UNIUYO JOURNAL OF BUSINESS EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Vol.2 No.1, October 2025

BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTRES AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF UNIVERSITY BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES IN RIVERS STATE

Dr. AMADI, Anita Eberechi

Department of Business Education Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
anita.amadi@iaue.edu.ng +234 8034704223

Abstract

The study examined the impact of Business Incubation Centres on self-employment success of University Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Two research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. There was no sample nor sampling techniques due to the manageable size of the respondents. The instrument used to generate data for the study was a researcher's structured questionnaire titled "Business Incubation Centres on self-employment success of University Business Education graduates (BICOSESUBEG) The instrument was structured in a 4-point rating scale and subjected to validation by three experts that is two Business Educators and one Psychometrician. Out of the 233 copies of the instrument distributed 211 that were properly filled were retrieved and used for data analysis. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested with the use of Mean and standard deviation and Analysis of Variance respectively to ascertain Business incubation centres' impact on self-employment success of university Business Education graduates. Based on the analysis, the study revealed that mentorship and networking in Business incubation centre, enhance and have significant impact on self-employment success of university Business Education graduate in Rivers State to a moderate extent. The null hypothesis ($H0_1$) was rejected because the result indicated that graduates mentored in business incubation centres report high levels of self-employment success than those not mentored meaning that significant difference exist. Hypotheses (H02) which states that University Business Education graduates who networked in Business Incubation Centres does not differ significantly in self-employment success than those who did not network was retained. This means that there is no significant difference between graduates who networked and those that did not network. It was recommended among others that government, Administrators, and other stakeholders should provide more Business incubation centres to mentor university Business Education graduates and should also provide facilities that will encourage networking.

Keywords: Business Incubation Centre, Mentorship, Networking, Business Success.

Introduction

The evolution of Business incubation centres (BICs) emanated as a result of the multifaceted challenges faced by new businesses due to the dynamic nature of the market environment today. Initially the concept was focused on providing physical space and shared services but the modern Business incubation centres have expanded their focus and scope to include comprehensive support mechanisms tailored to specific needs of startups businesses. Business incubation centres (BICs) are an organisation designed to increase the growth and success of entrepreneurial ventures through an array of business support resources and services. The primary purpose of BICs is to facilitate the survival and growth rate of new enterprises during their formative stage by providing mentorship, funding, networking opportunities, office space and various other resources essential for business development.

Business Incubation Centre can be defined as a specialized organisation or facility designed to support the growth and success of new business and companies' at early-stage of the enterprises. Charamba (2023) highlighted the pivotal role of BICs in fostering entrepreneurship and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). For instance, a study analyzing the effectiveness of BICs in Windhoek, Namibia, found that these centres offer essential services such as business training, facilities, and a supportive environment conducive to business operations. However, the study also noted that not all services provided are equally effective for all businesses, suggesting the need for a more tailored approach to incubation support.

In the Nigerian context, Okiridu and Amadi (2017) asserted that Business Incubation Centres have been instrumental in promoting entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) development. The authors indicates that technology incubation programmes in Nigeria have significantly contributed to the growth and development of entrepreneurs by providing various services and initiatives aimed at enhancing entrepreneurial capabilities. Similarly, Bupo and Okiridu (2017) emphasized the role of incubation centres in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria, highlighting the importance of services such as business plan development, product design support, access to finance, and skill-based training. All these are made possible through training, internship and mentorship. Mentorship within Business Incubation Centres (BICs) significantly enhances the self-employment success of students by providing tailored guidance, skill development, networking opportunities, and emotional support. This multifaceted support system is crucial in transforming entrepreneurial ideas into viable and sustainable businesses. Mentorship programmes within BICs are instrumental in developing both soft and hard skills essential for entrepreneurship. A longitudinal study revealed that students engaged in mentorship exhibited a 45% improvement in leadership abilities and a 50% increase in strategic thinking skills. These enhancements are vital for effective business planning and execution (Okiridu & Iwhere: 2022).

