

Navigating the Reasons behind Joining a Business Incubation Programme: Empirical Evidence from Entrepreneurs in South Africa

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Abstract: This study aims to examine why entrepreneurs choose to join the incubation programme in urban areas, South Africa. The study utilised a quantitative method approach to collect data by way of questionnaires. The data was collected using structured questionnaires. The research participants for this study were limited to entrepreneurs in the incubation programme in Western Cape Province and Gauteng Province in South Africa during the course of the study. Populations of all 65 (incubatees) were deemed suitable for the study. This paper provides an insight into the reasons entrepreneurs chose to join the incubation programme. The findings indicated that entrepreneurs join the incubation programme to acquire entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurial education, funding, business networks, Access to technology, sported a gap in the market and employment creation.

Keywords: business incubatees; business incubators; entrepreneurship; growth; South Africa

JEL Classification: L26

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship, have been recognised for the social development and the engine to economic growth, the country's economy depends of a large number of entrepreneurial activities (Garwe & Fatoki, 2012; Al Mamun, Nawi & Shamsudin, 2016). Entrepreneurship activities in South Africa help in the distribution of wealth and inequality, thus gold and other precious resources play a crucial role in the

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country. However, South Africa still suffers from high number of unemployment, income inequality and poverty. Many countries around the world are still recognising the significant small enterprises make in addressing poverty and inequality (Diedericks, 2015), entrepreneurship is necessary to provide job opportunities to the people. In the same views Choto (2015) argue that income generation, needed employment and growth stems from entrepreneurial activities. According to Lose, Maziriri and Madinga (2016) the performance of an entrepreneurs is based on starting new small enterprise, willingness to look for new opportunity, and development a business idea into a realistic. In addition, the strategic role of the entrepreneur as an agent of economic transformation in society is visible in employment and wealth generation, stimulation of indigenous entrepreneurship or promotion of entrepreneurial culture (Shenura, Haile & Negash, 2016, p. 137). Moreover, entrepreneurs drive innovation and speed up structural changes in the economy, thereby making an indirect contribution to productivity (Herrinton, Kew & Kew, 2008; Tullok, 2010). Despite the benefits of having entrepreneurs in an economy, in today's post-modern era, entrepreneurs are joining business incubation programmes so as to succeed in their entrepreneurial businesses.

2. Objective of the Study

This paper aims at examining why entrepreneurs choose to join the incubation programme in urban areas, South Africa.

3. Significance and Contribution of the Study

In South Africa, business incubation programmes are still evolving. Thus, the study may contribute towards entrepreneurial growth and improvement. The research may assist industry experts and government officials to prioritise the benefits of entrepreneurship activities in starting new business start-ups and in academic institutions to establish the entrepreneurial skills to students. The study is significant to business incubators and SMEs, given that it encourages entrepreneurs choose to join the incubation programme to acquire entrepreneurial skills which it may improve the growth and survival rate of business ventures. This research also contributes to theory of incubation and the body of research knowledge on business incubation. Furthermore, the significance of the study enhances incubation literature in Africa.

4. Literature Review

In order to address the aim of the research, it is of importance to have established a sound literature base around which the study was built. This section presents a review of the literature related to the purpose of the study. The review was undertaken in order to eliminate duplication of what has been done and provide a clear understanding of existing knowledge base in the problem area. The literature was reviewed under the following headings: functions of an entrepreneur and why entrepreneur join the incubators.

4.1. Functions of an Entrepreneur

The functions of an entrepreneur can be categorised into four functions which include risk taking, managerial, promotional and commercial function (Sinha, 2015). Firstly, The entrepreneur faces uncertainly and bears risks in his or her business uncertainly comprising those risks against which it is not possible to insure (Akrani, 2010). Some other risk faced include; the risk of new entry into the market, risk of failure. Secondly, the entrepreneur also plays a managerial function. Managing involves planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling (Yipeng, 2017, p. 52). In order to run a successful business, the entrepreneur has to plan on how to run his or her business, manage human resources, material, finances and organize the production of goods and services (Redondo & Camerore, 2017, p. 284). A properly managed entrepreneurial venture yields desired results (Horan, O'Dwyer & Tiernan, 2011, p. 117). Thirdly, the promotional function involves identifying and selection of business idea, preparing of a business plan, and finance requirements (Sinha, 2015). After idea generation, a business plan need to be put in place as a road map to how the business operation will work out and identifying sources of funds and approach investors. Lastly, The commercial function includes the following aspects: production/ manufacturing, marketing and accounting. An entrepreneur goes beyond reaching set of goals and constantly strives for excellence, exploring other higher goals in order to achieve growth and development of his or her business (Sinha, 2015).

