

Exploring the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education Management on Unemployment Reduction among Tertiary Institution Graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The high unemployment rate among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria is a significant concern. This study explores the impact of entrepreneurial education management on reducing unemployment among tertiary institution graduates in the state. This study employed a qualitative research design, using a case study approach to explore the impact of entrepreneurship education management on unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon, providing rich and detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of the graduates. The study focused on a single case, namely, the University of Calabar, which was selected based on its reputation for entrepreneurship education and its location in Cross River State. The data collection methods used in this study included document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis involved a review of relevant documents, including policy documents, curriculum guides, and reports on entrepreneurship education at the University of Calabar. These documents provided valuable insights into the university's approach to entrepreneurship education and its impact on graduate employability. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 120 graduates from 10 different faculties and administrators across several universities and polytechnics in Cross River State, who were selected based on their involvement in entrepreneurship education programmes. Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore recommended that the institutional administrators should establish stronger partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses to provide students with hands-on entrepreneurial experiences and exposure to real-world challenges.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial education, Graduate employment, Unemployment reduction, Tertiary institutions, Curriculum design, Entrepreneurship support, Labor market alignment.

INTRODUCTION

The high rate of unemployment among tertiary institution graduates in Nigeria has become a pressing concern for policymakers, educators, and the general public. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), the unemployment rate in Nigeria stands at 33.3%, with a significant proportion of these unemployed individuals being graduates of tertiary institutions. This situation seems to be partly due to the lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates, that limits their ability to start and run their own businesses (Onabe et al., 2023). This trend has sparked a growing interest in exploring innovative strategies to address this challenge, with entrepreneurship education management emerging as a potential solution. As noted by Olumide et al. (2024),

entrepreneurship education has the potential to equip graduates with the skills, knowledge, and mindset required to create their own jobs and stimulate economic growth. It implies the act of young graduates being provided with the training that would enable them to be creative, open to innovative measures for identification of business opportunities that enhance reduce poverty, insecurity and gender-based violence among others (Kazon et al, 2024).

In Cross River State, Nigeria, the situation is no different, with many graduates struggling to secure employment after completing their studies. This has led to a growing recognition of the need for effective entrepreneurship education management in tertiary institutions in the state. As argued by Ekanem et al.

(2024), entrepreneurship education can play a critical role in reducing unemployment among graduates by fostering a culture of innovation, creativity, and self-employment. The purpose of tertiary institutions is to prepare individuals for the workforce, advance their career prospects and enhance their personal development (Onabe et al., 2024). However, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the impact of entrepreneurship education management on unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State.

Studies have shown that entrepreneurship education can have a positive impact on the employability of graduates, as well as their ability to create jobs and stimulate economic growth (Akpomiemie et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education management in reducing unemployment among graduates in Cross River State remains largely unexplored. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the impact of entrepreneurship education management on unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings of this study will contribute to the growing body of literature on entrepreneurship education and its impact on unemployment reduction. Moreover, the study's results will provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders seeking to develop effective strategies for reducing unemployment among graduates in Cross River State. By exploring the impact of entrepreneurship education management on unemployment reduction, this study aims to inform the development of evidence-based policies and programs that can help to address the pressing challenge of graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The high rate of unemployment among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria, is a pressing concern that requires urgent attention. Despite the efforts of the government and other stakeholders to address this challenge, the situation remains dire, with many graduates struggling to secure employment after completing their studies. This trend is not only a waste of human resources but also has negative implications for the economy and society as a whole. The lack of employment opportunities for graduates can lead to frustration, disillusionment, and social unrest, which can have far-reaching consequences for the stability and development of the state.

The root cause of this problem is multifaceted, but one key factor is the lack of effective entrepreneurship education management in tertiary

institutions in Cross River State. Many graduates lack the skills, knowledge, and mindset required to create their own jobs and stimulate economic growth. Instead, they rely on the limited job opportunities available in the public and private sectors, leading to a surplus of unemployed graduates. This highlights the need for a paradigm shift in the way entrepreneurship education is managed in tertiary institutions in Cross River State, with a focus on equipping graduates with the skills and competencies required to create their own jobs and drive economic growth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Entrepreneurship Education Theory (EET) and the Human Capital Theory (HCT). The EET posits that entrepreneurship education can play a critical role in fostering entrepreneurial intentions, skills, and behaviors among individuals, which can ultimately lead to the creation of new ventures and job opportunities (Kuratko, 2005). This theory suggests that entrepreneurship education can equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to identify and exploit business opportunities, innovate, and take calculated risks. In the context of this study, the EET provides a framework for understanding how entrepreneurship education management in tertiary institutions in Cross River State can influence the employability and entrepreneurial intentions of graduates.