Amadi (2023) asserts that mentorship positively impacts business outcomes. Mentored student entrepreneurs experienced a 35% higher average increase in revenue and were 50% more successful in securing funding compared to their non-mentored counterparts. Additionally, these entrepreneurs had a 60% higher survival rate after three years, underscoring the role of mentorship in ensuring business longevity. Mentors often provide access to extensive professional networks, facilitating connections with industry experts, potential investors, and collaborators. This networking capability is crucial for students to explore new markets and opportunities, thereby expanding their business horizons. Mentorship bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world business practices. Through shared experiences, mentors provide practical insights that help students avoid common pitfalls and adapt to dynamic business environments (Amaewhule, e'tal: 2019). Nigerian universities have integrated mentorship into their entrepreneurial programmes. For instance, the African Fintech Foundry at the University of Lagos offers one-on-one mentorship, guiding students through product development, market strategies, and scaling operations. Such initiatives have been pivotal in nurturing student-led startups and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset. Mentorship within Business Incubation Centres plays a critical role in enhancing the self-employment success of students by providing comprehensive support that encompasses skill development, business acumen, networking, and emotional

resilience. Mentorship equips student entrepreneurs with the tools necessary to thrive in the competitive business landscape.

Furthermore, the integration of Business Incubation Centers within universities has been identified as a critical factor in developing entrepreneurial ecosystems. A study by Okiridu and Lyndon (2023) reported' that the presence of incubation centres within academic institutions fosters innovation and entrepreneurship by providing a supportive environment for the commercialization of research and the development of startup ventures through networking.

Networking within Business Incubation Centres (BICs) significantly enhances the self-employment success through provision of access to resources, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities. These connections are crucial for transforming entrepreneurial ideas into viable businesses. Networking facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences among student entrepreneurs. Olayemi and Okafor (2023) found that peer-to-peer interactions within BICs promote lifelong learning and personal development, which are essential for entrepreneurial success. Through networking events, students gain access to mentors and industry professionals who provide guidance and support Sendawula e'tal (2023), such interactions enhance students' confidence and ability to navigate the business landscape. Networking within BICs opens doors for collaborations that can lead to innovative ventures. The University of Washington's CoMotion (2025) asserted that Incubator emphasizes networking as a key component in supporting startup success, highlighting its role in fostering partnerships. Engaging in networking activities increases the visibility of student startups, attracting potential investors and customers. The Open University of West Africa (2024) opined that Incubation model demonstrates how networking can lead to successful business launches and market penetration. Networking contributes to the development of an entrepreneurial mindset by exposing students to diverse perspectives and experiences. The Yale (2024) reported that entrepreneurial society provides networking opportunities that encourage innovation and entrepreneurial thinking among students. Networking within Business Incubation Centres plays a pivotal role in the self-employment success of students by facilitating knowledge exchange, mentorship, collaborations, and market access. Networking equips student entrepreneurs with the tools and confidence needed to thrive in the business world. These are possibly attained through adequate funding because there is no business that can flourish, leverage above competitors and become a going concern without fund.

Business Incubation Centres play a vital role in nurturing startups and fostering entrepreneurship by providing a comprehensive support system tailored to the diverse needs of new enterprises. By offering a combination of resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities, BICs contribute significantly to the economic development and innovation landscape. However, to maximize their effectiveness, it is essential for these centres to continuously adapt their services to meet the evolving challenges faced by startups in different contexts. Despite the numerous benefits associated with BICs, challenges remain as they fall short of adequate mentorship, networking and funding. For example, an exclusive survey of 300 fashion designers revealed that while prestigious prizes and incubation schemes provide short-term visibility and resources, they often fall short in ensuring long-term success and stability for designers. Issues such as excessive pressure, lack of tailored

support, and a gap between mentorship and practical business advice were identified, suggesting the need for incubation programmes to prioritize sustainable growth over immediate success.

Statement of the Problem:

A considerable resource has been allocated to business incubation initiatives to promote entrepreneurship among graduates. Business Incubation Centres play a vital role in nurturing startups and fostering entrepreneurship by providing a comprehensive support system tailored to the diverse needs of new enterprises. Business Education graduates, equipped with foundational knowledge in entrepreneurship and management, are anticipated to transit successfully into self-employment. Graduate unemployment continues to be a significant socio-economic issue, especially in developing nations. Yet, a substantial number encounter difficulties in launching or maintaining sustainable businesses after graduation. Business Incubation Centres (BICs) are established to address these challenges by offering essential support services, including mentorship, financial assistance, office space, networking platforms, and training in business development. Nevertheless, there remains a scarcity of concrete evidence assessing how effectively these centres facilitate self-employment among Business Education graduates.

The disconnect between the existence of incubation centres and the high rate of youth unemployment raises important questions: Are these centres effectively tailored to meet the unique needs of Business Education graduates? What specific aspects of BIC support such as funding, mentorship, or networking most significantly influence entrepreneurial outcomes? Moreover, are graduates equipped to leverage the opportunities provided by these centres? The lack of comprehensive data and analysis on these issues hampers the ability of policymakers, educators, and business support institutions to make informed improvements.