4.2. Importance of an Entrepreneur

The importance of an entrepreneur will be categorised into four functions which include: economic growth and development; new businesses and employment; creation of value and equitable distribution of income. Firstly, entrepreneurs are the main contributors to economic growth, development, and prosperity; they bring a large share of technological innovation in products and production processes, which drive economic transformation and international trade (Spulber, 2008, p. 2). Secondly, Shrivastava (2013, p. 1) identified entrepreneurs as people who create new business which in turn result in employment creation for both the entrepreneur and the other individuals employed in the new venture. Thirdly, entrepreneurs create extraordinary value through conducting entrepreneurial activities, which result in

sustained competitive advantage and greater returns for different parties involved (Monsson & Jorgensen, 2014). They bring both economic and social value, economic value in the sense of productivity; growth and social include poverty reduction, enhancement of job satisfaction and personal relationships (Ahmad & Seymour, 2007). Entrepreneurs contribute to poverty reduction in developing countries (AL-Mabaraki & buster, 2010). Lastly, entrepreneurial ventures allow for equitable distribution of income, which in turn contributes to wealth distribution, the operation of the entrepreneurs is flexible and they offer personalized services (Dlodlo & Dhurup, 2010, p. 165). Dwivedi and Mishra (2013, p. 50) identified entrepreneurial ventures as a drive for female empowerment.

4.3. Why Entrepreneur Join the Incubators

Choto (2015, p. 40), identified the following aspects: lack of skills and expertise, funding challenges, technology and access to business networks as the reasons why entrepreneurs join business incubators. In order to be successful in their entrepreneurial ventures, entrepreneurs should have skills and expertise in the industry in which they operate, and should be able to identify gaps and opportunities in the market and take advantage of them (Kirsty, 2010, p. 3). The skill to identify gaps and opportunities is lacking amongst many entrepreneurs hence the need to attend business incubation programs. Kirsty (2010, p. 3) mentions that access to finance is the greatest challenge that entrepreneurs face which has contributed to them being involved in incubation programs. Financial institutions are quite nervous to lend money to new businesses owing to the risk of failure associated with them; entrepreneurs should find a founding partner who will act as a mentor, as well as give access to funding (Stott, Stone & Fae, 2016). This can be achieved through business incubator support, as it is easy for them to obtain funding from investors, banking institutions and the government. Most entrepreneurs lack the necessary resources that are required to successfully run their business. Business incubators give entrepreneurs access to better and improved technology, which enables them to run their businesses effectively and to remain competitive (Choto, 2015, p. 40). Lastly, Kirsty (2010, p. 4) described the market as not merely an economic institution; it is also governed by social networks which enables the sharing of information to necessitate innovation. Business networks enables the entrepreneur to be successful even with limited funding (Choto, 2015, p. 40). Vegitti & Adoscalitei (2017), mention that business incubators have established networks that they can connect entrepreneurs to, and they also run workshops where social interaction is encouraged, hence the need for entrepreneur to join the incubation programs.

5. Research Design and Methodology

Ostlund, Kidd, Wegstrom and Rowa-Dewar (2011) describe a research design as the strategy of a study and the plan by which the strategy is to be carried out.

According to Malhotra (2010) it is the master plan for directing a research study. There are three major research designs, namely exploratory research, (which primarily involves qualitative data), causal research and descriptive research (both of which primarily involve quantitative data) (Malhotra, 2010, p. 103). Maloi (2011) points out that descriptive research studies are constructed to answer who, what, when, where and how questions. As a result, descriptive research may be used to describe the characteristics of a target population, make predictions, determine the relationship between variables, and/or measure perceptions (Malhotra, 2010). This study seeks to examine why entrepreneurs choose to join the incubation programme in urban areas, South Africa. Therefore, this study followed a descriptive research design and, as such, the quantitative approach to data collection was followed, whereby a survey questionnaire was used to gather the required data. The research questions required individual and quantified responses from entrepreneurs; therefore questionnaire survey was an ideal means of getting such information (Veal, 2011). A respondent-completed structured questionnaire method was employed to obtain information from 65 entrepreneurs. The structured questionnaires used in the study were based on information obtained during the literature study (secondary research). A two section questionnaire was designed to collect data from the participants. Section A elicited general and biographical information about respondents. Section B requested participants' reasons as to why they choose to join an incubation programme in urban areas, South Africa. Moreover, all the responses on the measuring instruments were measured by a five-point Likert scale whereby, 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree/neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.

