Hybrid Strategy Implementation in a Hybrid Youth-Training Organisation

A framework for hybrid strategy implementation based on a case-study of a hybrid youth training organisation in Lagos, Nigeria.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

by

Chukwuemeka U. Azinge

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Dedication

To the Almighty and Merciful God who guided me every step of the way and provided relief and support all through this long and often uncertain journey.

To my supervisor, Dr. Carola Wolf, who empathetically and dexterously supervised my thesis at a crucial stage. I owe you a debt of gratitude for believing in my ability to surmount all hurdles and achieve success.

To my sacrificial mother, Dr (Mrs) Edith Nkechi Azinge, without whose moral and financial support I could never have attempted a DBA.

To my very dear wife, Lucia, always handy with a look of warmth and reassurance as I toiled tirelessly to see this through.

To my beloved daughters, Zita and Zioma, I hope this serves as a continuous inspiration that you can, indeed, achieve ANYTHING you set your mind to.

To my academic and professional colleagues who provided mental support and the right degree of encouragement, words will never be enough to express my sincere gratitude.

...The future is ours to conquer!

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work is my own. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. All quoted sources have been acknowledged.

Chukwuemeka U. Azinge

Date: December 2021

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List of Acronyms

AL	Action Learning
AR	Action Research
ARC	Action Research Cycle
ARQ	Action Research Question
CUPE	Customer Performance

ECNL	Emedith Consulting Nigeria Limited
ELYA	Emedith Low-cost Youth-entrepreneurship Academy
FIPE	Financial Performance
GEDI	Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
GLPE	Organisational Growth and Learning Perspective
IPPE	Internal Processes Performance
POD	Point of Difference
SDI	Strategic Decision Implementation
SIS	Strategic Information System
USP	Unique Selling Proposition

Abstract

Background

A lingering organisational problem among hybrid youth training organisations in Lagos, Nigeria, is the lack of any clear-cut initial competitive strategy that ultimately affects the competitiveness of the organisation. Empirical evidence suggests that sole strategy implementation is less efficient than hybrid strategy implementation due to the dynamic business environment leading to a change in consumer behaviour and expectations.

Purpose

To apply Action Research methodology to developing and applying a framework for hybrid competitive strategy implementation in a hybrid youth training organisation hitherto without a competitive strategy.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This qualitative action research study will focus on Emedith Consulting Nigeria Limited (ECNL) as the single case-study and will involve Action Learning (AL) collaboration with managers from other hybrid youth training organisations within Lagos, consultants employed at ECNL, as well as semi-structured open-ended interviews with target customers.

Findings

The results from this study are a framework for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation, a customer-driven hybrid competitive strategy implementation process for ECNL, and indices by which the efficacy of ECNL training services can be measured

Originality/Value

This study on hybrid competitive strategy implementation in a hybrid youth-training organisation reveals practical conclusions and provides a basis for improved competitiveness through implementation of the identified customer-oriented framework.

Keywords

Hybrid competitive strategy, hybrid organisation, competitiveness, youth entrepreneurship training

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background.

A hybrid organisation is defined as an organisation with both a social mission and a profit motive. Hybrid organisations are sometimes referred to as a social enterprise, mixed-mission, blended value, triple bottom line, creative capitalist organisations (Eldar, 2017). The case-study organisation - Emedith Consulting Nigeria Limited (ECNL)- is a hybrid youth training organisation located in Lagos, Nigeria, with a social mission premised on reducing youth unemployment by training and mentoring indigent aspiring and budding youth entrepreneurs such that they become profitable enough to employ other youths, thereby ultimately reducing youth unemployment. ECNL commenced business without any competitive strategy, as the focus was more of the social mission of reducing youth unemployment through youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring, than on competitiveness. ECNL was able to maintain competitiveness due to its unintentional low-cost strategy that enabled focus-customers afford our youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring sessions. However, due to a dynamic business environment, changing customer expectations and definition as to what constitutes value, in addition to industry transformation and unsatisfactory financial performance, ECNL now requires a clear-cut intentional competitive strategy to foster superior organisational performance and to improve the competitiveness of the organisation. The organisation commenced business in February 2011 with a staff strength of 5 employees inclusive of the manger-researcher who is the Head-Consultant (HC) of ECNL. As HC, I oversee the day-to-day affairs of the organisation and I am equally responsible for its strategic direction and position. Over the past two to three years ECNL has consistently averaged 32% uptake of its scheduled course offerings annually, which is much lower than a previous average of 70%. Customer feedback suggests that customers are beginning to focus on other service attributes in addition to low-costs, which is the major reason for the reduction in training uptake. In other words, ECNL target customers require a more tailored approach to their needs, hence the need for a competitive strategy to enable customer perception of all round service value, and improved performance for the organisation.

Empirical evidence suggests that a traditional sole-strategy implementation approach of cost leadership or differentiation instigated by Porter (1980, 1996), is not effective in the dynamic and changing business environment, with increasing competition and industry uncertainty, which gives rise to the need for and a more dynamic, robust and complex strategy implementation (Chakravarthy, 1997). This study aligns to the viewpoint that a hybrid strategy of both cost-leadership and differentiation presents a more dynamic and robust approach to strategy for managers and practitioners that is fitting for the times and enables superior organisational performance when compared to an implemented sole-strategy (Phillips, Chang and Buzzell, 1983; Hill, 1988; Murray, 1988; Beal and Yasai-Ardekani, 2000; Proff, 2000; Spanos, Zaralis and Lioukas, 2004, Pertusa-Ortega, Molina-Azorín and Claver-Cortés, 2009).

Also, the need for managers and practitioners to implement a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid organisation is premised on the desire for improved competitiveness, and since it has been accepted that a customer perception of service advantage is a major source of organisational competitiveness (Bastic, 2004; Blankson et al., 2006; McNally et al. 2010, Rijsdijk et al., 2011; Healy et al., 2017), the need for managers and practitioners to implement a hybrid competitive strategy and then communicate such low-cost and differentiated service qualities to target customers becomes even more apparent. Therefore, a desired organisational change from this study is *develop a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid organisation like ECNL.*

Furthermore, ECNL operates on the premise that youth entrepreneurship training is a significant factor in achieving economic growth, especially in developing countries like Nigeria (Akande, 2013). Rising youth unemployment makes it imperative for society to encourage and boost youth entrepreneurship training to enable more youth businesses, particularly the right business idea and availability of support network in addition to accessing required financial ability (Kalejaiye and Solaja, 2014). As a result of this view of youth entrepreneurship training in Nigeria as a fundamental means by which society can surmount a major economic problem (Akeusola, 2012), hitherto unemployed or underemployed youths are able to make the shift from unemployed to entrepreneurs,

thereby becoming self-employed and self-reliant (Abari, Oyetola, and Okunuga, 2013). However, even with the affordability of ECNL's current service offering, the perception of focus customers, that is unemployed aspiring and budding youth entrepreneurs, on service quality has come to be viewed as pertinent. This calls for ECNL to ensure that focus customers come to value its service offerings for reasons other than mere affordability, Consequently, it is my intention, as manager and scholar-practitioner, to enable the direct involvement of focus customers in formulating a hybrid competitive strategy implementing process for ECNL. Therefore, the desired organisational change in this regard is to *ensure a customer-driven implementation process for a hybrid competitive strategy framework.*

Again, studies have argued the need to measure organisational performance having implemented a competitive strategy to ascertain if the aim of implementing the competitive strategy has been or is being achieved (Mostaghel et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2017; Jaaskelainen and Luukkanen, 2017). In this regard, the balance scorecard approach of Kaplan and Norton (1992) is deemed suitable for managers and practitioners as regards providing indices of measurement of organisational performance from the perspectives of finance, customer, organisational growth and internal processes (Reefke and Trocchi, 2013; Yoshikuni et al., 2014; Park et al., 2015). Consequently, the foregoing informs the desired organisational change for ECNL to *develop indices to measure the efficacy of ECNL's youth entrepreneurship training services.*

1.2   Management Problem at an Organisational level.

As a hybrid organisation or social enterprise, ECNL did not commence business with an intentional competitive strategy because the focus was more on the social mission. However, over the last three years, it has become clear that to maintain a level of profitability and competitiveness, an intentional competitive strategy is necessary. However, bearing in mind the peculiar and dynamic nature of hybrid organisations or social enterprises, implementing a sole competitive strategy in the traditional sense becomes more improbable., while a competitive strategy that is tailored to the dynamic nature of hybrid organisations becomes even more desirable. Consequently, ECNL is

desirous of formulating and implementing a strategy that improves its current competitive positioning and considers the dual nature of the organisation as one with both a social mission and a profit motive. What this implies is that the organisational problem currently facing management boils down to *reduced customer patronage and social impact resulting in dwindling revenue for the organisation*. This means that the uptake of ECNL's entrepreneurship session has reduced considerably over a three-year period, meaning that the social mission of reducing youth unemployment and underemployment via tailored youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring has been impacted. This reduced customer patronage and social impact is evident in the 38% reduction in session uptake witnessed within the stipulated three-year period.

