the disparities in identification and exploitation of opportunities (Shane & Vankataraman, 2000). Human capital theories encourage investment on nation's workforce (people working with public and private sector organizations) because expenditure on training and development is a productive investment like investment on physical assets (Onu, 2013). Human capital development can be enhanced through quality education which will help in economic growth and development. Schumpeter (1934) views entrepreneurship as responsive for creative destruction. That is education acts as impetus for creating new ideas, improved techniques, new technologies and new products development. Van-Den-Berg (2001) establishes a correlation between the level of education and new product development in knowledge-based economies that invested massively in education.

Investment in entrepreneurship education can help in stimulating career prospects among young graduates and youth in the country.

McLean and Kuo (2014) argues that it is not education that contributes to economic growth but also other aspects such as health, transportation, housing and other aspect of social reproduction. Baker is of the opinion that people are rational and will make rational decisions. Thus, people make decisions about education solely on the basis of utility (return on investment), free of society and culture. McLean and Kuo (2014), also argue that people do not always make rational decisions as Baker assumes. Decisions to attend specific training or education may not always result in a positive outcome for the sponsoring organization or individuals (Jones, David, Rebecca, & Celia, 2017). Another critique of the theory was that education expenses are not positively correlated between furthering education and employments status and such expenses may result in a cost burden for the organization or individual, rather than an investment, if not invested wisely (McLean & Kuo, 2014). Baker's research and writings have been the most used on human capital theory, yet are rarely challenged or critiqued.

Empirical Review

Popescu, Bostan, Robu, Maxim and Diaconu (2016) analyze how much entrepreneurial intentions are influenced by certain psycho-behavioral traits of the individual (creativity, locus of control, need for achievement and risk taking propensity) and to evaluate the influence of different types of education on these intentions, in order to see if the entrepreneurial education significantly influences the entrepreneurial intentions of Romanian young people. Survey research design was used. Questionnaire was distributed to 600 students from the undergraduate (bachelor) and master programs within the large state universities of Romania who have entrepreneurship courses in the content of their curricula. Six research hypotheses were tested. Data analysis including Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and General Linear Models (GLM) were used for the study. Results of the study indicated that the need for achievement and the propensity towards taking risks play an important role in determining the

entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, graduates of the high schools with an entrepreneurial field are less inclined to engage in businesses compared to the graduates of the high schools that offer general education.

Ohuma (2015) carried out a research Entrepreneurship Education and development courses in Nigerian tertiary institutions: A remedy to graduates unemployment. The study investigated the exposure of under-graduates students to entrepreneurial education for post-graduation job creation ability. The population consisted all the final year students of Educational Administration, Ebonyi State University 2013/2014 academic year totaling 200 respondents. The population served as the sample size. The instrument was a structured questionnaire, subjected to face and content validation by experts in Educational Administration; Measurement and Evaluation units. test for reliability yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) statistics and population t-test of analysis were used to analyze the data at 0.05 alpha level. The findings showed a significant relationship in the three hypotheses. The result implies that entrepreneurial education is relevant to students with regard to equipping them with skills for post-graduation job creation ability rather than job seekers. The study recommended collaborative efforts of National University Commission (NUC) with Department of Educational Administration to identify other entrepreneurship programmes to address graduate unemployment on graduation.

Jones *et al* (2018) carried out a research on the assessment of entrepreneurial intents' and skills needed to be self-employed by business education graduates in Delta State Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study and three null hypotheses were tested. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The entire population of 377 was studied without sampling as the size was manageable. A 5-point rating scale questionnaire containing 30 items in three clusters which was validated by experts with grand reliability coefficient of 80 was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze data to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents views while the z-test was used to test the null hypotheses a. 0.05 level of significance. They found out that business education graduates in Delta State highly need accounting and office technology and management skills but moderately need marketing skills for self-employment. Also gender did not significantly affect the respondents mean ratings on the extent business education graduates need accounting and office technology and management skills for self-employment but did on the extent they need marketing skills. Based on the findings, it was concluded that business education graduates in Delta State need entrepreneurial skills such as accounting, office technology and management, and marketing skills for self-employment. It was recommended among others that business educators should use innovative.