Antonites and Kliphuis (2011) define a unit of analysis as the main body that is being analysed in a study. Cooper and Schindler (2011, p. 166) define a unit of analysis as the entity being studied and which the researcher decides how the data should be analyzed for the study. For instance, people, groups or individuals could be a unit of analysis in a study. In this study the unit of analysis is the South African entrepreneur in the Cape metropolitan area as well as the Johannesburg metropolitan area.

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) define a population as any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the research. In research, population refers to the aggregate of all the units that are eligible to participate in a study (Creswell & Plano, 2007; Salkind, 2012). In addition, a population is defined by Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2011, p. 53) as a group of entities with a common set of characteristics. In this study the population of relevance will consist of all entrepreneurs in the incubation programme in Western Cape Province and Gauteng Province in South Africa during the course of the study.

This research was undertaken in the Cape Metropolitan area of the Western Cape as well as in the Johannesburg Metropolitan area of the Gauteng Province. Since two

of the researchers are reside in Western Cape and the other two are residing in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The researchers found it convenient to conduct the study in these locations.

A sample can be defined as a portion of a larger population (Dube, Roberts-Lombard & Van Tonder, 2015, p. 243). Roets (2013) defines sample size as the count of factors involved in the study. According to Choto and Tengeh (2014, p. 97), a sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 is appropriate for most research studies. Therefore, this research study utilized 65 participants.

6. Reliability, Validity and Data Analysis

Rubin and Babbie (2011, p. 194) point out that reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same result each time. The main purpose of reliability is to provide consistent results and minimise errors and biases (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p. 150). To guarantee reliability and viability, a pilot study was conducted to refine the questionnaire and study protocol. The intended objectives of the study were evaluated in relation to the data collection. The process was repeat post data collection and analysis to ensure that the findings are error free and unbiased. Mouton (2001, p. 108) assert that data analysis is breaking up the data into manageable patterns, themes, connections and trends and to understand the various constitutive elements of the data through an inspection of the relationship between concepts and constructs to evaluate trends that can be identified or isolated. A Microsoft Excel spread sheet was used to enter all the data and in order to make inferences of the data obtained, the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 24.0 for Windows was used to code data and to run the statistical analysis as well as to analyze the data with descriptive statistics as the ultimate goal. Hence, the results are tabulated and presented in percentages.

7. Results and Discussion

This section is dedicated to displaying and discussing the results of the study.

7.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents Utilizing Descriptive Statistics

Liphadzi (2015, p. 72) explains that descriptive statistics are used to present quantitative descriptions in a manageable form. The main goal of using descriptive statistics is to describe and summarise the characteristics of a sample (O'Leary, 2010, p. 237).

The profile of sampled respondents in the survey comprised 18 males and 47 females (representing 28% and 72% respectively). This gender composition tends to suggest

that female entrepreneurs are substantially more likely to be involved in a business incubation program than male entrepreneurs. Table 1 also provides an outline of the respondents' locations. Findings indicate that the respondents 51% (n=33) resides in Cape Town and 49% percent (n=32) resides in Johannesburg. The age structure of the sample, as illustrated by table 1, shows that only 20% (n=13) of the respondents were under the age of 30 years, 25% (n=16) were aged between 30 and 39 years, 32% (n=21) represented the 40–49 year age group, 15% (n=10) represented the 50–59 year age group and a meagre 8% (n=5) of the sample were 60 years of age and above. The majority 32% (n=21) of the respondents were aged 40–49 years. Therefore, it seems that the entrepreneurs who are part of an incubation programme are concentrated within the age bracket of 40–49 years. Lastly in terms of formal education levels, Table 1 shows that the majority of the individuals do not have any formal education As shown by table 1, illustrate that 79% (n=51) of the participants had no formal education, 12% (n=8) had basic education, while 6% (n=4) had a diploma, and only 3% (n=2) had a degree.