Consequently, this study is focused on alleviating this problem of reduced customer patronage and dwindling revenue by formulating and implementing a hybrid competitive strategy that will positively impact its social mission and improve customer patronage, thereby increasing the revenue of the organisation and improving the competitive positioning of the ECNL brand.

1.3   Research Questions and Methods

The literature on implementing a hybrid competitive strategy majorly focuses on traditional organisations with a purely profit motive and no social objective, and not hybrid organisations with both a social and profit motive. Therefore, it is not known how a hybrid competitive strategy can be implemented in a hybrid organisation and several gaps exist in this regard.   Authors have stated that the research methods and questions of any study should ideally be in consonance with the philosophical underpinnings of the research (Tai and Ajjawi, 2016; Berryman, 2019). For this study, qualitative research is employed to uncover deeper processes and understanding of the relationship between hybrid strategy implementation and competitiveness.   In relation to the type of qualitative research, Action Research (AR) is employed and will involve collaboration with managers from other hybrid youth training organisations and employees of ECNL.

The major research objective of this study is to develop and implement a hybrid competitive strategy at ECNL - a hybrid youth training organisation. This research seeks

to answer the research questions along three dimensions: Dimension 1 relates to the strategy framework; dimension 2 relates to implementation process from the perspective of the 'focus' customer, and dimension 3 relates to measuring customer perception of training service efficacy. Consequently, the Research Questions (RQs) are as follows:

- *RQ1: What is a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth training organisation?*

- *RQ2: How can a hybrid youth training organisation (ECNL) implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework?*

- *RQ3: How can a hybrid youth training organisation (ECNL) measure customer perception its training service offerings?*

1.4   Novelty and contribution of the study

There have been several opinions and critical studies on competitive strategies, strategy implementation and the effect on organisational performance and competitiveness. Some scholars have taken the time to investigate the factors that affect the implementation of the strategy. However, in these discussions on competitive strategies, though the possibility of a hybrid or combination strategy as an add-on in organisations operating either a cost-leadership strategy or differentiation has been discussed (Lapersonne, Sanghavi, and Mattos, 2015), there has been little or no in-depth study on how a hybrid competitive strategy can be implemented in a hybrid youth training organisation without any existing competitive strategy.

Furthermore, studies have also been conducted on the role of managers in the strategy implementation process (Skivington and Daft, 1991; Bharadwaj et al., 1993; Trout and Rivkin, 1997; Ryan and Deci, 2006; Hogan and Kaiser, 2008; Yoshikuni and Jeronimo, 2013; Yoshukuni and Albertin, 2018; Chua and Ayoko, 2019). However, a theoretical gap exists on a framework to guide managers of hybrid youth training organisations through the implementation process of implementing a hybrid competitive strategy, as well as the

challenges posed by this process. A theoretical gap also exists in providing indices for measuring the efficacy of the training services a hybrid youth training organsation.

Consequently, the present study examines hybrid competitive strategy framework, the process of implementation in a hybrid youth training organisation, and indices for measuring customer perception of youth training services in a hybrid youth training organisation. 8

1.5   Outline of thesis

This study consists of seven chapters, with the instant chapter introducing the background, theoretical foundations, and organisational change objectives of the case-study organisation. Chapter 2 reviews the literature surrounding hybrid organisations, hybrid strategy implementation, competitiveness, and the youth entrepreneurship training. Chapter 2 also provides a conceptual framework for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation. The first part of the chapter defines hybrid organisations and the dynamics of organisational competitiveness, before examining the relationship between hybrid strategy, strategy implementation and organisational growth. The second part explores the literature and the theories of hybrid strategy implementation as well as youth entrepreneurship training, being the premise of the social mission of the case-study hybrid youth training organisation. Chapter 3 lays out the methodology and methods of inquiry of the present study by exploring its ontological, epistemological, and paradigmatic positions. The chapter also examines the use of case-study as the relevant qualitative research methodology, as well as the general empirical methods in action research projects, the transition from theoretical knowing to practical knowing. The chapter also lays out the Action research process and how the ARC iterations were enacted, the process of constructing action, planning action, taking action, evaluating the action taken, as well as reflection on the interviews from the focus organisation target customers. Chapter 4 details the steps of the Action Research Cycle (ARC) including data collection and analysis, while Chapter 5 presents the findings from the data analysis process, the outcomes of the ARC. Chapter 6 discusses the findings of this study, and presents the limitations, implications for both theory and practice, as well

as ideas for future research. Chapter 7 concludes this study by presenting a reflection on my scholar-practitioner journey from the standpoint of researcher-manager.

1.6 Summary of Chapter

This chapter began by offering a background to the present study, and then focuses on the organisational change objectives, approach, and the method of inquiry. Furthermore, this chapter equally highlights the novelty of this study, its contributions to management and practice, and the overall structure of this thesis.

The next chapter critically examines the literature surrounding the framework for this study, as well as presents a literature-driven framework for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Chapter Introduction

This chapter will examine hybrid organisations and the dynamics of competitiveness, define a youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring hybrid organisation, and then explore the motivation behind a youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring hybrid organisation. Pertinence will equally be attached to the relationship between dimensions and models of competitiveness, clarifying Porter's competitive strategies, its limitations, and the germane case for a hybrid competitive strategy to enable superior organisational performance in a hybrid youth entrepreneurship training organisation. Typologies and factors affecting hybrid competitive organisations will also be explored, as well as how organisations can measure their performance after implementing a hybrid strategy. Finally, a literature-driven framework for a hybrid competitive strategy is proposed.

2.2   Literature Review Methodology

In studying the existing body of knowledge regarding hybrid strategy implementation and competitiveness in a hybrid youth training organisation, a systematic literature review was conducted by employing the guidelines in Centobelli (2019). These guidelines stipulate two dimensions to conducting a literature review: (i) the paper selection phase and (ii) the phase of descriptive, theoretical, and content analysis of the selected papers.

In the paper selection phase, a combination of selected keywords was used for the search based on the essence and focus of this thesis. These keywords are hybrid strategy, strategy implementation, hybrid organisations and competitiveness, as well as a youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring in Lagos, Nigeria. AS shown in figure 2.1, the searches were not initially limited to any specific period, and the process of review was limited to peer-reviewed articles, eBooks, and scholarly reviews published in journals and conference papers. In total 350 relevant hits were returned from an advanced search on the academic databases 'Google Scholar', 'Scopus' and 'Discovery'. The exclusion criteria were based on articles from the last five years, that is from 2015, which came to 165 articles. These articles were then limited to the subject area of business, management

and accounting, which came to 95 articles. Regarding the relevance of such articles in relation to the thesis subject matter as deduced from the abstract, as well as the availability of the full-text, 82 articles were accepted and examined according to their full-text. 61 articles were added from backward referencing, while 33 were added from forward referencing, bringing the total number of accepted and examined articles to 176 (see figure 2.1). The second phase of conducting a literature review is the descriptive, theoretical, and content analysis phase (Centobelli, 2019).

In the descriptive analysis mini-phase, articles were analyses based on time, journal, methodology and author's country, consequently, four major topic categories were deciphered during the full-text content analysis of the selected articles: (i) hybrid strategy, strategy implementation and organisational growth, (ii) hybrid organisations and dynamics of competitiveness, (iii) managerial involvement and hybrid strategy implementation (iv) youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring, with a specific focus on Lagos, Nigeria where the focus organisation is located. The next section explores the definition of hybrid organisations and the dynamics of competitiveness, with a specific focus on youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring organisations