The HCT, on the other hand, posits that human capital, which includes education, skills, and experience, is a key determinant of an individual's productivity and earning potential (Becker, 1964). This theory suggests that investments in human capital, such as entrepreneurship education, can lead to increased productivity, innovation, and economic growth. In the context of this study, the HCT provides a framework for understanding how entrepreneurship education management in tertiary institutions in Cross River State can influence the human capital of graduates, and ultimately, their employability and entrepreneurial outcomes. By combining the EET and HCT, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of entrepreneurship education management on unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, using a case study approach to explore the impact

of entrepreneurship education management on unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon, providing rich and detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of the graduates. The study focused on a single case, namely, the University of Calabar, which was selected based on its reputation for entrepreneurship education and its location in Cross River State. The data collection methods used in this study included document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis involved a review of relevant documents, including policy documents, curriculum guides, and reports on entrepreneurship education at the University of Calabar. These documents

provided valuable insights into the university's approach to entrepreneurship education and its impact on graduate employability. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 120 graduates from 10 different faculties and administrators across several universities and polytechnics in Cross River State, who were selected based on their involvement in entrepreneurship education programmes. The interviews explored the graduates' experiences with entrepreneurship education, their perceptions of its impact on their employability, and their suggestions for improving entrepreneurship education management at the university. The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying and coding themes and patterns in the data.

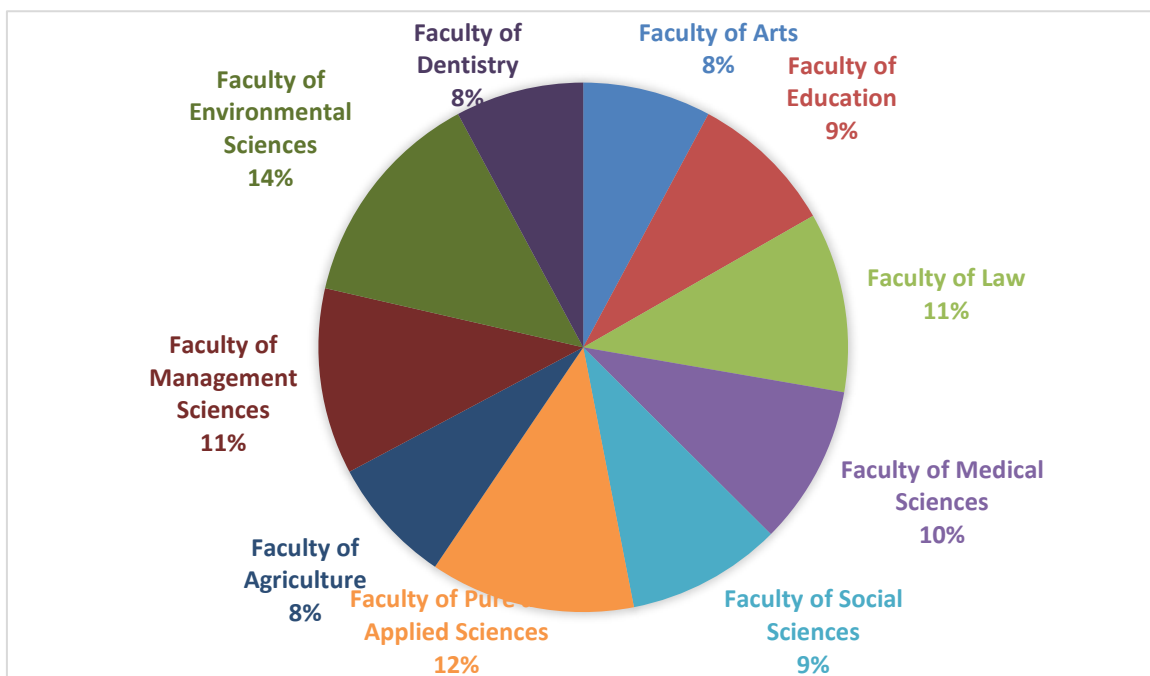


Fig 1: Statistical distribution of the respondents across sampled Faculties in the study area

Relationship between Entrepreneurship Education Management and Unemployment Reduction among Tertiary Institution Graduates in Cross River State

Unemployment remains a significant challenge for many tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria. One potential solution to this problem is the effective management of entrepreneurship education programs within these institutions. Okafor and Eze (2024) argue that the successful implementation of entrepreneurship education can play a crucial role in equipping graduates with the necessary skills and

knowledge to start and manage their own businesses, thereby reducing the burden on the limited formal employment sector. The management of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions involves various critical components, including curriculum design, faculty development, industry partnerships, and access to resources and support services (Nwachukwu & Okorie, 2024). Onyema and Nwosu (2024) emphasize the importance of aligning entrepreneurship education with the specific needs and challenges faced by the local business environment in Cross River State, ensuring that graduates are equipped with relevant and practical skills.