7.2. Reasons Behind why Entrepreneurs Join an Incubation Programme

The charts show specific reasons to attend the business incubation programme.

Table 1. The need of entrepreneurial skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	Strongly	1	1.5	1.5
		Disagree	3	4.6	4.6
	Neutral	2	3.1	3.1	9.2
	Agree	30	46.2	46.2	55.4
	Strongly	29	44.6	44.6	100.0
agree					
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 show that 1(1.5%) of the respondents said strongly disagree; 3(4.6%) replied disagree; 2(3.1%) said they were Neutral; 30(46.2%) agreed and 29(44.6%) answered strongly agree. It is thus revealed that entrepreneurs join an incubation programme in order to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. Fatoki (2012) points out that entrepreneurial skills include creativity, innovation, risk-taking and ability to interpret successful entrepreneurial role models and identification of opportunities.

The findings of this study are in line with the previous researchers such as Adegbite (2001) who mentions that some entrepreneurs need professional assistance and business-plan services in the incubation programme. In addition, these results are in line with a study conducted by Lose (2016) to investigate the role of business incubators in facilitating the entrepreneurial skills requirements of small and medium

size enterprises in the Cape metropolitan area, South Africa. The empirical results of the study revealed that entrepreneurs join the incubation programme to attain both growth and entrepreneurial skills.

Table 2. The need of entrepreneurial education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	7.7	7.7	7.7
	Disagree	12	18.5	18.5	26.2
	Neutral	5	7.7	7.7	33.8
	Agree	23	35.4	35.4	69.2
	Strongly agree	20	30.8	30.8	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 indicated that 5 (7.7) of the respondents said strongly disagree; 12 (18.5%) replied disagree; 5 (7.7%) said they were Neutral; 24 (35.4%) agreed and 20(30.8%) answered strongly agree. It is therefore revealed that entrepreneurs join an incubation programme because they seek entrepreneurial education. Kunene (2008, p. 118) indicates that entrepreneurship can be taught and education can actually beneficially foster entrepreneurship. In addition, Freeman (2000, p. 372) as well as Massey (2004, p. 458) explain that entrepreneurship can actually be taught and learnt. Furthermore, Entrepreneurship education is said to be very important in the nurturing of the entrepreneur (Parhankangas & Ehrlich, 2014). A study carried out by Gans and Scott (2013) revealed that entrepreneurship education produces self-sufficient enterprising individuals, produces successful business and industry leaders, enhances a graduate's ability to create wealth and produces champions of innovation. Incubators provide their clients (entrepreneurs) with educational services and counselling (e.g., the creation of business plans, counselling related to the acquisition of funds for entrepreneurship, the elaboration of the marketing strategy, mediation with contacts, and the like (Lesáková, 2012). Therefore, from the authors' explanations this substantiates or justifies the reason behind joining an incubation programme.

Table 3. Access to funding

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	7.7	7.7	7.7
	Disagree	9	13.8	13.8	21.5
	Neutral	4	6.2	6.2	27.7
	Agree	29	44.6	44.6	72.3
	Strongly agree	18	27.7	27.7	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 sought responses regarding the extent to which entrepreneurs agreed that they join the incubation programme because they seek to have access to funding. The majority 9 (44.6%) of respondents stated that they agree that access to funding makes them join an incubation programme. The next high frequency 18 (27.7%) was for strongly agree. It is thus revealed that entrepreneurs in the Cape Town metropolitan Area as well as the Johannesburg Metropolitan area join an incubation programme in order to have access to funding since through a business incubator support, it is easier for entrepreneurs to obtain funding from investors, banking institutions and the government. These results are in consistence with the works of Fatoki (2014) who elucidates that entrepreneurs need funding to be able to achieve a competitive advantage in the market.

Table 4. Access to business networks

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	9.2	9.2	9.2
	Disagree	9	13.8	13.8	23.1
	Neutral	18	27.7	27.7	50.8
	Agree	15	23.1	23.1	73.8
	Strongly Agree	17	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that access to business networks makes them join an incubation programme. In addition, Table 4 indicates that a total of 19(26.2%) respondents strongly agree that the ability to network with other entrepreneurs who form part of a business incubation programme makes them to join a business incubation programme, followed by 15(23.1%) of respondents agreed, while some 18(27.7%) who said they were neutral with the statement. In addition, the results of this study are in line with the study that was conduct by Dawson, Fuller-Love, Sinnott, & O'Gorman (2011) to investigate entrepreneurs' perceptions of business networks. The results of this study indicate that networks may be a cost-effective way of encouraging and supporting entrepreneurs.