Figure 2.1 Literature Review Map
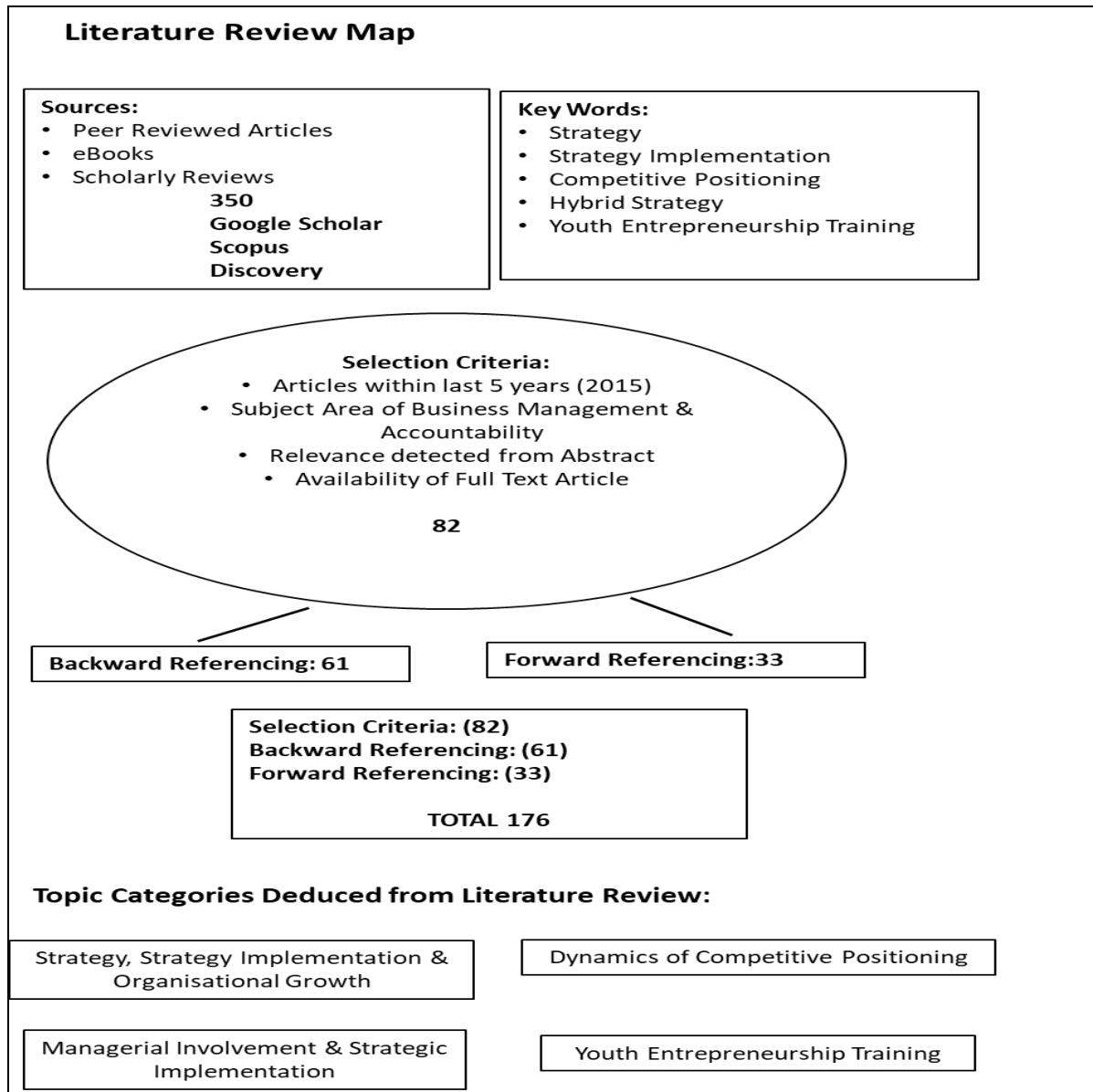
2.3 Hybrid Organisations, Social Enterprises, and the Dynamics of Competitiveness

Hybrid organisations, also referred to as social enterprises, are defined as organisations that combine a social or philanthropic objective and a profit-motive, with a class of individuals as beneficiaries of the corresponding subsidy (Eldar, 2017).   This definition is adopted for the purpose of this study. Hybrid organisations have also been the subject of both controversy and contradiction stemming, primarily from the combination of

private and public functions by the organisation (Bills and Rochester, 2020). These functions, consequently, bring about two demands that hybrid youth training organisations must cater to, that is, the market-commercial demand, and the social welfare-community demand. Sometimes, there is the environmental demand that hybridity brings, which is why hybrid organisations are also referred to triple bottom line organisations, that is, a triple focus on social motive, profit motive and environmental motive. As a result of this multi-faceted focus of hybrid organsations, they naturally interface with a lot more stakeholders than non-hybrid organsitions, though the dynamics of competitiveness remain the same.

The term 'social enterprise' can equally be employed to define a hybrid organisation, and social enterprises have been strictly defined as "organisations seeking business solutions to social problems." (Thompson and Doherty, 2006 p.362). Social enterprises are different in form and structure when compared to initiatives that aid host communities and nearby environs. Thompson and Doherty (2006) attribute certain characteristics to a social enterprise:

1. There exists a social purpose.
2. Community advantage is created through assets and wealth of the enterprise, usually through market-place trade.
3. There is no distribution of profits or surpluses to shareholders as may be the case in a traditional enterprise.
4. Members of the enterprise are part of its decision-making and governance.
5. The accountability of the enterprise spreads to the wider community.
6. A double or triple bottom line most certainly always exists.

In analysing the recent trends in Europe as regards social enterprise, Borzaga and Defourny (2001) acknowledge the idea of 'social enterprise' as being somewhat of a recent phenomenon that consolidated about the late 1990s. Some have attempted, however unsuccessfully in my opinion, to the term 'social enterprise' to non-profit organisations that market-oriented and have specific strategies to earn income, though they also highlight the social enterprise spectrum, depicted in table 2.1, as ranging from

purely charitable to purely commercial (Dees and Anderson, 2006). This social enterprise spectrum defines the full array of business models available to social enterprises, from purely philanthropic to purely commercial, with differences along the spectrum.

Table 2.1 Social Enterprise Spectrum

	Purely Charitable ⟷ Purely Commercial		
Motives, Methods & Goals	Appeal to goodwill Mission-driven Social value creation	Mixed motives Balance of mission and market Social and economic value	Appeal to self-interest Market-driven Economic value creation
<u>Key Stakeholders</u>			
Targeted Customers	Pay nothing	Subsidized rates, and/or mix of full payers and those who pay nothing	Pay full market rates
Capital Providers	Donations and Grants	Below-market capital and/or mix of donations and market rates capital	Market rate capital
Work Force	Volunteers	Below-market wages and/or mix of volunteers and fully paid staff	Market rate compensation
Suppliers	Make in-kind donations	Special discounts and/or mix of in-kind and full price	Charge full market prices

(Source: Dees and Anderson, 2006 p.51)

From the social enterprise spectrum depicted in table 2.1, this study is aligned in between purely philanthropic and purely commercial, that is, mixed motives that implies that a social enterprise or hybrid organisation strike a balance between its social mission and the market, thereby creating both social and economic value. The fine details that encompass the 'mixed motive' aspect of the social enterprise spectrum is stated in table 2.1 under the heading "mixed motive: balance of mission and market, social and economic

value". More recently, Ridley-Duff and Bull (2016) illustrate how social enterprise can be both a social and political response especially in emerging economies, for instance, in situations of 'fair-trade', as has been the case in Latin-America, Africa, and Asia. Consequently, and by implication, one can therefore add 'unemployment' or 'underemployment' as a similar situation that can warrant the social enterprises in areas plagued with these issues such as Nigeria. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term 'hybrid organisation' as opposed to 'social enterprise', is employed merely for convenience and embellishment, especially bearing in mind that this study focuses on implementing a hybrid competitive strategy. Accordingly, a youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring hybrid organisation is one that combines a desire for competitiveness with the social mission of reducing youth unemployment through low-cost entrepreneurship training and mentoring sessions.

The dynamics and sustainability of such competitiveness of a hybrid organisation referred to in the preceding paragraph has been narrowed down to 'distinctive organisational skills and resources,' especially in relation to a service industry (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan, and Fahy, 1993). Authors have claimed that an organisation's competitiveness is most sustainable where organisational skills and distinctive resources form the bedrock and can ward off replication from competitors (Barney, 1991; Hamal and Prahalad, 1994; Webster, 1994). This is in addition to the view that where service industries apply new technologies, there is a greater chance of a heightened competitiveness (Quinn and Gagnon, 1986). Other authors have suggested industry-specific competitiveness as a means of gaining sustainable competitiveness (Kim and Lim 1988; Miller 1988). They argue that the industry in which an organisation plays is determinant of the dynamics of competitiveness within that industry, pointing out that stable industries require the efficacy of transformation processes, while stormy industries need service or product innovation (see figure 2.2).

More recently, however, competitiveness has been labelled a function of two main perspectives, that is, the content-oriented approach (Hoskisson, Shi, Yi & Jin, 2013; Jensen, Cobbs, & Turner, 2015; Lin & Wu, 2014) and the process-oriented approach

(Babafemi, 2015). The former denotes organisations reflecting on the most favourable strategies, competencies, and resources that they can deploy to gain a more favourable competitiveness within their industry. The latter approach reflects on when and how organisations formulate and implement the strategies that can enable an improved competitiveness. Consequently, this section will define competitiveness and elucidate its dimensions, characteristics, and intricacies.   Additionally, this section will clarify the ambiguities between the various models of competitiveness and propose an ideal model for a youth training hybrid organisation.