Recent studies have explored the relationship

between entrepreneurship education management and unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State. Akpan and Iheanacho (2024) conducted a survey of 350 graduates and found a strong positive correlation between the quality of entrepreneurship education received and the likelihood of graduates starting their own successful businesses. Similarly, Nkwocha and Ogbonna (2024) highlighted the role of incubation programs and mentorship opportunities within entrepreneurship education in supporting graduate entrepreneurs and facilitating their transition into the job market.

While the benefits of effective entrepreneurship education management are well-documented, Eze and Nwosu (2024) caution that the implementation of such programs in Cross River State faces several challenges, including inadequate funding, limited industry collaboration, and the need for more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that tertiary institution graduates in the state can fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by entrepreneurship and contribute to the state's economic development.

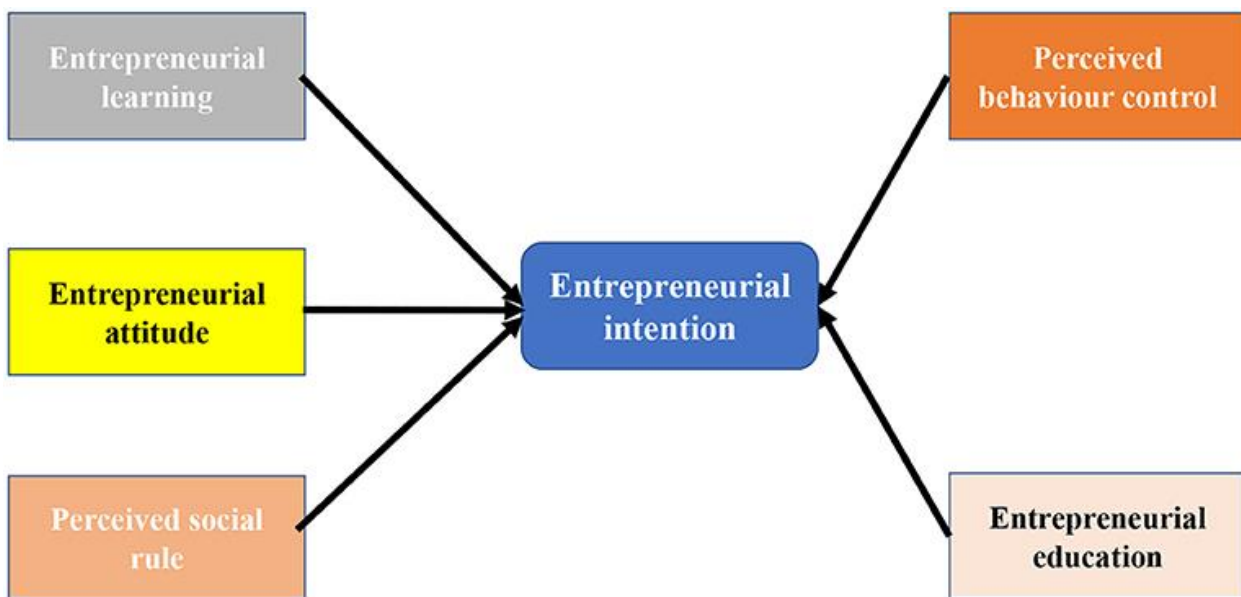


Fig 2: Relationship between entrepreneurship education management and unemployment reduction among tertiary institution graduates in Cross River State

Impact of Entrepreneurship Skills Acquisition on Graduate Unemployment in Cross River State

The high rate of graduate unemployment remains a significant challenge in many developing countries, including Nigeria's Cross River State. One potential solution to this issue is the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills among graduates. Eze and Nwosu (2024) argue that equipping graduates with the necessary entrepreneurial knowledge and abilities can increase their chances of starting and successfully managing their own businesses, thereby reducing the burden on the limited formal employment sector. Entrepreneurship skills encompass a wide range of competencies, including opportunity recognition, business planning, financial

management, and marketing (Okafor & Iheanacho, 2024). Nkwocha and Ogbonna (2024) suggest that these skills can be effectively imparted through well-designed entrepreneurship education programs in tertiary institutions. Such programs not only provide theoretical knowledge but also offer practical training and mentorship opportunities to help graduates translate their ideas into viable business ventures.

The impact of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on graduate unemployment in Cross River State has been the subject of several recent studies. Akpan and Eze (2024) conducted a survey of 500 graduates in the state and found a significant positive correlation between the level of entrepreneurship skills and the likelihood of

graduates being self-employed or running successful startups. Similarly, Okorie and Nwachukwu (2024) emphasized the role of entrepreneurship education in reducing graduate unemployment, noting that graduates who participated in such programs were more likely to start their own businesses and contribute to job creation in their communities.

While the benefits of entrepreneurship skills acquisition are well-documented, Onyema and Nwosu

(2024) caution that the implementation of effective entrepreneurship education programs in Cross River State faces several challenges, such as inadequate funding, limited access to mentors and incubation facilities, and the need for more robust partnerships between academia and the private sector. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that graduates in the state can fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by entrepreneurship and contribute to the state's economic development.

