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**MENTORSHIP AND INTERNSHIP AS CORRELATE OF BUSINESS START-UPS
AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA**

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MENTORSHIP AND INTERNSHIP AS CORRELATE OF BUSINESS START-UPS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rise of business startups in Nigeria have been threatened by the inability to remain viable and stand the test of time in the competitive market. This has resulted in many startups folding up nearly daily. The study therefore aims to examine mentorship and internship as correlate of business startups among young people in Lagos state, Nigeria. Two research questions were answered. Descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. The population of the study comprised graduates of a training institute with specific focus on potential entrepreneurs, and the coordinators of Lagos State Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LSCCI), and Bank of Industry (BOI) respectively who oversee training and development units. To gather information from characteristics that can give relevant and useful responses to the research questions, purposive sampling technique was deployed to select 10 respondents each from LSCCI and BOI, and a coordinator each from these two government agencies. In all, 22 respondents were selected for this study comprising of 20 trainees and two coordinators. Interview was used for gathering of qualitative data to establish how mentorship and internship serve as correlate for business startups among young people. The analysis of the qualitative data was done using thematic analysis. Findings from the study reveal that mentorship has improved the orientation and skills of young people towards start-ups, and that internship has relationship with the start-ups among young persons in Lagos. The study concluded that mentorship and internship have relationship with start-ups among young people in Lagos, but it is obvious that mentorship has more influences. The study therefore recommended among others that, mentorship and internship programmes be strongly promoted in the higher institutions of learning.

Introduction

The life after school of many young graduates of higher education in Nigeria seem not to be a smooth sailing one when it comes to securing employment opportunities or being self-employed. The employability and capability of graduates are meant to have been developed in the higher institutions such that, on graduating from school, they become employed or self-employed.

However, the reality is that majority of these graduates are unemployed and underemployed. Research have shown that one out of 10 graduates in Nigeria gets a job, 80% of the Nigerian youths are unemployed, and about 10% are underemployed with 7 out of 10 graduates remain unemployed or underemployed (Yinusa, Bakare, Adebisi, Jegede, 2020). To get out of this unemployment and guide against poverty, some young people took it upon themselves to establish business startups commonly refers to as small scale businesses.

Evidence abounds that the increasing rate of business startups in Nigeria was enhanced by the advancement in technological development in which young people are taken more advantage of it day by day. Consequently, these business startups are metamorphosing into micro, small and medium enterprises, and are dominating the local markets in Nigeria. These MSMEs are jointly responsible for employing between 2–199 people, generated 59,647,954 jobs as of December 2017, 2,889,715 (5%) of those jobs were created by SMEs startups, and are arguably responsible for creation of 85% industrial employment in Nigeria (MSME report, 2017; Mohammed, 2017).

It is worthy of note that despite the increasing growth in business startups estimated at about 41,469,947 (99.8%) in Nigeria, majority of them are failing and are packing up daily with its attendant problems such as, unfavourable government policies, funding, multiple taxations and difficulty in doing business in Nigeria. According to MSME national survey report in 2017, the number of small enterprises decreased significantly from 4,670 in 2013 to 1,793 in 2017 amounting to 61% drop rate.

Literatures have identified majorly external factors as some of the problems affecting business startups in Nigeria (MSME report, 2017; Mohammed, 2017, NBS, 2019), little or no literature has worked on mentorship and internship as critical for business startups among young people. Mentorship and internship create an enabling environment for people to garner skills, knowledge, and experiences in form of one-on-one relationships and with diverse business experts which help individual to develop their business ideas, scale and sustain the business. In the argument of Hurst & Good (2010), majority of business startups today failed to learn about the peculiarities and complexities of business environment before establishing theirs, and this understandably has contributed to why some business startups could not stand the test of time. It is against this backdrop that this study examined mentorship and internship as correlate of business startups among young people in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In this contemporary time, young people are now yielding to experts' advice to take charge of their lives by starting a small business rather than searching for white collar jobs that rarely exist in the labour market. This has led to upsurge in the establishment of small businesses in Nigeria. However, observations showed that despite the growth witnessed in the establishment of business startups among young people in Nigeria, five out of every 50 established startups folded up at the end of the day. The reasons for winding up and lack of sustainability of these business startups are not just attributed to funding and unfavourable business conditions alone but could be susceptible to other factors relating to skills and expertise. This study, therefore, explores mentorship and internship as correlate of business startups among young people.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to examine mentorship and internship as correlate of business startups among young people. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to;

- i. Determine the relationship between mentorship and startups among young people;
- ii. Assess the relationship between internship and startups among young people.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the relationship between mentorship and business startups among young people?
- ii. How can internship be related to business startups among young people?