Figure 2.2 Theoretical perspectives of inter-firm rivalry
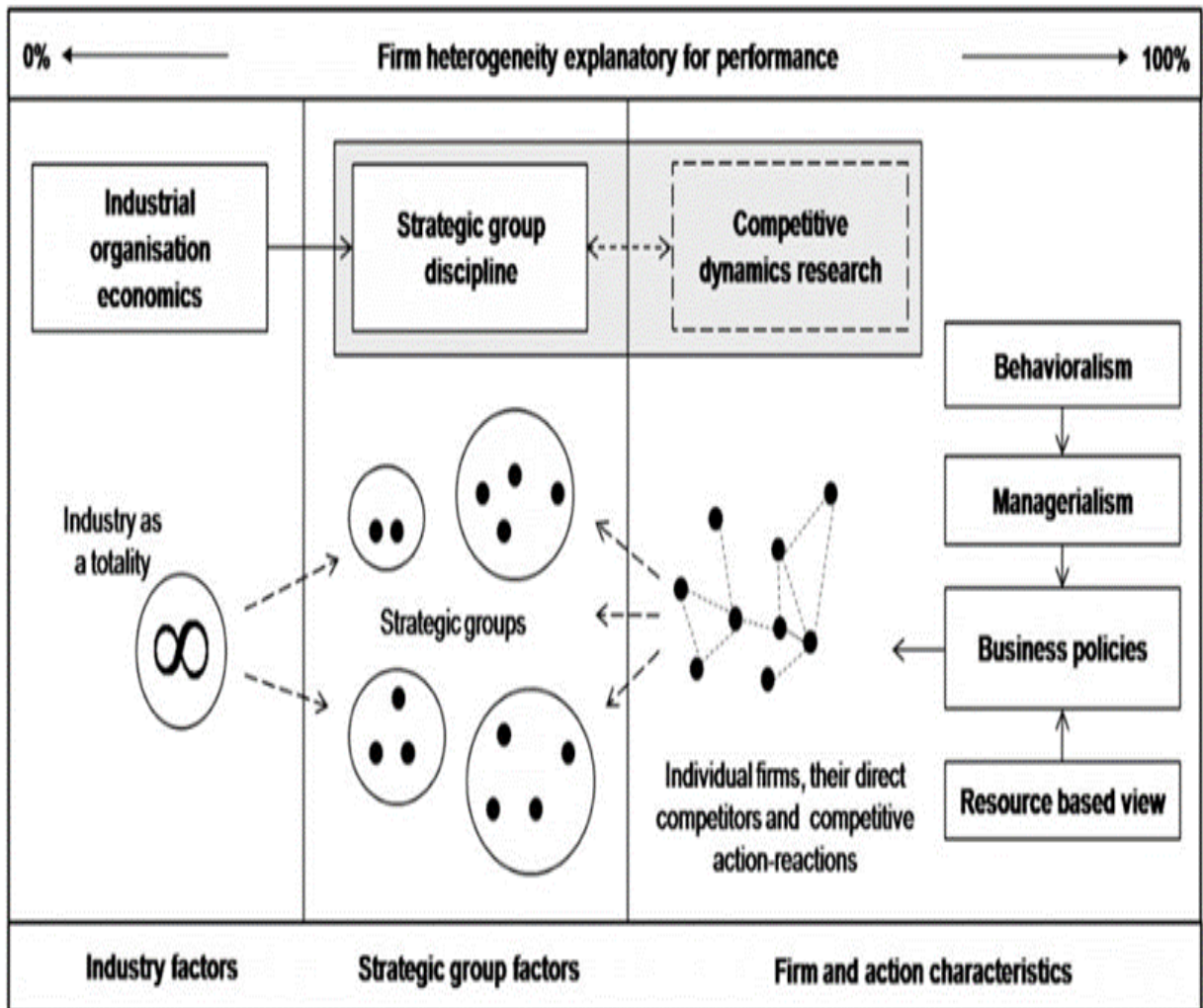
(Source: Schimmer, 2012 p.12)

2.3.1   Definition and dimensions of organisational competitiveness

Organisational competitiveness has been defined as the product of combining a choice of the target market and the differential advantage an organisation wishes to bring to that target market to secure patronage (Hooley, Broderick and Moller, 1998). It has equally been stated as "the combination of choice of the target market (where the firm will compete) and competitive advantage (how the firm will compete)" (Hooley, Greenley, Fahy, and Cadogan, 2001, p.503). Ries and Trout (2001) define positioning as the differentiating a brand in the psyche of an intending customer or consumer, especially

when compared to similar brands. The emphasis in the Ries and Trout (2001) definition is differentiation; in other words, competitiveness is a function of differentiation. What is important in the definitions enunciated is 'perception,' which means that the customer perceives the service as different. A slightly different view of competitiveness involves organisations that consciously identify their target market, to appreciate where exactly they will be competing, as well as how they hope to serve such targets (Hooley and Saunders, 1993). What is equally clear from the foregoing is that a variety and combination of variables culminate to determine the competitiveness of organisations (Kale and Arditi, 2002).

Six dimensions of competitiveness have been postulated, which incorporate the number of different ways organisations might position themselves within an industry (Hooley et al., 1998). Price positioning is the first dimension, and it involves prices being at par, if not lower than competitors. For this to be sustainable, costs must be kept at a minimum. However, if keeping costs at a minimum begins to cause financial loss or real disadvantage to the organisation, then price positioning may not be sustainable in such instance.   Quality positioning requires a well-articulated idea of what constitutes quality in the minds of potential customers; this involves 'market sensing' and 'customer bonding.' Important in this process is 'brand image,' as image and reputation are key to successful high-price positioning and require cultivation, and when necessary energetic protection.   Innovation positioning is attached to situations where there is rapid technological development within an industry that creates the prospect for innovation positioning. In this vein, Hamel and Prahalad (1994) had employed the phrase 'fast failure, thereby urging the launch of novel products with the appreciation that though not all will succeed, some will. Service positioning articulates organisations offering superior service to their target customers, which implies service that is specifically tailored to the needs of such target customers. This involves 'market sensing' skills, which denotes identifying the specific requirements of the target market, building closer bonds with target customers, service and monitoring systems. Benefit positioning denotes organisation dexterously recognising the 'benefits' their target customers want and doing what it takes to meet that customer want. However, Hooley et al. (1998) make clear that

the competencies must exist for such organisations to sieve out the benefits customers want and possess the requisite skill and facility to deliver such benefits to customers. Finally, tailored positioning involves tailoring products to meet the specific requirements of individual customers. From the foregoing, it can be asserted that the proficiency an organisation is required to have centres around building and managing relationships with individual customers and recognising what such individual customers want.

2.3.2   Characteristics and intricacies of competitiveness

Studies that have focused on how to sustain competitiveness have elucidated characteristics that have enabled organisations to sustain their competitiveness (Coyne, 1985; Barney, 1991). These studies reveal that to sustain competitiveness, skills and resources must be valuable, remain above both competition and imitation by competitors, as well as be incapable of strategic substitution by competitors. Authors have equally suggested that the competitiveness of an organisation is characterised by cost-leadership potentials, quality enhancements, as well as service or product improvement, process innovation, heterogeneity of the market, and interaction of resources. (Hill, 1988; Murray, 1988). These opinions allude to a hybrid strategy as a premise for improved competitiveness, as well as sound differentiation strategy as means by which an organisation can positively enhance its competitiveness (Blankson et al.,2006; Mishra et al., 1996). In recent times, differentiation has shifted from a uni-dimensional product perspective to a multi-dimensional product perspective that enables customers to perform new tasks and solve their problems, as well as meet their needs in a unique better way than similar products (Bastic 2004). This multi-dimensional view is primarily made up of the superiority of the product, the meaningfulness of the product and the innovativeness of the product. (McNally et al. 2010, Rijsdijk et al., 2011; Healy et al., 2017). Human capital is another factor that has a bearing not only not on the competitiveness of organisations, but also on the sustainability of any competitive advantage such organisations may enjoy (Prajogo & Oke, 2016; Delery & Roumpi, 2017). Human capital implies a skill set comprising ability and know-how upon which human resources is built (Onkelinx, Manolova & Edelman, 2016; Nieves & Quintana, 2018).

However, some studies have disputed a positive relationship between human capital and competitiveness (Zeghal & Maaloul, 2010; Abdulsalam, Al-Qaheri & Al-Khayyat, 2011). Prajogo & Oke (2016), highlight a gap in the literature regarding the effect of other factors on competitiveness, and not just human capital, such as market size, barriers to market entry, regulatory and economic factors, as well as the effect of the interaction between internal and external factors.