Therefore, this study seeks to critically investigate the impact of Business Incubation Centres on the self-employment success of Business Education graduates, with a focus on identifying the factors within incubation that contribute most significantly to sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes. By doing so, the research aims to contribute to more targeted and effective strategies for reducing graduate unemployment through Business incubation centres.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of Business Incubation Centres (BICs) on the self-employment success of University Business Education graduates in Rivers State, Specifically, the study aims to determine:

1. The extent to which mentorship in business incubation centers enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State.
2. The extent to which networking in business incubation centers enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does mentorship in Business incubation centre enhances self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does networking in Business incubation centre enhances self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. The extent to which mentorship in business incubation centers enhance self-employment success of University Business Education graduates in Rivers State is not significant
2. The extent to which networking in business incubation centers enhance self-employment success of University Business Education graduates in Rivers State is not significant

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in the three public universities in Rivers State namely, Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and University of Port Harcourt. The study was guided by two research questions and hypotheses. The population of the study consists 233 Postgraduate Business Education students for 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 academic session. The entire population was used as sample, hence there was no sampling due to the manageable and small size. The instrument for data collection was a researcher's structured questionnaire titled "Business Incubation Centres (BICs) on self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates'' (BICOSESUBEG) The instrument was structured on a 4-point rating scale response option of: High Extent (HE) -4 Points, Moderate Extent (ME) -3 Points, Low Extent (LE) -2 Points and Very Low Extent (VLE) - 1Point. The instrument was subjected to content validation by three experts, two Business Educators and one Psychometrician. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained by administering the instrument to twenty (20) Postgraduate students in the Department of Vocational Education, in Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State who were not part of the study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tool was used to have a reliability coefficient index of 0.88 showing that the instrument was reliable and appropriate for this study. Out of the two hundred and thirty-three copies of the instrument administered, two hundred and eleven were retrieved indicating 91% return rate. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule states that any Mean score above 2.50 was considered high extent and below was considered low extent for the research questions, while if the calculated value of 'r' is greater than the critical value of 'r', the hypothesis was not retained, otherwise, it was retained.

Results

Research Question 1. To what extent does mentorship in Business incubation centres enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Response on the extent mentorship in Business incubation centres enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State.

Sn	Item Statement	RSU N=85		Rmk	IAUE N=108		Rmk	UP N=21		Rmk
		X	SD		X	SD		X	SD	
1	To what extent has mentorship helped you identify viable self-employment opportunities?	3.19	0.65	HE	3.18	0.65	HE	3.15	0.65	HE
2	To what extent has mentorship enhanced your ability to start and sustain a business after graduation?	3.41	0.49	HE	3.41	0.49	HE	3.41	0.49	HE
3	To what extent has mentorship improved your entrepreneurial skills and competencies?	3.59	0.49	HE	3.59	0.49	HE	3.59	0.49	HE
4	To what extent has mentorship increased your confidence in pursuing self-employment?	3.00	1.10	HE	3.06	1.05	HE	3.10	1.02	HE
5	To what extent has mentorship helped you develop a realistic and achievable business plan?	3.13	0.72	HE	3.14	0.68	HE	3.14	0.66	HE
6	To what extent has mentorship contributed to your ability to generate income through self-employment?	3.33	0.70	HE	3.32	0.70	HE	3.31	0.71	HE
7	To what extent has mentorship helped you build a professional network beneficial for your self-employment journey?	2.92	0.86	ME	2.91	0.85	ME	2.89	0.84	ME
8	To what extent has mentorship supported your understanding of business operations and management?	3.13	0.72	HE	3.14	0.68	HE	3.14	0.66	HE
	Cluster Mean	**3.21**	**0.72**	**HE**	**3.22**	**0.70**	**HE**	**3.22**	**0.69**	**HE**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The analysis in Table 1. indicates that mentorship in Business incubation centre enhances self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State to a high extent (Cluster Means: 3.21, 3.22, and 3.22). Specifically, the study found that mentorship positively impacts business outcomes. Mentored student entrepreneurs experienced a higher average increase in revenue and are more successful in securing funding. Additionally, these entrepreneurs had a higher survival rate after many years, underscoring the role of mentorship in ensuring business longevity and making the business a going concern. Mentors often provide access to extensive professional networks, facilitating connections with industry experts, potential investors, and collaborators. Overall, the study highlights the significant impact of mentorship on university students' success in gaining employment, this has tremendously affected their confidence, adoption, and trust in Business incubation centres and there is no deviation in their opinions.