Literature Review

Learning theories have been majorly viewed from behavioural, cognitive, and constructive. The first two (behavioural and cognitive) are the major categories of learning theories, while constructive was later considered because of its instructional design in the literature (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991; Winn, 1991). There was a shift from behavioural theory to cognitive theory because of its failure to clarify how individuals process information (Aljohani, 2017). However, constructivist theory is rooted in several features of cognitive theory as postulated by Piaget and Vygotsky (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Basically, the theory is rooted in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and education (Bada, 2015). This study therefore considers constructivism as underpinning theory to examine the effectiveness of learning under mentorship and internship on business start-ups among youths.

Constructivist Theory of Learning

The idea of constructivism was first considered by Ernst von Glasersfeld in 1974 and the assumption is that all knowledge is constructed. The central idea of constructive theory is that human learning is constructed, and a new knowledge is influenced and modified by the previous leaning (Phillips, 1995). The theory is one of the most dominant and current approaches to learning and education (Krahenbuhl, 2016), and its application into multidisciplinary learning environment and inter-disciplinary fields has considerably increased its acceptability in the literature (Basturk, 2016; Jaleel & Verghis, 2015). For instance, preparing problem-solving lesson notes is one of the elements of constructivist theory (Basturk, 2016). Creating a safe environment for leaners by STEM instructors is another example of the theory as this will enable the learners to feel free and have a good reflection in the learning process (Ah-Nam & Osman, 2017).

Building knowledge and skills is the focus of constructivist postulation, and this has reflected in the high thinking and emotional skills of the leaners (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). Individual tends to construct his/her own understanding and knowledge of a particular practice and reflects on the experience gotten from such practice (Bereiter, 1994). Doing this helps leaners to reconcile their previous experience with the new encounter either by changing their former ways of doing things or considering the new approach as inappropriate (Bada, 2015). Consequently, people could learn from the experience they have gained. The relevance of constructivist theory to this study is in two-fold. 1) the first argument is on how the trainers will be able to identify and understand the necessary skills and orientation required for youths (leaners) to successfully operate start-up businesses; 2) another argument is how youths that engage in mentorship and internship construct their understanding and knowledge they have gained compared to their previous experience in relations to business start-up.

Internship

Internship in terms of learning process is a work-based knowledge opportunity that takes place as part of formal education (doing interns as a student), or external to formal education (interns after graduation) during which an individual is expected to acquire specific skills within a specified period of time in an establishment or a business organization (Marinas, Goia, Igret & Marinas, 2018). In the opinion of Elarde and Chong (2012), internship programs tend to offer the participants with practical experience which might not be practically possible in the classrooms. The central feature of this learning arrangement is that it gives the students or leaners the

opportunity to understand what working in a business environment actually entails and how this can affect their learning experience (Hurst & Good, 2010).

In internship learning programs, students (learners), industry and academics are the major stakeholders (Marinas *et al.*, 2018). Internship is very common in the health sector, hospitality, and manufacturing because it allows students to glean relevant skills and experience that could only be acquired during on-the-job training (Ismail, 2018). However, internship has gained much recognition in a recent time in the space of information technology and entrepreneurship because of its relevance in developing capacities that has socio-economic impacts (Dobratz, Singh & Abbey, 2014; Galloway, Marks & Chillias, 2014). Internship has the potential to offer a means for IT graduates to acquire entry level work experience in an organisation particularly in a commercial sector (Ismail, 2018). Through this, the learners (through interns) can develop their commercial skills and become more employable in a business environment (Galloway *et al.*, 2014), while some may be exposed to an entrepreneurial ecosystem through which they can be in a better position to start their own businesses ((Dobratz *et al.*, 2014; Ismail, 2018).

Lagos State Graduate Internship Placement Programme (LASGIPP)

Lagos State graduate internship programme was designed to avail candidates the opportunity to develop employability and work-ready skills that are required in securing gainful and rewarding job employment. The idea behind LASGIPP is basically to address some of the agendas of the present government in Lagos State which are; education and technology and making the state a 21st Century Economy. The beneficiaries of LASGIPP are to be paid a monthly stipend of N40,000 for the period of 6 months duration of the internship.

Karisfined Edge Solutions

Karisfined Edge Solutions has an internship programme designed to empower new set of young graduates who seek opportunity to kick start their professional journey. The aim of the program is to pre-select exceptional fresh graduates for internship openings who are seeking to develop their skills while being mentored and coached by experienced professionals. The participants are allowed to apply regardless of their specific field of study, and it covers areas like; personal assistant (PA), office administrator (OA), sales, front desk/receptionist, customer service, human resources (HR), Executive Assistants, among others. The beneficiaries have an opportunity to be part of inclusive work environment that guarantees fair learning opportunities and challenges that will enable them to grow and develop in their chosen careers.