Business networks have been argued to be of significance in improving competitiveness (Sheng et al., 2011; Li et al., 2012; Saha and Banerjee, 2015; Danso et al., 2016), as well as political and financial networks (Fonseka et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2016; Pruthi and Wright, 2017; Kotabe et al., 2017). Networking ultimately boosts performance and improves an organisations' competitive advantage, especially in developed and developing countries like Nigeria (Huang et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2015; Su et al., 2015). This is especially so when employed by an organisation as a conscious or inadvertent means of fast-tracking organisational growth (Lechner and Gudmundsson, 2014). Social media is equally touted as an effective means by which organisations can showcase its differentiated service and engage its target customers, as well as create a positive brand presence, image and awareness and reach new customers (Kim et al., 2015; Godey et al., 2016; Alalwan et al., 2017).

Differentiation via strategic innovation has also been argued to be the most important factor that affects competitiveness of organisations (Lilly & Juma, 2014; Kalay & Lynn, 2015), for example, it has been asserted that manufacturing and industrial organisations have been the clearest example of the value of strategic innovation in differentiating services and improving their competitiveness (Bayraktar, Hancerliogullari, Cetinguc & Calisir, 2017). Therefore, the goldmine of strategic innovation in differentiation and improving the competitiveness of organisations is narrowed down to its antidote effect on violent, hostile and rapidly fluctuating markets and industries, and how organisations compete and survive in such markets (Hobday, 2005; Weerawardena, Mort, Salunke, Knight & Liesch, 2015; Lewin and Stuart, 2016). However, not everyone aligns to this position of a positive relationship between strategic innovation and competitiveness and

have identified a negative relationship on organisational performance and competitiveness (Birley & Westhead, 1990; McGee, Dowling & Megginson, 1995; Rosenbusch, Brinkmann and Bausch, 2011). Figure 2.3 provides a broad view of these factors that determine the competitiveness of any organisation.

Figure 2.3 Factors determining business competitiveness

Markets, Competitors and Customers
Including market share, export share, distribution of customers (many small or mostly big). Also the level of risk taking company pursue and aggressiveness when working with competitors.

Business Strategies
Includes diversification of products and services, uniqueness of the value proposition of the company and innovations. Also processes how products are manufactured or services are delivered. Tradeoff between price and quality, business promotion strategies, quality.

External Environment
Quality of the infrastructure necessary for conducting business (i.e. taxes, legislation, shadow economy, etc.), quality of controlling institutions for business.

Efficient use of Human and Physical Capital
Includes turnover and efficiency of employees, effective management of human resources, climate within the organization. Various indicators representing efficiency in using physical capital.

COMPETITIVENESS

Communication Channels
Includes acquiring information and resources from suppliers, customers, financial institutions, business promotion organisations and universities.

Availability of Human and Physical Capital
Includes education and previous business experience of owner- managers. Access to employees and quality of available employees. Access to physical resources for manufacturing and services.

Using Financial stability
Includes access to internal and external capital, structure of income and expenses. Proportion of fixed and variable costs; quality of cash flow (access to current assets, etc.).

Indicators of Business Operations
Including profits, turnover, growth of employees as compared to competitors.

Optimistic and Realistic Growth Plans

(Source: Sauka, 2015, p.142)

2.3.3 Disambiguation of the models of organisational competitiveness

Numerous studies have elucidated on the importance of positioning within its competitive market (Hauser and Shugan, 1983; Hauser, 1988; Moorthy, 1988; Carpenter 1989), and these authors have suggested various models which organisations can employ to improve competitiveness. Ansari, Economides, and Ghosh (1994) argue that most models of brand positioning assume that the number of market brands is determined

exogenously, and these brands enter or reposition in the chorus. Some of these models include Hotelling model (Hotelling, 1929), Lane's model (Lane, 1980), the defender model (Hauser and Shugan, 1983; Hauser, 1988), and the Ansari et al. (1994) model.

The Hotelling (1929) model of competitiveness interrogates the relationship between the location of an organisation's product/services and the location as it relates to the transportation costs of the consumer. This model was initially developed as a game in which organisations selected both a location and price to sell their products. This model investigates three key variables, that is, transportation costs, customers' distribution and competitors' location. These variables are viewed as pivotal to the profitability and competitiveness of an organisation. The Hotelling model involves two sub-models, the static and dynamic models. In the static model, organistions can choose their location and price within a single stage, while in the dynamic model, location is selected before the price. The significance of the model stems from the notion that an organisation's product/service will not necessarily enjoy a better competitiveness due to lower prices, as customers will equally consider the location of such product or service in deciding on patronage. Thus, the key factor of the hotelling model is differentiation regarding location. This implies that organisations who wish to position their brand will be required to differentiate the location of such brand products or services to improve their competitiveness. Authors have criticised the Hotelling model as a result of what they view as its one-dimensional nature and assumption on the relationship between distance and utility (Graitson, 1982; Depalma et al., 1985). Further criticism stems from the viewpoint that competitiveness is concerned with the preferences of the consumer and not their physical location (Ansari, Economides and Ghosh, 1994). Whilst Lane's model is premised on the idea that brands enter a market one after the other, and such brands cannot be repositioned once they have entered the market, the defender model (Hauser and Shugan, 1984; Hauser, 1988) examines situations where brands are already within the competitive market, that is, repositioning a brand that is already in existence. This model suggests, among others, that where prices are constant, organisations shift positioning towards the centre of the market, and maximum brand differentiation is required to improve its competitiveness. Consequently, the defender model is proposed

as an ideal model for this study considering that this study focuses on an existing brand without an existing competitive strategy, and where *"a manager sought to understand his market and adjust his brand's positioning to obtain maximum profitability"* (Hauser, 1988 p.77). This choice model assumes customers have a multiplicity of tastes and argues that consumers assess brands based on differentiated service characteristics of usability and power, and not just low costs. To put it practically, in the defender model a hybrid youth training organisation will determine what competitive position it would like to occupy, and then select the characteristics that echo usability and power.

2.4   Competitive Strategy Options and Organisational Growth

Three kinds of Business Strategy, shown in figure 2.4, have been argued to exist, and they are (i) strategy in general, (ii) corporate strategy and (iii) competitive strategy (Nickols, 2012). Strategy provides a basis for the competitive advantage that an organisation seeks to enjoy (Chaston, 2013). Organisations often project the strategy they feel most adequately captures the competitiveness they hope to attain through performance (Mahdi et al. 2015). Candy et al. (2011) state that strategy relates to the way organisations enable the future they desire, which ultimately requires decision making and action taking that usher such organisation into its desired state.   Candy et al. (2011) narrow strategy down to the state of the results and outcomes.   Cole (2004) associates certain concepts with the Candy et al. (2011) 'desired state' such as future organisational direction, internal action approach design, organisational change management teamwork, and improved organisational performance. In this section, the traditional competitive sole strategies elucidated by Porter (1980, 1985) and its limitations will be examined, as well as enunciate the case for a hybrid competitive strategy.

Figure 2.4 Focal points of strategy
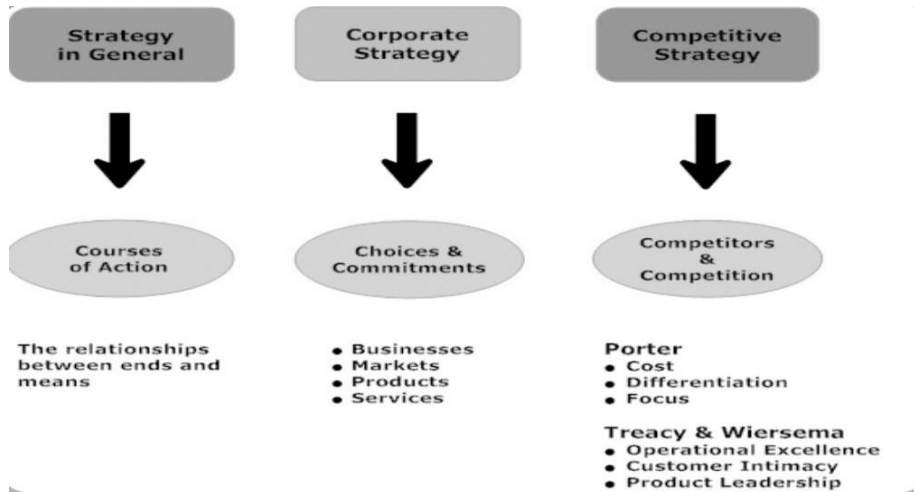
(Source: Nickols, 2012)

2.4.1 Porter's Competitive Strategies

The need for organisations to maintain competitiveness in their industry via a competitive strategy that assertively enables a comprehensive market share in the industry in question has been emphasised, and to enable such market share, Porter (1980, 1985, 1996) postulates three generic competitive strategies of cost leadership, differentiation, and focus, shown in figure 2.5, and argues primarily that organisations compete based on one of these three competitive strategies.