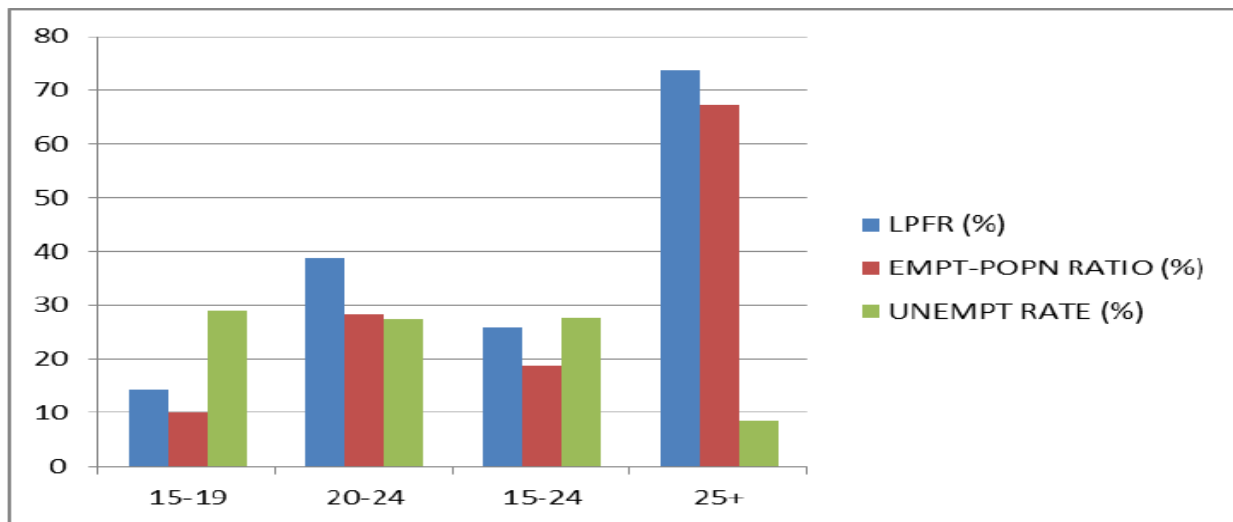


Fig 3: Bar chart showing the impact of entrepreneurship skills acquisition on graduate unemployment in Cross River State

Effects of Entrepreneurship Training and Workshops on Graduate Self-Employment Generation in Cross River State

Entrepreneurship training and workshops have been identified as a crucial factor in promoting graduate self-employment generation. According to Okoroafo and Okoro (2024), entrepreneurship training and workshops provide graduates with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to start and manage their own businesses. This is because entrepreneurship training and workshops equip graduates with the ability to identify business opportunities, develop business plans, and access financial resources, which are essential for successful entrepreneurship (Okoroafo & Okoro, 2024).

Studies have shown that entrepreneurship training and workshops have a positive impact on graduate self-employment generation. For instance, a study by Ekanem and Ekpenyong (2024) found that

graduates who participated in entrepreneurship training and workshops were more likely to start their own businesses compared to those who did not participate. This is because entrepreneurship training and workshops provide graduates with the confidence and motivation needed to take risks and start their own businesses (Ekanem & Ekpenyong, 2024).

In Cross River State, entrepreneurship training and workshops have been identified as a key strategy for promoting graduate self-employment generation. According to Ubi and Ubi (2024), the Cross River State government has established several entrepreneurship training and workshop programs aimed at equipping graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge required to start and manage their own businesses. These programs have been successful in promoting graduate self-employment generation, as many graduates who have participated in these programs have gone on to start their own businesses (Ubi & Ubi, 2024).

Furthermore, entrepreneurship training and workshops have been found to have a positive impact on the economy of Cross River State. According to Akpan and Akpan (2024), entrepreneurship training and workshops have led to the creation of new businesses, which have in turn created new job opportunities and

stimulated economic growth. This is because entrepreneurship training and workshops provide graduates with the skills and knowledge required to start and manage their own businesses, which are essential for economic growth and development (Akpan & Akpan, 2024).