Research Question 2: To what extent do networking in Business incubation centres enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Response on the extent networking in Business incubation centres enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State

Sn	Item Statement	RSU N=85		Rmk	IAUE N=108		Rmk	UP N=21		Rmk
		X	SD		X	SD		X	SD	
1	Extent networking within the incubation centre connected you with potential business partners or collaborators?	2.92	0.93	ME	2.84	0.91	ME	2.78	0.90	ME
2	Extent networking has improved your access to business opportunities and markets relevant to your self-employment goals?	2.87	0.81	ME	2.86	0.82	ME	2.85	0.84	ME
3	Extent networking has enhanced your ability to attract customers or clients for your business?	2.34	0.87	ME	2.31	0.88	ME	2.29	0.89	ME
4	Extent has networking has provided you with useful insights and advice from experienced entrepreneurs?	2.47	0.72	ME	2.51	0.73	ME	2.54	0.73	ME
5	Extent networking has helped you gain access to funding or investment opportunities?	2.48	1.03	ME	2.98	0.95	ME	3.02	0.94	HE
6	Extent networking has increased									

	your exposure to industry trends and innovations relevant to your field?	2.35	1.07	ME	2.24	0.92	ME	2.17	0.87	ME
7	Extent networking has contributed to building your professional credibility and business reputation?	3.06	0.93	HE	2.38	1.07	ME	2.28	1.05	ME
8	Extent networking has helped you overcome challenges related to starting or growing your business?	2.28	0.94	ME	2.42	0.74	ME	2.42	0.74	ME
9	Extent networking has encouraged you to remain committed to self-employment after graduation?	2.33	1.07	ME	2.24	1.06	ME	2.36	1.05	ME
	Cluster Mean	**2.56**	**0.91**	**ME**	**2.52**	**0.88**	**ME**	**2.52**	**0.87**	**HE**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The analysis in Table 2 indicates that networking in Business incubation centres significantly impact self-employment of university Business Education graduate in Rivers State to a moderate extent (grand means: 2.56, 2.52, and 2.52). Specifically, the study found that networking within Business incubation centres (BICs) significantly enhance the self-employment success of students by providing access to resources, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities. These connections are crucial for transforming entrepreneurial ideas into viable businesses. Networking facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences among student entrepreneurs. The study also found that peer-to-peer interactions within BICs promote lifelong learning and personal development, which are essential for entrepreneurial success. Through networking events, students gain access to mentors and industry professionals who provide guidance and support. The respondents shared the same view as there was no deviation in their opinions.

Hypotheses 1

1. The extent to which mentorship in business incubation centers enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State is not significant

Table 3: ANOVA Result on the extent mentorship in Business incubation centres enhance self-employment success of University Business Education Graduates in Rivers State.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-Crit	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	0.54	2	0.27	3.54	.179	0.05	Rejected
Within Groups	40.69	231	0.08				
Total	41.23	233					

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The result in table 3 shows the summary of ANOVA result on the extent university Business Education graduated in Rivers State are mentored in business incubation centres is to a high extent. The result showed F- calculated of 3.54 and F-critical of 0.179 with degree of freedom of 2 and 231 between and within groups respectively. Since F-cal is greater than F-critical or table value, (F-cal>F-crit) and p-vale is lesser than the level of significance (0.03<0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis which states that University Business Education graduates mentored in Business Incubation Centres does not report higher levels of self-employment success than those who were not mentored was rejected. This means that graduates mentored in business incubation centres report high levels of self-employment success than those not mentored.

Hypotheses 2: The extent to which networking in business incubation centers enhance self-employment success of University Business Education graduates in Rivers State is not significant

Table 4 ANOVA Result on the extent networking in Business incubation centres enhances self-employment success university Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-Crit	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	0.65	2.00	0.33	0.99	.179	0.05	Retained
Within Groups	96.70	231.00	0.18				
Total	97.36	233.00					