A cost-leadership sole strategy refers to efforts by organisations to improve competitiveness by operating the lowest industry price, and organisations that seek to implement a cost-leadership strategy ensure that they are both able to control costs, as well as ensure operational efficiency of the organisation (Porter,1980). What is most crucial in a cost-leadership strategy is that the high-volume goods or services produced possess characteristics that are attractive to customers when the price and standard is compared to those of competitors (Ireland et al., 2011).

A differentiation strategy seeks to facilitate a modus operandi that distinguishes an organisation from its competitors in key areas such as products, services, branding, marketing, and quality (Yunus, 2015). Porter (1980) argues that organisations that

operate a low-cost strategy are continually under threat from those that operate a differentiation strategy. As a result, he stipulates the need for organisations that currently operate a cost leadership strategy to move to a differentiation strategy and continue to innovate their products and/or services. Bae and Lawlar (2000) point out certain pre-requisites associated with moving to a differentiation strategy, such as a flexible work system, training and development of employees, in addition to involvement and collaboration of employees. Banker et al. (2011) argue that differentiation strategy will be most successful in relation to products specific to an organisation that are not easy to replicate.

A focus strategy varies from the other two generic strategies in the sense that the other strategies are concerned with products or services for a whole industry, while a focus strategy is by its very nature tailored to a customer segment (Awade, 2014). A focus strategy premised on differentiation explores authenticity via quality service solutions that are tailored to the specific requirements and expectations of target customers, while a focus strategy premised on cost-leadership seeks to limit the value proposition of the organisation to only that which is pertinent to the target customer to create the advantage on costs (Lapersonne, Sanghavi, and Mattos, 2015). Consequently, any organisation seeking to implement a focus strategy should ideally determine if such strategy will be premised on cost-leadership or differentiation.

Figure 2.5 Porter's competitive strategies

(Source: Tanwar, 2013 p.12)

2.4.2 The case for a hybrid competitive strategy: Overcoming Porter's 'stuck in the middle' phenomenon

An organisation is said to operate a hybrid competitive strategy where such organisation offers their services or products at lower prices than their competitors, in addition to ensuring such products or services are of high quality (Thompson et al., 2012). Therefore, a hybrid competitive strategy combines the elements of all 3 generic strategies elucidated by Porter (1980; 1985), that is, cost-leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies with the aim of achieving superior organisational performance. While numerous studies have taken the original view of Porter (1980; 1985) to the effect that cost leadership, differentiation and focus are independent and separate and should be implemented in a pure form (Hambrick, 1983; Dess and Davis. 1984) to avoid a 'stuck in the middle' situation. Porter (1980; 1985) contended this fourth situation in organisational competitive strategy exists, and he categorised it as "stuck in the middle". According to porter, it is not an intentional strategy in the sense, but the result of the inability of the organization to effectively pursue any of the three broad strategies elucidated by Porter. More recently, Edwards, Ketchen, and Short (2014) state that firms often become stuck in the middle not because managers do not arrive at a well-defined competitive strategy but because such organisations are simply outsmarted by competitors. Thus, an organization is said to be stuck in the middle where service offerings are not differentiated enough to persuade target customers to patronize such service offerings, and costs are too high to successfully compete as a cost-leader. Such organisations that are stuck in the middle generally are less competitive due to a lack of target customers and competitive costs. Consequently, to overcome this stuck in the middle phenomenon elucidated by Porter, a hybrid or combinative strategy combines all Porter's sole strategies in a manner that is feasible, profitable, and beneficial to the performance of the organisation (Miller & Dess, 1993; et al., 2004; Acquaah & Ardekani, 2006; Baroto, Abdullah, and Wan, 2012). The reason for this has been attributed to the particular emphasis on the pure strategies of cost-leadership and differentiation strategies that create more customer-focused products and services. In such circumstances, differentiation aspect of the hybrid strategy will enable the organisation to ensure high quality of services that create a customer perception of value, while the cost-leadership

aspect of the hybrid strategy, which already exists in the focus organisation, will continue to enable the organisation set prices to be the lowest among competitors (Learning, 2009). The competitiveness that results from the hybrid strategy, which is absent where a sole strategy is implemented, will be borne out of a dual advantage of high customer-focused service offerings mixed with lower competitive costs. Therefore, customer-perception of service value, and a customer-driven differentiation process is at the very heart of a hybrid competitive strategy, as where target customers drive the price, in addition to the service characteristics and offerings, such target customers would not need to be persuaded to patronise such services. Thus, a hybrid competitive strategy simultaneously aims to operationalise both differentiation in terms of enhanced benefits to the focus customer group, as well as a lower cost of services when compared to industry competitors, to achieve improved levels of competitiveness within the industry segment.

Baroto et al., (2012) in further exploring the benefits of implementing a hybrid strategy in the place of a sole strategy, stated that a 'higher performance' can be expected from implementing a hybrid strategy because of "ability to deliver enhanced benefits to the customers with low price while achieving sufficient margins for reinvestment to maintain and develop bases of differentiation" (p.124). And this higher performance becomes more relevant should organisations opt to take their quest for competitiveness to the global marketplace. Furthermore, an organisation that has an existing cost-leadership strategy, in other words, not a new entrant into the market, will find itself in an awkward competitive position if its target-customers that it has served since its inception begin to prioritize attributes other than price. Lapersonne et al. (2015) notes that such an organisation could suffer loss of a major part of its target-customer base as a result since it remained too basic with little or no focus on the target customer changing needs in relation to service or product quality. Consequently, the environment the organisation finds itself is most crucial to the strategy to be implemented, and Lapersonne et al. (2015) highlights the difference between implementing a hybrid strategy in an emergent or mature market and implementing a hybrid strategy where 'competitive intensity' exists. In an emergent market, hybrid strategy is desirable due to the fast rate of development

and the changes it occasions, and instructively Ghana, a sub-Saharan African country like Nigeria, has been stated to be a case-study for implementing a hybrid strategy in an emergent market (Acquaah and Yasai-Ardekani, 2008). However, they also state that in a situation of competitive intensity, a hybrid strategy can be adopted to catalyse a higher level of performance when compared to competitors who operate a pure or sole strategy.

2.5 Hybrid Competitive Strategy Implementation

Lapersonne et al. (2015) highlight two main implementation routes for organisations seeking to implement a hybrid strategy, one is where the organisation in question already operates and enjoys the benefit of a sole or pure competitive strategy of differentiation and then seeks to equally enjoy the benefits of cost advantage. The other is where the organisation operates a low-cost strategy and then invests the profits in marketing the difference in its products or services to also enjoy benefits of differentiation. However, this study seeks to explore another hybrid strategy implementation route, where a hybrid organisation commences business with an initial focus on the social mission, and little or no focus on a competitive strategy until the organisation begins to fail as a result.

Implementation of a hybrid competitive strategy involves appreciation of the role of ambidexterity, trade-offs and the environment. Strategic ambidexterity is stated to involve an exploitative and explorative mindset considered as inherently contradictory (Lapersonne et al., 2015). Accordingly, any organisation seeking to implement a hybrid strategy should have an appreciation of ambidextrously managing the development of service qualities, appreciating that trade-offs must happen, which all lead to continuous organisational and managerial learning. Two different types of ambidexterity exist in hybrid strategy implementation, the first is associated with employing hybrid strategy as a medium to reassert the organisation's competitive edge. This has been named the 'Reinforcement Adaptive Perspective', while the second enabling environment, named the 'Survival Adaptive Technique', relates to employing a hybrid strategy as means to alter the strategic direction of the organisation. Consequently, this section will examine the typologies and factors relating to the implementation of a hybrid competitive strategy

in a hybrid youth training organisation, as well critically examine the issues surrounding the development of a hybrid strategy implementation framework.

2.5.1   Typologies and factors relating to Hybrid Strategy Implementation

Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984) elucidated four typologies of strategy implementation interventions (see figure 2.6) that are instructive to the hybrid strategy implementation process. Evolutionary Intervention is employed when the duration of the intervention is lengthy and the problem to be solved is viewed as minor. Circumstances that may warrant evolutionary intervention are minor changes with slight variation in implementation methods, low implementation costs as well as personnel-dependent implementation. Characteristics of managerial intervention include a one-structure implementation plan, minor adjustments, low-costs, a steady business environment, and so on. Another intervention option for organisations is 'sequential intervention', which is used when there is a long duration for implementation, and the problem to be solved is viewed as major. Owing to the long duration for intervention, the implementation of the new strategy is done in a sequential manner. Finally, complex intervention is employed when the duration for intervention is short, but the strategic problem is viewed as major. This sort of intervention is not only complex, but also capital intensive.