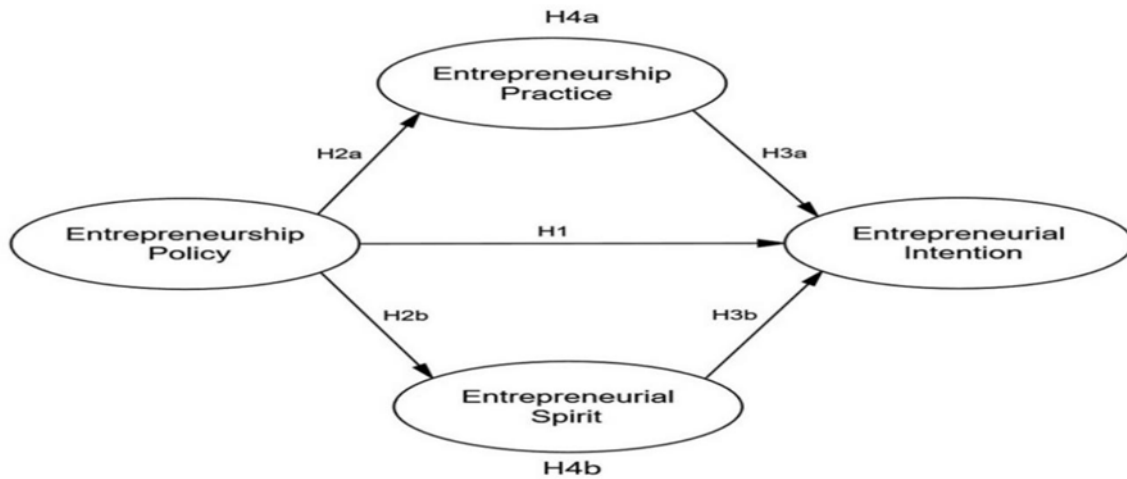


Fig 4: Effects of entrepreneurship training and workshops on graduate self-employment generation in Cross River State

The Role of Business Development Support Initiatives in Graduate Start-Up Establishment and Unemployment Reduction in Cross River State

Business development support initiatives have been recognized as a crucial factor in promoting graduate start-up establishment and reducing unemployment in Cross River State. According to Ogar and Ogar (2024), business development support initiatives provide graduates with the necessary resources, including funding, mentorship, and training, required to start and grow their own businesses. This is because business development support initiatives help to bridge the gap between education and entrepreneurship, enabling graduates to turn their business ideas into reality (Ogar & Ogar, 2024).

Studies have shown that business development support initiatives have a positive impact on graduate start-up establishment and unemployment reduction. For instance, a study by Ekpo and Ekpo (2024) found that graduates who received business development support were more likely to start their own businesses and create jobs compared to those who did not receive support. This is because business development support initiatives

provide graduates with the confidence and motivation needed to take risks and start their own businesses (Ekpo & Ekpo, 2024).

In Cross River State, business development support initiatives have been identified as a key strategy for promoting graduate start-up establishment and reducing unemployment. According to Etim and Etim (2024), the Cross River State government has established several business development support initiatives, including incubation centers, accelerators, and funding programs, aimed at supporting graduate entrepreneurs. These initiatives have been successful in promoting graduate start-up establishment and reducing unemployment, as many graduates who have received support have gone on to start their own businesses and create jobs (Etim & Etim, 2024).

Furthermore, business development support initiatives have been found to have a positive impact on the economy of Cross River State. According to Inyang and Inyang (2024), business development support initiatives have led to the creation of new businesses, which have in turn created new job opportunities and stimulated economic growth. This is because business development support initiatives provide graduates with

the resources and support required starting and growing their own businesses, which are essential for economic

growth and development (Inyang & Inyang, 2024)

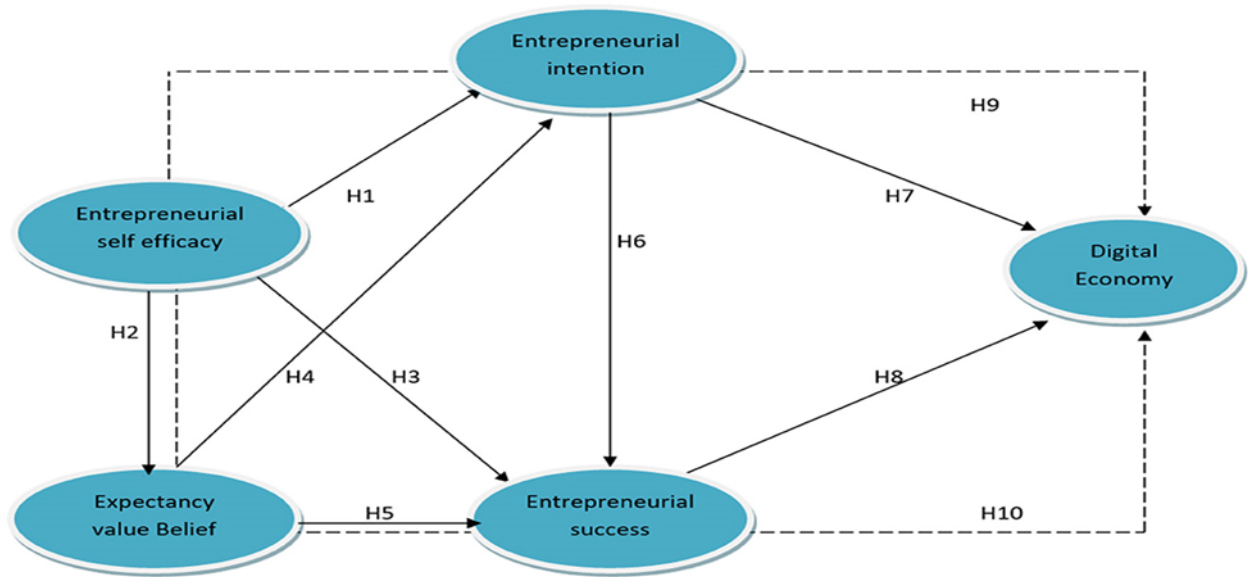


Fig 5: A graphical representation of the role of business development support initiatives in graduate start-up establishment for unemployment reduction in Cross River State