Transport Services Limited (TSL)

Transport Services Limited has an internship programme that is specifically designed to empower young graduates and undergraduates towards gaining hands-on experience in a variety of fields that cut across various functions. The program allows the beneficiaries to have opportunity to work with talented and diverse teams of people, and as well possess the ability to develop problem-solving, leadership and management skills.

Mentoring

Entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurial learning from external for them to acquire capability that can enhance their adaptability skills (St-Jean & Audet, 2012), particularly when they are faced with critical decisions that can engender sustainability (Taylor & Thorpe, 2004). Entrepreneurial learning is an ability to recognize new opportunities (Rae & Carswell, 2001). Considering this option demonstrates mentoring as an interpersonal learning relationship between a mentor (believed to be an experienced person) who engages a mentee (regarded as a less experienced person) for psychological and skills enhancement (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Mullen, 1998; Nabi, Walmsley & Akhtar, 2019).

Entrepreneurs or learners tend to work with many mentors or experts that can provide necessary supports for business growth or skills development. Evidence in the literature shows that mentoring has commendable impact on the career success of learners or entrepreneurs (Orth, C. D., & Jacobs, 1971). In the context of innovative start-ups, mentoring is identified as a means to enhance entrepreneur's self-esteem, entrepreneurial intentions towards superior performance and business survival (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Spigel, 2017; Waters, McCabe, Kiellerup & Kiellerup, 2002). This has positioned the approach of mentoring different from other skills enhancement methods. Mentoring has both psychological and career-related supports to the young entrepreneurs (Kram, 1983). The psychological aspect relates with building self-confidence of the learners, quality leadership and counselling, while the career-related entails building career-related skills and acquiring know-how about the business sphere (Leck & Orser, 2013; Rae & Carswell, 2001; St-Jean, 2011).

Afripreneur Mentor Me

Afripreneur is a social business platform for innovation and solution to the problems and needs of aspiring and growing entrepreneurs to make them more effective and efficient in their business operations with lean start-up approaches. It is a social enterprise support platform that enables

enterprising Africans to easily move from ideation to world-class business enterprise. Afripreneur provides a sustainable structure that creates various businesses which will lead to the creation of many employment opportunities. It has an online platform that allows for remote access to essential solutions needed by entrepreneurs through internet-enabled devices and computers using a cloud technology approach that makes knowledge and support accessible to every entrepreneur. While the offline solutions are events that create great experience and collaboration for entrepreneurs through networking and face-to-face interactions. One of the products of this social business platform is tagged “*Afripreneur MentorMe*”, designed for the people that need to start a business and mentorship. The product tends to help aspiring entrepreneurs to start a business by connecting them to other entrepreneurs around them for mentorship.

Mara Mentor

Mara Mentor is a free online mentoring platform designed by Mara Foundations Nigeria, a non-profit social enterprise for emerging African entrepreneurs to facilitate connections to business leaders globally and can be accessed through a web-based platform and mobile applications. Mara Foundations Nigeria is open to all and sundry with a particular focus on empowering young and women entrepreneurs for the purpose of creating change for a sustainable future. The rationale behind developing Mara Mentor by the foundation is that entrepreneurship is very key to the reduction of unemployment, innovation, and economic growth.

Mara Mentor is an online and mobile platform that targets young people who want to start a business. The online platform enables entrepreneurs to connect virtually with veteran business leaders locally and mentors across the globe for mentorship, advice, non-formal education, and guidance. The platform also provides all-inclusive support services via funding support toward novel business ideas, start-ups, incubation centres, and continual business training in workplaces. Mara Mentor enables entrepreneurs to gain inspiration, support, leadership, and vital feedback required for the progression of business ideas and plans.

Mentorship, Internship and Start-ups in Nigeria

Entrepreneurial skills acquisition could be attained via different means such as training, seminars, workshops, development programmes, mentoring, internship among others (Uma, Onwusogbolu & Obidike, 2015). The quest for entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurship education in Nigeria began in the mid-1980s when the nation’s economy was in bad shape owing to the socio-economic and political instability (Odia & Odia, 2013). There was high youth unemployment because young

graduates lack the required skills and sound knowledge that can engender self-reliance (Arogundade, 2011; Nwangwu, 2006). Responding to this challenge is to consider various entrepreneurial skills stimulus through which the entrepreneurial intentions of youths could be enhanced towards developing career options and starting new businesses (Arogundade, 2011; Odia & Odia, 2013).