Faloye and Olatunji (2018) carried out research on entrepreneurship education in Nigeria University: Intentions, Prospects, Challenges and strategies. They viewed entrepreneurship education as an education and training which helps to develop

students to use their creativity, possess the ability to recognize and evaluate business opportunity, take initiative, responsibility, risks and appropriate actions to succeed. This paper sought to identify the challenges confronting the success of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria and gather strategies for its improvement. Simple random sampling techniques was used to select 620 students and entrepreneurs as the sample of study. A 30- item questionnaire was used to gather information. Findings revealed that Entrepreneurship Education challenge include; recruiting qualified teachers with appropriate knowledge, fund raising for financing Entrepreneurship Education in schools and for youths, establishment of business, training and retraining, provision of adequate facilities etc. it was recommended that adequate funding of entrepreneurship education activities / provision of take-off grants for students and entrepreneurs, necessary infrastructural facilities/technology, among others.

Ajike and Nwakoby (2017) carried out research on the extent to which entrepreneurship in Nigeria has helped to reduce youth unemployment. The study revealed that government policies and initiative has affected the "transformation question". This is due to the increase of corruption, inadequate and maladministration. They concludes that entrepreneurship country is an engine for job creation, innovation and diversity and that Nigeria's entrepreneurs have a long way to go before they can effectively drive changes in the economy. They recommend that government should genuinely recognize the essence of entrepreneurship to economic development by providing the enabling environment for the youth to be gainful employed for economic development.

Methodology

The study adopted the use of ethnography approach which enabled the study to combine observations, interview and reflexitivity having worked in a students' settings for decades. It is this that made study conduct some form of participant observation research within three selected Institutions in Kwara State, and included some views from those whose vantage points come from outside the institutions. Gronroos (2002) identified four categories of observational research: complete observer role, observer as participant, participant as observer and complete participant. Gronroos (2002) argue that participant observation is probably the most classic ethnographic method, which means that it is closest to the role model for qualitative research. Creswell (2012) explains that participant observation is where the researcher enters the research setting and actually becomes a part of the work team. He pointed out that although this method is prone to biases, in studies of longer duration, the respondents become more relaxed and tend to behave more naturally.

This study is a descriptive study adopting the survey and case study method using the deductive approach and relying on qualitative method common in business management research. The qualitative method helps to solicit information on the perspective and thought of the staff in the areas of skills acquisition and students'

entrepreneurial intention taking into cognizance the role of university education in Nigeria. The population of this study involved nine students purposively picked across the three universities selected in Kwara State responses were analysed using coding and categorization which enabled the study arranged them thematically.

Thematic Analysis of the Interview Responses

Figure1 presented the thematic analysis of the study, based on data collected from the in-depth interviews conducted with nine students across the selected universities in Kwara State. The analysis presents answered the research questions which were explored through in-depth interview. The aim of the thematic analysis was is to examine and probe the opinion of the students on entrepreneurship development curriculum of universities in Kwara State and their goals. Consequently, the qualitative in-depth interview was conducted to complement the findings of the quantitative study. The objective of the study is to examine the extent to which entrepreneurial skill acquisition has help to enhanced student self-employment

The interview responses were analyzed thematically, where each theme answered the research question, the result anchored on the entrepreneurship development curriculum of universities in Kwara State and their goals. The study identified themes and sub-themes and that described how and ways development of curriculum can affect student goals . The emerged conceptions are grouped into themes and sub-themes. Figure 1 visualizes all the main themes and sub-themes from the perceptions of the selected students.