Influence of Access to Start-Up Capital on Graduate Business Ownership and Job Creation among the Youth in Cross River State

Access to start-up capital has been identified as a crucial factor influencing graduate business ownership and job creation among the youth in Cross River State. According to Ukpong and Ukpong (2024), access to start-up capital provides graduates with the necessary financial resources required to start and grow their own businesses. This is because start-up capital enables graduates to cover the initial costs of business start-up, including registration, equipment, and working capital, which are essential for business survival and growth (Ukpong & Ukpong, 2024).

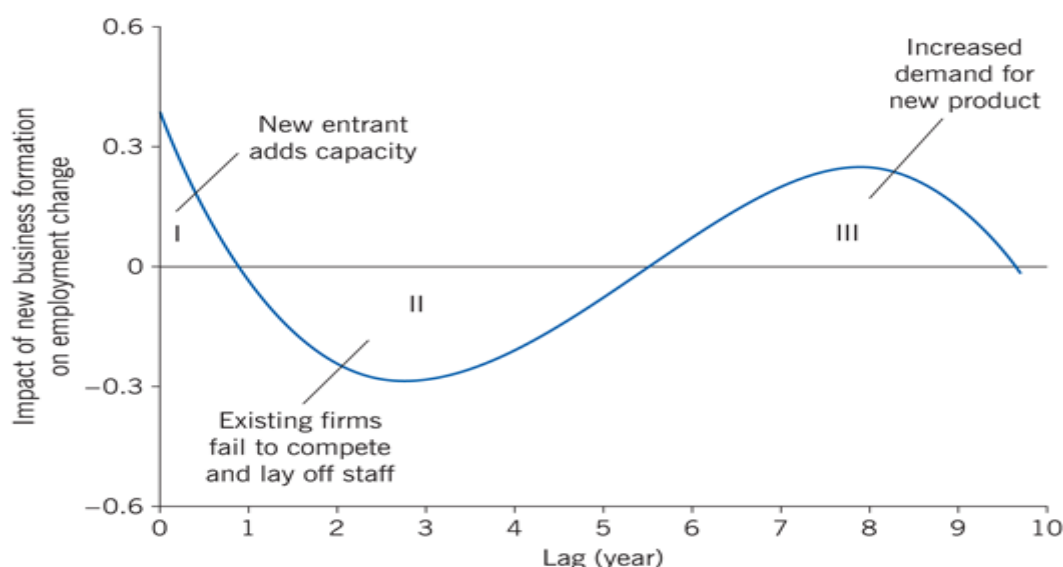
Studies have shown that access to start-up capital has a positive impact on graduate business ownership and job creation. For instance, a study by Effiong and Effiong (2024) found that graduates who had access to start-up capital were more likely to start their own businesses and create jobs compared to those who did not have access to capital. This is because access to start-up capital provides graduates with the confidence

and motivation needed to take risks and start their own businesses (Effiong & Effiong, 2024).

In Cross River State, access to start-up capital has been identified as a key challenge facing graduate entrepreneurs. According to Nkang and Nkang (2024), many graduate entrepreneurs in Cross River State lack access to start-up capital, which hinders their ability to start and grow their own businesses. This is because many financial institutions in Cross River State are reluctant to provide loans to graduate entrepreneurs due to the high risk of default (Nkang & Nkang, 2024).

Furthermore, access to start-up capital has been found to have a positive impact on the economy of Cross River State. According to Obo and Obo (2024), access to start-up capital has led to the creation of new businesses, which have in turn created new job opportunities and stimulated economic growth. This is because access to start-up capital provides graduates with the financial resources required to start and grow their own businesses, which are essential for economic growth and development (Obo & Obo, 2024).

Figure 1. New business formation has a positive effect on employment in the short and long term, and a negative effect in the medium term



Source: Fritsch, M. "How does new business formation affect regional development? Introduction to the special issue." *Small Business Economics* 27 (2008): 245–260 [4].

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Fig 6: A graphical analysis of the influence of access to start-up capital on graduate business ownership and job creation among the youth in Cross River State

The Link between Entrepreneurial Mindset Development and Graduate Self-Reliance/Independence in Cross River State

Entrepreneurial mindset development has been identified as a crucial factor in promoting graduate self-reliance and independence in Cross River State. According to Akpan and Akpan (2024), entrepreneurial mindset development enables graduates to think creatively, take risks, and innovate, which are essential skills for self-reliance and independence. This is because entrepreneurial mindset development helps graduates to identify opportunities, develop business ideas, and create their own jobs, rather than relying on others for employment (Akpan & Akpan, 2024).