Figure 2.6 Typologies of strategy implementation

(Source: Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1984 p.20)

Many authors have suggested that varying factors influence strategy implementation Armstrong, 2010; Hrebiniak, 2013; Klettner et al., 2014; Engert and Baumgartner, 2016).

Some of these factors elucidated include leadership, systems, culture/shared values, and rewards, the stronger the synergy between these components, the higher the chances of effective implementation of a hybrid strategy. Similarly, Okumus (2001) suggests ten factors that are instructive to any strategy implementation process, (i) formulation, (ii) organisational structure (iii) culture (iv) communication (v) environment (vi) resource allocation (vii) operational planning (viii) people (ix) control and (x) outcome.

Other authors have commented explicitly on the effect of the shared values or culture of an organisation on strategic implementation (Robbins, 2005; David, 2011; O'reilly, 2008). Griffin and Moorhead (2011) suggest that a culture of sharing information in the context of strategic implementation starts with organisational learning and communication/knowledge transfer. A culture of rewards and control is equally argued by Hrebiniak (2013) to be vital to the strategic implementation process and include not only cash benefits, but anything geared towards boosting the morale of the employee. Controls imply appropriate disciplinary procedures, strategy revision if and where necessary, and accountability in a timely fashion (Armstrong, 2010; Hrebiniak, 2013). The last set of factors are change management, operational planning, and power. Robbins and Coulter (2012) categorise operational planning and power into two, that is, single use plans and standing plans. The former denotes plans designed to meet strategic implementation, while the latter denotes plans that have become standard strategic implementation practices. However, Koseoglu et al. (2018) who reviewed the literature on formulation and implementation of strategic decisions and pointed out that there are knowledge gaps in the relationship between the factors that affect strategic decision implementation and performance within organisational structures in relation to the socio-demographics of the sample. These factors influencing strategy implementation are extensively depicted in tables 2.2 and 2.3.

Table 2.2 Factors influencing strategy implementation process in the category 'strategy'.

	Planning	Formulation	Implementation	Control and monitoring
	No strategic plans	Wrong strategy formulation	Problem with strategy explanation	Inflexible strategy
Strategy	No links between tactical plans and strategy and strategic objectives	Unclear and fuzzy strategy	Inability to transpose ideas into the ready-made actions	
	No links between vision and operational activities	Strategic objectives defined in isolation from reality	No knowledge of the strategy at all levels of the organisation	
	No fundamental knowledge of the strategy	Excessive number of objectives	Interference with the relationship between the overall strategy and smaller strategies of minor units	
	Conflicting priorities	Excessive complexity of the strategy	Poor or insufficient communication between the entities responsible for strategy implementation	
	Internal inconsistency of the strategy with the budget	No schedule and no definition of "milestones"	No consistent implementation of strategic objectives	
	Inefficient system of information acquisition and selection	No communication of the strategy	Failure to report on the progress in strategy implementation	
	Incorrect calculation of funds for strategy implementation	Unnecessary bureaucracy		
	No additional sources of funding for strategy implementation			
	The strategy is in conflict with the existing organisational structure			
	Unrealistic, unclear and unfeasible			

(Source: Piorkowska and Rynca, 2020 p. 501)

Table 2.3 Factors influencing the strategy implementation process in the category of 'management'

	Planning	Formulation	Implementation	Control and monitoring
	Hierarchical or liberal management style	Unclear course of the strategy management process	Management's lack of experience in strategy implementation	No effective evaluation and control system
Management	Managers' lack of knowledge and skills in strategy development	Manager's lack of involvement in the strategy formulation process	No or underdeveloped leadership skills of managers	No strategic controlling
	Management's lack of experience in strategy implementation	No ability to engage staff	No coordination	Failure to appoint a supervising controller
	No ability to prioritise tasks	No adequate employee incentive and remuneration system	No charismatic leaders among executives	
	No or mismatch of key indicators for the strategy implementation process	No or misallocation of resources	No action consistency	
	Short-term thinking	Incorrect allocation of decision-making rights	No stimulation of staff's desired behaviours	
	No access to data and indicators	Incorrect allocation of tasks and responsibilities	Overloading management with current affairs	
	No capacity to manage change and overcome resistance to change	Problems with delegating tasks	No leaders effectively motivating staff to implement the strategy	
	No stakeholder orientation	No effective communication of strategy objectives	No coupling of strategic and operational activities	
	No intellectual flexibility of managers	Unclear communication of responsibilities	Prolonged decision-making time	
	Failure to define the supervisory and decision-making relations between the management board	No assignment of economic measures and indicators to strategic objectives	Malfunctioning decision-making mechanism	

(Source: Piorkowska and Rynca, 2020 p. 502)

2.5.2   Issues surrounding the development of a hybrid strategy framework

Strategy formulation or strategic planning, in its traditional sense, involved an organisation's reflection on the internal and external surroundings and then deciding on a path; however, the alternative to that is organisations taking a flexible approach and refining strategy as situation demands (Chaston, 2017). This modern and alternative view has been referred to as strategy-as-practice (S-as-P), which encourages collaboration between the strategist (usually the founder in a small firm and senior management in larger organisations) and other structures within the organisation (Whittington, 2003; Jarrat and Stiles, 2010).   Jarrat and Stiles (2010) equally revealed a wide range of scenarios that should be examined by the researcher-manager as strategist before arriving at a strategic direction to be implemented. The advantage of this is that the developed hybrid strategy becomes the product of the entrepreneur-strategist enhanced and increasing understanding of the industry market (Chaston and Sadler-Smith, 2012).

Developing a hybrid strategy becomes easier to appreciate once the individual competitive strategies enunciated by Porter (1980, 1985) are understood. The arguments of Hambrick (1983), and Dees and Davis (1984) on the pure nature of competitive strategies set the stage for the counterargument of implementing a hybrid strategy, and a hybrid strategy for hybrid organisations will involve appreciating the factors that have a direct bearing on the process. Also, bearing in mind that any hybrid strategy to be applied to the focus hybrid organisations will consist of a focus strategy, such strategy will equally consider customer perception of value to formulate the right differentiation strategy to be implemented. This is evidently a shift from a pure application of a low-cost strategy. Consequently, any formulated differentiation strategy implies some Unique Selling Point (USP) or Point of Difference (POD) in the service offering that will enable the organisation to achieve customer perception of value, especially where policies exist to continually promote the development of service solutions that proffer distinctive alternatives to the status quo (Banker et al., 2011). Other authors have equally argued that a successful implementation of a differentiation strategy, as an addition to a cost-leadership strategy, will entail some shift in

organisation's focus on price to the actual needs of the target-customer, and the ways to meet these needs (Sun & Pan, 2011; Box, 2011). Besanko et al. (2000) suggest two types of differentiation that organisations can employ, that is, vertical and horizontal differentiation. Kim and Wang (2014) offer a helpful definition for vertical differentiation; that is, the qualities that make a product unique, specific, and attractive to customers. Yunus (2015), on the other hand, argues that a product is horizontally differentiated if customers have ranked such product differently even when similar products are offered at the same price.

Where strategy implementation breaks down, this should be of great concern to the organisations involved not only because organisational performance is adversely affected, but also the adverse effect on the larger society (Nienaber, 2019). This makes it even more important that once the differentiation strategy is being applied, there is little or no chance of a breakdown midway. Steiner (2004) argues that strategy implementation is a process that involves the allocation of resources and management activities to support strategies that have been opted for and monitoring the process through to the attainment of organisational objectives (Hrebiniak, 2006). This implies that organisations seeking to implement a hybrid strategy must be certain that they possess or will be able to source whatever resources may be required. However, strategic implementation has its fair share of problems, and the most common problem with strategic implementation has to do with taking for granted the time required for successful strategy implementation as well as unforeseen challenges and circumstances that can naturally delay the process (Alexander, 1985). This salient point made it necessary for organisations to carefully consider the minimum time that will be required to implement a hybrid strategy. Pearce and Robinson (2003) highlight another possible drawback in the implementation process for hybrid organisations, which is the lack of willingness to employ the skills and talents of other competent individuals within the organisation. Also, they highlight this lack of delegation as being responsible for most unsuccessful strategy implementation processes, in addition to situations where motivation, organisational culture and a strong synergy between such culture and motivation are clearly lacking. Odhiambo (2006) argues that these potential problems

associated with implementing a hybrid strategy for hybrid organisations must be properly addressed before the application process commences. Thus, one of the ways organisations can deal with these problems would be employee involvement. Cummings and Worley (2005) argue that employee involvement is vital to the hybrid strategy implementation process, especially as regards creating the belief in the minds of the organisational team that the formulated strategy can indeed be successfully implemented. However, Thompson and Strickland (2003) point out other related factors also play a big role, such as the internal structure within organisations, allocation of resources in relation to staff-size, incentives and rewards available, as well as the procedures, policies, and practice that exists within the organisation. Otley (1999) argues as key to successful implementation: dual communication and constructive feedback mechanism within hybrid organisations such that activity and behaviour can be adequately regulated and guided. McCarthy and Curran (1996) share these same sentiments and point out that individuals in key roles fully appreciate and employ existing organisational structure to assist the implementation. To the delight of the researcher, this all-important need for an ongoing consensus between management and staff in the strategy implementation process has been duly acknowledged (Song, 1983; Kinyoe, 2012).