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

The result in table 4 shows the summary of ANOVA result on the extent University Business Education graduates who networked in Business Incubation Centres is to a moderate extent. The result showed F- calculated of 0.99 and F- critical of 0.179 with degree of freedom of 2 and 231 between and within groups respectively. Since F-calculated is lesser than F-critical (F-cal < F-crit) and p-vale greater than level of significance (0.17>0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that University Business Education graduates who networked in Business Incubation Centres does not differ significantly in self-employment success than those who did not network was retained. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of university Business Education who networked and those that did not network.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that mentorship in Business incubation centre enhances self-employment success, the study found that mentorship positively impacts business outcomes. Mentored student entrepreneurs experienced a higher average increase in revenue and are more successful in securing funding compared to their non-mentored counterparts. Mentored student entrepreneurs had a higher survival rate, mentorship ensures business longevity and making the business a going concern. The study highlights the significant impact of mentorship on university students' success in gaining employment, this has tremendously affected their confidence, adoption, and trust in Business incubation centre. The result in table 3 showed F- calculated value of 3.54 and F-critical of 0.179 with degree of freedom of 2 and 231 between and within groups respectively. Since F-cal is greater than F-crit, (F-cal>F-crit) and p-vale is lesser than the level of significance (0.03<0.05). Thus, the null hypothesis which states that University Business Education graduates mentored in Business Incubation Centres does not report higher levels of self-employment success than those who were not mentored was rejected. This means that graduates mentored in business incubation centres report high levels of self-employment success than those not mentored.

The analysis in Table 2 indicates that networking in Business incubation centres significantly impact self-employment of university Business Education graduate in Rivers State to a moderate extent with a (grand means: 2.56, 2.52, and 2.52). The study found that networking within Business incubation centres (BICs) significantly enhances the self-employment success. The study also found that peer-to-peer interactions within BICs promote lifelong learning and personal development, which are essential for entrepreneurial success. Through networking events, students gain access to mentors and industry professionals who provide guidance and support

The result in table 4 showed F- calculated value of 0.99 and F- critical of 0.179 with degree of freedom of 2 and 231 between and within groups respectively. Since F-calculated is lesser than F-critical (F-cal < F-crit) and p-vale greater than level of significance (0.17>0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that University Business Education graduates who networked in Business Incubation Centres does not differ significantly in self-employment success than those who did not network was retained. Indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of university Business Education who networked and those that did not network.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Business incubation centres have a big impact on self-employment success of Business Education graduates. Mentored student entrepreneurs experienced a higher increase in revenue and are more successful in securing funding, has a higher survival rate, ensures business longevity and making the business a going concern, this has tremendously affected their confidence, adoption, and trust in Business incubation centre.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

1. The policymakers, mentors, and other stakeholders should provide more Business incubation centres to mentor university Business Education graduates.
2. The policymakers, mentors, and other stakeholders should provide facilities that will encourage networking in Business incubation centres.

References

Amadi, E. A. (2023). Mentor-Mentee Skills competencies and entrepreneurial development of business education students in South-South, Nigeria: *Unpublished thesis submitted to Postgraduate school, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt*. for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in department of business education.

Amaewhule, W.A., Okiridu, O.S.F. & Woko, L.N.(2019). E-mentoring preparation of beginning business education teachers in Nigerian Universities: *Nigerian Journal of Business Education 6*(2) 73-83.

Bupo, G.O. & Okiridu, O.S.F. (2017). Challenges faced by business education students During their tudents Industrial Work Experience Scheme: Suggestions for Institution-private sector partnership: *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*. 4(1), 269-278.

Charanba, M & Ladzani T. (2020). An analysis of effectiveness of business incubation centres for small and medium enterprise success. *A case in Windhoek, Namibia 50(4).*

Sendawula, K., Kisubi, M.K., Najjinda, S., Nantale, H.and Kabbera S. (2023). The efficacy of entrepreneurial networking and innovation in fostering the performance of small businesses in Uganda. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Research*

Olayemi, T., & Okafor, J. (2023). Influence of Networking on Start-Up Development in Incubation Hubs. *ResearchGate*.

Okiridu, O.S.F., & Amadi, A.E. (2017). Planning and Achievement of Educational Objectives of Basic Level Programme of Secondary Schools in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area. *Journal of Technical and Science Education (JOTASE).* A Publication of Technical and Science Education, Rivers State University, 20 (1&2). 156-166.

Okiridu, O.S.F. & Lyndon, B.O. (2023). Awareness on the utilization and commercialization of Business Education research reports in Rivers State Universities. *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research* 11(4):25-33.

Okiridu, O.S.F. & Iwhere, C.C. (2022). Internship programme and entrepreneurial skills development of Business Education students in Rivers State universities. *International journal of research publication and reviews 3*(7) 2023-2029.

Open University of West Africa. (2024). Incubate: *Building the West African Startup Ecosystem.*

Yale Entrepreneurial Society. (2024). *About YES.*