Table 5. Access to technology

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Disagree	3	4.6	4.6	6.2
	Neutral	9	13.8	13.8	20.0
	Agree	26	40.0	40.0	60.0

Strongly Agree	26	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that they join business incubation programmes because they seek to have access to technology. 1(1.5%) of the respondents said strongly disagree; 3(4.6%) replied disagree; 9(13.8%) said they were Neutral; 26(40%) agreed and 26(40%) answered strongly agree. It is therefore revealed that entrepreneurs join an incubation programme because they are in need of technology so as to run their entrepreneurial businesses successfully. Choto, (2015:40) and Lose & Tengeh (2016) states that business incubators give survivalist entrepreneurs access to better and improved technology, as it is always changing.

Table 6. Lack of unemployment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	12.3	12.3	12.3
	Disagree	21	32.3	32.3	44.6
	Neutral	15	23.1	23.1	67.7
	Agree	15	23.1	23.1	90.8
	Strongly Agree	6	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that they join business incubation programmes because they were unemployed. 8(12.3%) of the respondents said strongly disagree; 21(32%) replied disagree; interestingly both Neutral and agreed respondents share 15(23.1%) and 6(9.2%) answered strongly agree. The South African economy has been experiencing low economic growth, high unemployment and an unsatisfactory level of poverty for the past years (Mandipaka, 2014). Furthermore, South Africa has been described as a country where poverty is very high and this is unacceptable (Statistics South Africa, 2014); youth unemployment in particular is very high (Herrington, Kew & Kew, 2009).

Table 7. Identified a gap in the market

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	4.6	4.6	4.6
	Disagree	4	6.2	6.2	10.8
	Neutral	15	23.1	23.1	33.8
	Agree	34	52.3	52.3	86.2
	Strongly agree	9	13.8	13.8	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that they join the incubation programme because there was a gap in the market to start their business. The majority 34(52.3%) of respondents stated that they agree that they spotted a gap before joining an incubation programme. The next high frequency 15(23.1%) were neutral, while 9(13.8) of the participants strongly agreed that there was a need to start the business.

Table 8. Employment creation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	9.2	9.2	9.2
	Disagree	6	9.2	9.2	18.5
	Neutral	6	9.2	9.2	27.7
	Agree	33	50.8	50.8	78.5
	Strongly agree	14	21.5	21.5	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed that they join business incubation programmes because they wanted to create employment for locals. 6 (9.2%) of the respondents said strongly disagree; 6 (9.2%) replied disagree; 6 (9.2%) said they were Neutral; a majority of 33 (50.8%) agreed and 14 (21.5%) answered strongly agree. Choto (2015) concur that entrepreneurs in the incubation programme do contribute to economic development and job creation.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study needed to be qualified in light of the limitations. In the light of the findings/results, it is recommended that an understanding of how. In spite of the contribution of this study, it has its limitations which provide avenues for future researches. First and most significantly, the present research is conducted from the entrepreneurs in Gauteng province. Perhaps if data collection is expanded to include other provinces, findings might be more insightful. Future studies should therefore consider this recommended research direction. There is also the problem of common method bias because qualitative research was purely used in this study. It was going to be more robust if the study included both qualitative and quantitative methods. All in all, these suggested future avenues of study stand to immensely contribute new knowledge to the existing body of entrepreneurship literature, a context that happen to be less researched by some researchers in Africa.

9. Conclusion

In this study the key words has been well introduced, key questions and aims of the study have been identified, a literature review has been conducted to have an overview or to gain a depth understanding of the concepts like entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, innovation, challenges and solutions. Innovation is imperative because it allows the organisation to adapt to change, to increase market share, to meet the buyers' standards or requirements and lastly to improve productivity or reduce production costs. On the academic side, this study makes a significant contribution to the organisational behaviour literature by systematically exploring the impact of entrepreneurship, efficiency and effectiveness in the context of entrepreneurs in the Gauteng province. It has also been discovered that in today's highly competitive global environment an entrepreneur's ability to introduce innovations is a key success factor for sustaining competitive advantage.

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