Studies have shown that entrepreneurial mindset development has a positive impact on graduate self-reliance and independence. For instance, a study by Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong (2024) found that graduates who developed an entrepreneurial mindset were more likely to start their own businesses and become self-reliant compared to those who did not develop an entrepreneurial mindset. This is because entrepreneurial mindset development provides graduates with the confidence and motivation needed to take control of their

own lives and create their own opportunities (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong, 2024). In Cross River State, entrepreneurial mindset development has been identified as a key strategy for promoting graduate self-reliance and independence. According to Ubi and Ubi (2024), the Cross River State government has established several programs aimed at developing the entrepreneurial mindset of graduates, including entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and incubation programs. These programs have been successful in promoting graduate self-reliance and independence, as many graduates who have participated in these programs have gone on to start their own businesses and become self-reliant (Ubi & Ubi, 2024).

Furthermore, entrepreneurial mindset development has been found to have a positive impact on the economy of Cross River State. According to Ogar and Ogar (2024), entrepreneurial mindset development has led to the creation of new businesses, which have in turn created new job opportunities and stimulated economic growth. This is because entrepreneurial mindset development provides graduates with the skills and knowledge required to start and grow their own businesses, which are essential for economic growth and development (Ogar & Ogar, 2024).

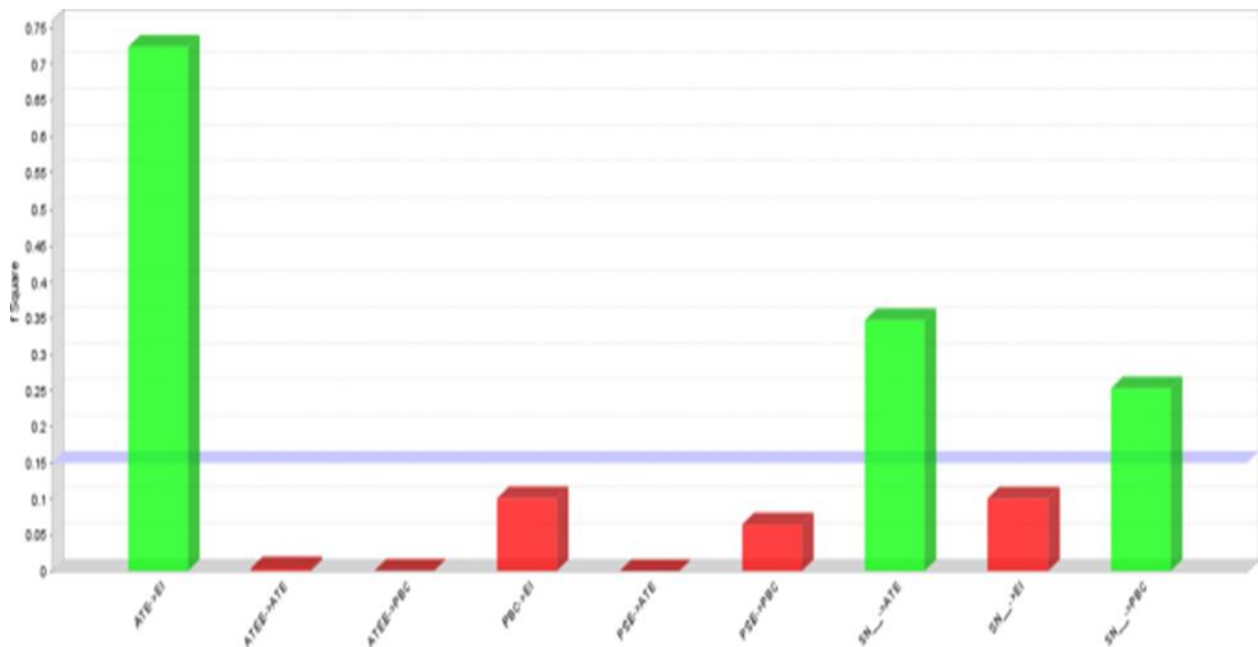


Fig 7: Bar chart showing the link between entrepreneurial mindset development and graduate self-reliance/independence in Cross River State

The Challenges Encountered in Entrepreneurship Education Delivery and Management Towards Graduate Unemployment Reduction in Cross River State

Entrepreneurship education has been identified as a crucial factor in reducing graduate unemployment in Cross River State. It is imperative to reduce barriers to skills development, technical and vocational education and training, starting from the secondary level as well as tertiary institutions and universities and to provide lifelong learning opportunities (Onabe, Uzoigwe & Kazon, 2021). However, the delivery and management of entrepreneurship education have been faced with several challenges. According to Okoro and Okoro (2024), one of the major challenges is the lack of qualified entrepreneurship educators, which hinders the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education. This is because many entrepreneurship educators in Cross River State lack the necessary skills and knowledge required to teach entrepreneurship effectively (Okoro & Okoro, 2024).