Mentorship is not a new concept in the world, and this has become part of societal culture in Nigeria. For instance, in Igbo communities in Nigeria, farmers, craftsmen, traders, and educationists often engage in mentoring younger ones to become their successors or starting their own businesses (Odia & Odia, 2013). Mentoring exists in a situation whereby a senior person (in terms of skills and understanding) oversees the career and skills development of another person (usually a junior or lesser understanding and skills) towards self-reliance, entrepreneurial capacity building and a better performance (Ayodeji & Adebayo, 2015; Zey, 1990). The interaction under the scheme of mentorship can enable the mentee to build the required skills and entrepreneurial intentions to drive innovative start-ups.

In the case of internship, the Nigerian government (Federal Government under the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program-Sure-P unveiled the Graduate Internship Scheme-GIS in October 2012 for the purpose of creating a working environment for the Nigerian young graduates to gain experience (Odia & Odia, 2013). In October 2011, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria-YouWin was launched for the youths to independently develop business plans and avail soft loans to run their businesses (Suleiman, 2013). Like this is N-Power programme that was launched in 2016 by the Nigeria Federal Government to provide a structure for a huge scale and useful work skills acquisition necessary to boost start-ups and jobs creation (Abovu & Chintuwa, 2019). N-Power was designed to cover young graduates and non-graduates (e.g., targeting 500,000 N-Power Graduate Teachers Corps, 25, 000 N-Power knowledge for non-graduates, and 75, 000 N-Power build for non-graduates) through which skills could be enhanced for creativity and entrepreneurial activities (Abovu & Chintuwa, 2019).

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. The population of the study comprises of graduates of a training institute with specific focus on potential entrepreneurs, and the coordinators of Lagos State Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LSCCI), and Bank of Industry (BOI) respectively who oversee training and development units. Purposive sampling

technique was deployed to select 10 respondents each from LSCCI and BOI and a coordinator each from these two government agencies, because they possess characteristics that can give relevant information that could be useful for this study.

These two agencies have proven records of training and development of youths and graduates with entrepreneurship focus. The two agencies also, have mentorship and internship programmes they run concurrently. This informs the decision of this study to select each coordinator from these agencies who oversee training and development units to air their views on the phenomenon. In all, 22 respondents were selected for this study comprising of 20 trainees and two coordinators.

Interview was used for gathering of data to establish how mentorship and internship serve as correlate for business startups among young people. The interview was designed in a semi-structure form wherein the participants were guided on the questions but were allowed to express their view based on the questions asked. The interview was conducted via zoom-an online meeting app owing to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the responses were documented. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Analysis

Qualitative Results Presentation of Interview with the Graduate Trainees using Thematic

Themes associated with mentorship and business startups elements were established and analysed. Responses from the graduate trainees showed a validation for the research questions raised. The findings from transcribed themes were discussed as follows:

What are the relationships between mentorship and business startups among young people?

Majority of the participants responded that an association exists between mentorship and their business startups. Some of the excerpts from the participants are as follows:

The place of mentorship in my business startup is crucial. If not that I was mentored by a renowned business tycoon (I won't mention his name), my small business that I am pushing up now will have crumbled (*Participant 002*).

Ordinarily, I don't believe in mentorship before given the awful experiences shared by my friends but thank God Lagos State Chamber of Commerce and Industry attached me to a mentor through one of their training programmes.

With this, I was able to gather the momentum and passion to forge ahead in my business when the going gets tough. I maintained a good relationship with her, and it is what is helping till date (*Participant 07*).

For me, my business startup was at the infant level if there is a word to describe that in this context, but with the good mentor I was attached to, he taught me how I can package my business for wider reach and scale it up (*Participant 10*).

The study, therefore, showed that mentorship by no small measure have a significant relationship with business startups among young people in Lagos state.

In what ways can internship be related to business startups among young people?

Majority of the participants responded that internship enhanced their business startups.

Some of the excerpts from the participants are as follows:

I usually ensure that I learn new things everyday throughout the period of my internship programme. Before, I am a novice when it comes to business, but the internship programme opened my eyes to how business are conducted, negotiated and can be managed. It was from this experience I network and begin to start my own venture. Today, I can say the internship was significant to my business startup (*Participant 03*).

During the internship programme, my boss left majority of the day-to-day activities of the business for me to handle. It is like I manage the affairs of his business. This builds my confidence, and skills. Sometimes, I run daily affairs of my boss business by delegating positions, duties, and responsibilities to some people to function properly. These experiences have shaped me to become a business-oriented person, say entrepreneur, and I am proud to have started a small business because of the experience gained (*Participant 06*).