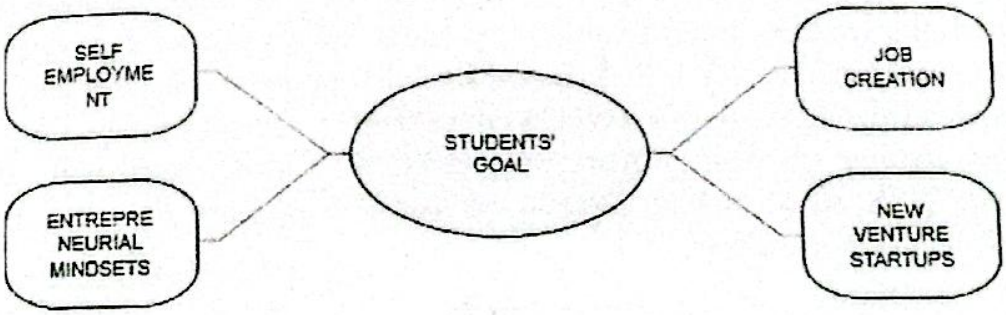
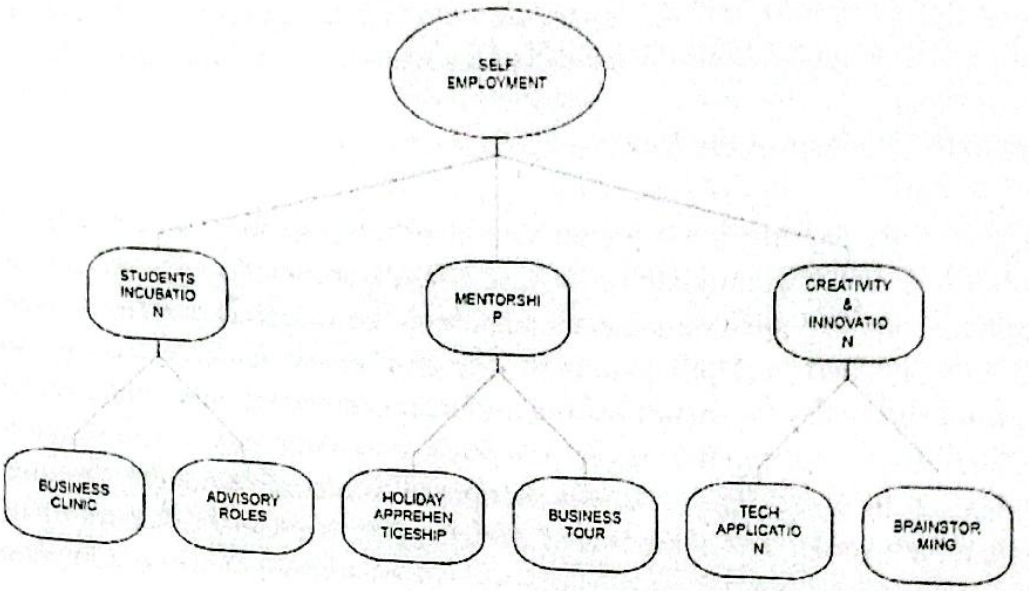


Figure 1: Thematic Representation of the Study.
Source: Authors' Field Survey (2020)

Theme: Entrepreneurial skill acquisition and student self-employment tendency

According to Oluseye (2017), self-employment is the act of generating one's income directly from customers, clients or other organizations as opposed to being an employee of a business or person. When one is self-employed, it means one is carrying on one's own business rather than working for an employer. This implies that self-employment is a situation in which an individual works for him/ herself instead of working for an employer that pays salary or wages. Self-employment brings independence thereby giving room to implement creative ideas. The responses from

the various interviews revealed three sub themes and six sub themes as shown in figure 1.