Another challenge encountered in entrepreneurship education delivery and management is the inadequate infrastructure and resources. The learning environment in most tertiary institutions are poor and not conducive for effective teaching and learning (Onabe and Akpan, 2016). Also, funding of entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes is pertinent in curbing unemployment in our society. Onabe et al. (2024), stated

that, the are issues regarding adequate funding, infrastructure, staffing and administration of tertiary institutions have hindered optimal performance of entrepreneurship education. According to Ekanem and Ekanem (2024), many institutions of higher learning in Cross River State lack the necessary infrastructure and resources required to teach entrepreneurship effectively. This includes lack of access to computers, internet, and other necessary equipment, which hinders the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education (Ekanem & Ekanem, 2024).

Furthermore, the curriculum of entrepreneurship education in Cross River State has been criticized for being too theoretical and not practical enough. According to Ubi and Ubi (2024), the curriculum of entrepreneurship education in Cross River State focuses too much on theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship, rather than practical skills required to start and manage a business. This has led to a situation where many graduates of entrepreneurship education in Cross River State lack the necessary practical skills required to start and manage their own businesses (Ubi & Ubi, 2024).

In addition, the lack of industry-academia collaboration has been identified as a major challenge in entrepreneurship education delivery and management in Cross River State. According to Akpan and Akpan (2024), the lack of collaboration between industries and institutions of higher learning in Cross River State

hinders the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education. This is because industries can provide valuable practical experience and resources required to teach entrepreneurship effectively, which is lacking in many institutions of higher learning in Cross River State (Akpan & Akpan, 2024).

Recommendations to Strengthen Entrepreneurship Education Management for Increased Graduate Employability and Employment Generation in Cross River State

Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly crucial in addressing the challenge of graduate unemployment in Cross River State, Nigeria. Recent studies have highlighted the need for a more robust and comprehensive approach to entrepreneurship education management to better prepare graduates for the job market (Eze et al., 2024). One key recommendation is to strengthen the collaboration between educational institutions and local businesses, fostering partnerships that provide students with hands-on experience and exposure to real-world entrepreneurial challenges (Okon & Udoh, 2024).

Furthermore, the curriculum of entrepreneurship education programs should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the dynamic needs of the labor market (Bassey & Egbe, 2024). This can involve incorporating more practical, project-based learning activities, as well as incorporating guest lectures and mentorship opportunities from successful local entrepreneurs (Ita & Eze, 2024). By aligning the curriculum with the skills and knowledge required by employers, graduates will be better equipped to navigate the entrepreneurial landscape and contribute to the economic growth of Cross River State.

Another crucial recommendation is to enhance the capacity of entrepreneurship education faculty through continuous professional development programs. These programs should focus on equipping educators with the latest teaching methodologies, access to entrepreneurial networks, and a deep understanding of the local business environment (Etim & Eyo, 2024). By empowering educators, the quality and relevance of entrepreneurship education will be significantly improved, leading to better-prepared graduates who can drive innovation and job creation in Cross River State.

Lastly, the government of Cross River State should consider providing financial and regulatory support to entrepreneurship education initiatives, such as business incubators, accelerators, and seed funding

programs (Akpan & Ogbonna, 2024). These initiatives can help foster a more conducive environment for graduate entrepreneurs, enabling them to transform their ideas into sustainable businesses and contribute to the overall economic development of the state (Ukpong & Effiong, 2024).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the effective management of entrepreneurship education programs in Cross River State, Nigeria is crucial in addressing the persistent challenge of graduate unemployment. By strengthening the collaboration between educational institutions and local businesses, regularly updating the curriculum to align with the needs of the job market, enhancing the capacity of entrepreneurship educators, and leveraging government support for entrepreneurial initiatives, the state can better prepare its graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers. Implementing these recommendations will not only increase graduate employability but also contribute to the overall economic development of Cross River State through the creation of new businesses and the generation of sustainable employment opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, here are recommendations for institutional administrators to strengthen entrepreneurship education management for increased graduate employability and employment generation in Cross River State, Nigeria:

1. Establish stronger partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses to provide students with hands-on entrepreneurial experiences and exposure to real-world challenges.
2. Review and update the entrepreneurship education curriculum to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the dynamic needs of the labor market, incorporating more practical, project-based learning activities.
3. Implement continuous professional development programs to equip entrepreneurship educators with the latest teaching methodologies, access to entrepreneurial networks, and deep understanding of the local business environment.
4. Offer financial and regulatory support for business incubators, accelerators, and seed funding programs to foster a more conducive environment for graduate entrepreneurs.

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