My internship story was a successful one. After graduation, I could not secure a job and I had to participate in an internship programme where I was paid stipend. What matter most to me then was the art of selling and marketing, and not the meager I received. I gained networking skills which helped me to connect with the dealers of the

products we sell. Today, I have started a small business after I completed the internship programme, and I am doing well at it (*Participant 12*).

The study therefore showed that internship is related to business startups among young people by providing the platform for them to gain practical skills, competencies and experiences required to excel in their various business startups.

Discussion of Findings

The present high rate of youth unemployment particularly in developing economies has no doubt generated huge concern in the literature. This has made researchers and experts to realize that the best option to minimize this menace is to build entrepreneurship culture that can enhance employment creation more than employability skills. Consequently, institutions, government agencies, business organisations, and non-profit organisations are now adopting internship and mentorship programmes for the young people (graduates and non-graduates) to acquire certain entrepreneurship and employability skills that can make them economically viable in the system. However, the individual contributions of mentorship and internship programmes to the capacity and capability of young people towards start-ups have not been exhaustively discussed in the literature. This study is therefore designed to jointly examine the relationship between mentorship, internship, and start-ups among young people.

The findings of this study reveal that mentorship has improved the orientation and skills of young people towards start-ups. The implication of this is that mentorship has not only affected the hard skills of the youths, but also the soft skills that can positively affect their businesses. The findings of St-Jean and Audet (2012) indicate that through mentorship, cognitive learning contributes to 62%, affective learning accounts for 35.9%, while the skill-inclined learning is in a marginal position. This also supports Nabi *et al* (2019) with the submission that the nature of mentoring covers knowledge development and socio-emotional supports.

It is established in the study that internship has relationship with the start-ups among young persons in Lagos. Form the findings of this study, it is revealed that internship programmes have made young people to learn new things, particularly how businesses can be started and operated successfully. However, the findings of some other studies demonstrate the influence of internship on small and medium scales (SMEs) from the perspective of firm's performance. For example,

Degravel (2011) argument is based on how SMEs can maximize the potentials of internship, and this is viewed from the angle of resource-based view through cost management since the interns may not receive the same salary with the core staff. Walmsley, Thomas, and Jameson (2012) also submit that universities consider internship for their students to acquire skills, but most of the programmes take place in large corporations. The authors (Walmsley *et al.*, 2012) therefore suggest that SMEs can leverage on this to improve their performance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that mentorship and internship have relationship with start-ups among young people in Lagos, but it is obvious that mentorship has more influences. The general assumption is that internship is mainly designed to enhance employability skills of young graduates or undergraduates, while mentorship is meant for those that need entrepreneurship skills. However, both mentorship and internship can influence employability and entrepreneurship skills that are useful in the workplace and starting up businesses.

Policy Implication

Internship is practically addressed as a means of enhancing the employability skills of young people in most studies. In a recent study, Marinas et al (2018) argue that to a large extent, literature regarding internship tends to emphasize the roles the programs play in the future career of young graduates in terms of their engagement in companies towards becoming potential employees. However, these young graduates may be dispirited if they could not get jobs with the company they engaged with on internship or other firms upon the termination of the program. For the program to be impactful, internship could be restructured to accommodate and drive entrepreneurship skills and orientations of young start-ups.

The mindset of most of the people is that internship is designed for young people to connect themselves with people for job opportunities. This is evidenced in the study of Nachammai, Vijayalakshmi and Gurumoorthy (2020) with the argument that the major benefit to be derived from entrepreneurship internship is for the motivation of the participants and networking with experts and professionals in the industry. However, networking can aid entrepreneurial activities of the start-ups, but the argument here is about how the program can significantly affect the orientation and emotion of young people in building their capacity towards being employers of

labour rather than job seekers. For this reason, this study suggests that internship programs should be redesigned to significantly affect the mindset and intention of youths towards start-ups, while some may still decide to engage in the program for their employability skills.

The implication of this is that some young people who do not have enough capital to start their own businesses could leverage on getting white collar jobs for them to gather funds towards starting their businesses. Mentorship and internship could therefore be considered as having similar capacity to jointly contributing to start-ups among young people. This study has therefore established the relationship between mentorship and internship and their individual contributions to the intention of young people towards start-ups, and the aspects of these programmes that could be improved upon.

Recommendations

From the findings and conclusion of the study, it is recommended that mentorships and internships should be strongly promoted in the higher institutions of learning, and every established training outfit to enhance the acquisition of skills and expertise of potential entrepreneurs in the real world of work. This will enhance the self-efficacy and doggedness of business startup owners to scale their businesses to ensuring viability and sustainability in the competitive market.

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