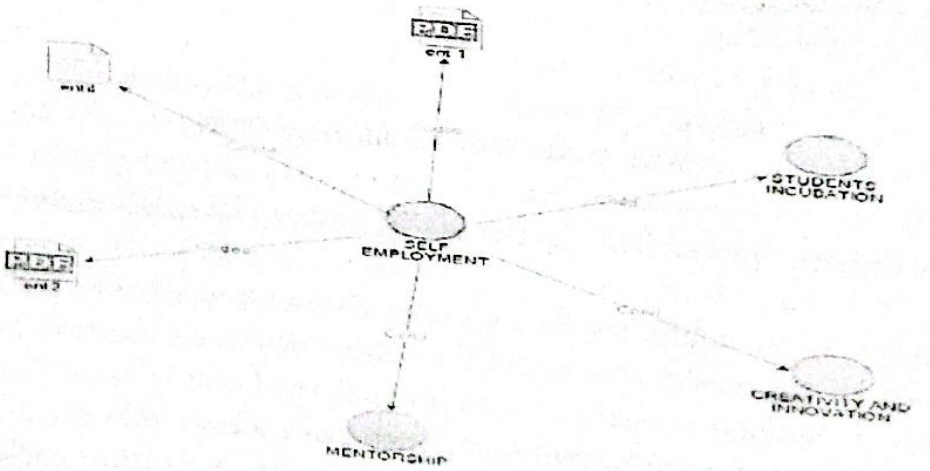


Source: Nvivo output (2020).

Figure 2: Thematic analysis of self employment tendency

Students' Incubation

The university curriculum through the benchmark for academic standard (BMAS), emphasized the establishment of business clinic and also placed the department as advisors to students in terms of entrepreneurship development. The basic idea is to prepare the students towards self employment before and after graduation. For instance, respondents **ilr1, hui3, kw1,** and **kw3** all supports the fact that they are been incubated through the business clinics established by the entrepreneurship centers in their various universities. Also, respondent **kw2** in her word said " *the level advisers in the school usually serve as our business advisors, he acts as a kind of counselor to all the students*".



Source: Nvivo output (2020)

Figure 3: Self employment and its sub themes

Mentorship

According to Adebayo and Kolawole (201 3)mentoring as a process by which persons of superior rank, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of a person. Mentorship is a method of grooming in use for establishing relationship between junior and senior employees, a method gaining popularity to facilitating both employee and management development in the organization. Mentoring is about mutual trust and respect (Abubakar, Kabir, & Nalsado, 2014). It is a two way relationship in which both the mentor and mentee get the chance to learn new things and further their personal development. Mentorship is the guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or educational institution. Mentorship is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledge person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. Kw2 viewed the university mentorship as aid that facilitates personal and professional growth of an individual by sharing the knowledge and insight that have been learned through the years. The university curriculum has been designed to mentor the students toward self employment.

Creativity and Innovation

Respondents kui2 submits that self employment can be achieved through creativity and innovation by way of usage of technology brainstorming within the classrooms. Assignments on thinking out of the box, providing creative business solution and case studies are ways of stimulating the students towards self reliance. These are in line with the submissions of (Abubakar, Kabir, & Nalsado, 2014). Creativity plays an important role in new product development and creativity consist three techniques; brainstorming, vital confrontation and morphological. According to Hamzah, et al (2016) people become more creative when they are motivated primarily by the interest, satisfaction or challenges of the present and past situations which is not only by external factors, but also the passion and interest of the person's internal desire to do something different and unique.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study that has implications on strategy development for entrepreneurship development curriculum of universities in Kwara State and students' intention. The thematic analysis showed that students can create job for the other people by establishing a business where people can work or by providing opportunities for them to establish their own business. The university curriculum has been designed to be a form of education that helps people in acquiring skills and knowledge needed in business startup which will lead to job creation. The study also concluded that students intention is challenged by creativity and innovation and mentorship by the university curriculum. In view of the above findings and based on the study objective, the following recommendations are made:

i. The students' entrepreneurial mindset should be enhanced through career team building; the schools should encourage undergraduates to attend workshops, and acquire vocational skills. The schools should also encourage the students on holiday jobs and skills acquisition.

ii. Also, creativity and innovation is found to have positive effect on self employment, hence students should be encouraged to perform creativity and innovation activities to enhance their willingness to be self employed.

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