In recent times, however, this concept of strategy implementation has been linked with the term strategic decision implementation (SDI) (Leonardi, 2015; Engert & Baumgarten 2016), however contrary opinions view 'strategic decision' and 'implementation' as distinct both in theory and in practice (Peters, Adam, Alonge, Agyepong, & Tran, 2014; Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015). Thus, a more acceptable truce is to align with the view of SDI as a combination of different approaches that make it a multi-faceted concept and not a single-faceted concept (Proctor et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2014). This is simply because implementing a hybrid strategy is a combination of a lot of factors that make the idea a multi-faceted concept. Therefore, a major theoretical gap that this study explores is how exactly SDI in the form of implementing a hybrid strategy can be deployed for the benefit of hybrid organisations (Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2014; Engert & Baumgartner, 2016).

2.5.3 Measuring organisational performance after hybrid strategy implementation

Measuring organisational performance after implementation of a hybrid strategy enables an assessment of the organisation's performance and competitiveness along multiple dimensions (Mostaghel et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2017; Jaaskelainen and Luukkanen, 2017). Researchers have argued that Kaplan and Norton 's (1992) balance scorecard approach provides a real and inclusive tool of organisational performance measurement. The indices of measurement in the balance scorecard approach are financial performance (FIPE), customer performance (CUPE), organisational growth and learning perspective (GLPE), and internal process performance efficiency (IPPE) (Reefke and Trocchi, 2013; Yoshikuni et al., 2014; Park et al., 2015). Based on the balance scorecard approach, financial performance (FIPE) for an organisation is determined by the growth and productivity of ECNL, particularly in relation to how the organisation can create value for shareholders via the physical and incorporeal assets of the organisation (Mithas et al., 2011; Perkins et al., 2014). Thus, for a positive FIPE measurement, organisations should strive to manage organisational costs, expenses, and the performance of investments, in addition to generating adequate revenue for the organisation (Yoshikuni et al., 2014; Callado and Jack, 2015; Park et al., 2017).   Customer performance (CUPE) refers to how an organisation can ensure value is created for their target market through their youth entrepreneurship capacity building academy (Leon-Soriano et al., 2010; Mostaghel et al., 2015). Customer perception is key in determining an organisation's CUPE, as customers should ideally make the call based on the qualities a product or service exudes to keep their patronage (Reefke and Trocchi, 2013; Yoshikuni et al., 2014; Park et al., 2017). Organisational growth and learning perspective (GLPE) stipulate how value can be created through integrating organisational assets, usually intangible assets (Reefke and Trocchi, 2013; Perkins et al., 2014; Park et al., 2017). The training of employees is crucial to GLPE measurement, as human capital development, information technology support and corporate culture all add up to constitute the GLPE dimension of measuring organisational performance. (Yoshikuni et al., 2014; Park et al., 2017). Internal processes performance (IPPE) encapsulates all actions geared towards generating maximum value

for shareholders and clients, usually through the assets of the organisation (Perkins et al. 2014; Park et al., 2017). Organisational actions specifically refer to the organisation's value chain activities often characterised by innovation, procedures, and after-sales service, which have been argued to be vital to overall organisational performance (Reefke and Trocchi, 2013; Park et al., 2017). However, being a hybrid youth-training organisation with a social mission of reducing youth unemployment and underemployment via youth entrepreneurship training, target customer perception of training service becomes even more fundamental to its existence. Hence, as regards organisational performance and the balance scorecard approach, this study is focused on discerning the indices that make up the customer perception (CUPE) dimension in a hybrid youth training organisation. Figure 2.7 depicts the balance scorecard approach.

Figure 2.7 The balance scorecard approach
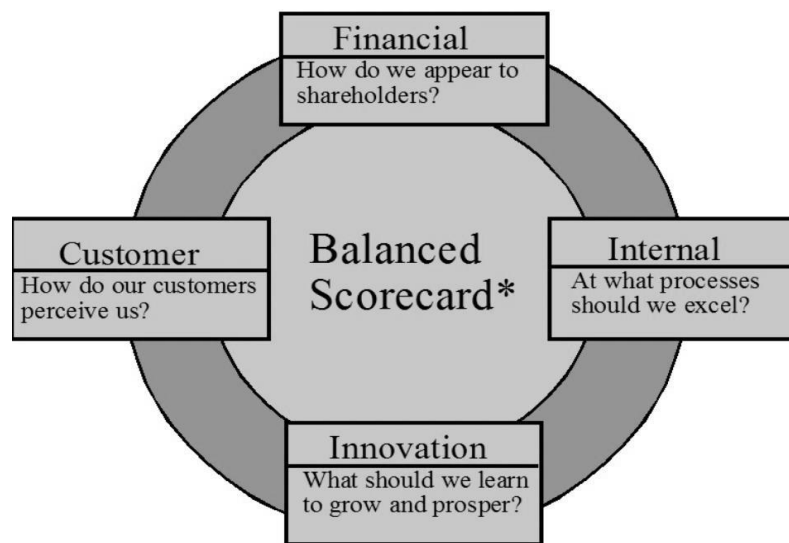
(Source: Tatikonda and Tatikonda, 1998).

2.6   Implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation

From the examined literature, implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in the focus hybrid youth training organisation should be managerially driven by the researcher, as this is crucial for viable competitiveness to be achieved (Bharadwaj et al., 1993; Trout

and Rivkin, 1997). Also, the literature reveals that to arrive at a framework for a hybrid competitive strategy for the focus hybrid youth training organisation, a content-oriented approach is recommended to enable reflection on the most favourable strategies, competencies, and resources that can be deployed to gain a more favourable competitive position, bearing in mind dismal organisational performance resulting from changing customer needs and satisafaction (Hoskisson, Shi, Yi & Jin, 2013; Jensen, Cobbs, & Turner, 2015; Lin & Wu, 2014). Additionally, the literature equally postulates that a hybrid competitive strategy framework in the focus hybrid youth training organisation will involve consciously identifying the target market to gain a deeper appreciation of where exactly they are competing, as well as how best to serve such targets (Hooley and Saunders, 1993).

Additionally, the literature reveals that information systems that facilitate strategy communication and awareness (Arvidsson et al., 2014; Whittington, 2014) play a vital role in the hybrid strategy implementation process, especially regarding action learning set members appreciating the strategic objectives of the hybrid competitive strategy to be applied (Yoshikuni and Jeronimo, 2013; Yoshukuni and Albertin, 2018), in addition to enabling the researcher-manager better moderate discussions during the implementation process to ensure the strategic aims are met (Karpovsky and Galliers, 2015; Jaaskelainen and Luukkanen, 2017). Furthermore, literature examined discloses that the defender model (Hauser and Shugan, 1984; Hauser, 1988) is applicable to hybrid youth training organisations due to its focus on organisations already within the competitive market, that seek repositioning. This model postulates where organisations already operate consistent low-costs, even though not as an intentional strategy, positioning of such organisation should be geared towards the centre of the market, and optimum service differentiation should be undertaken to enable such repositioning and improve competitiveness.

Furthermore, given that solely keeping costs at a minimum has become a real disadvantage to the organisation, this implies that competitive positioning based solely on price is no longer sustainable. Hence, the need for simultaneous service positioning to

articulate the organisations service offering to target customers, in addition to an intentional and focused cost-leadership strategy. Consequently, it is suggested by the examined literature that the competitiveness of the focus hybrid youth training organisation ultimately be characterized not only by cost-leadership potentials, but also quality enhancements as well as service improvement, process innovation, heterogeneity of the market, and interaction of resources (Hill, 1988; Murray, 1988). Additionally, the examined literature suggests that the differentiation strategy to be pursued by the focus hybrid youth training organisation must be so sound as to positively affect its competitiveness (Blankson et al., 2006; Mishra et al., 1996). Furthermore, it is noted from extant literatre that differentiation has shifted from a unidimensional perspective to a multi-dimensional perspective that enables customers to perform new tasks and solve their problems, as well as meet their needs in a unique better way than similar services (Bastic 2004). The role of business networks in achieving this multi-dimensional perspective cannot be understated, as existing literature advocates that it significantly impacts differentiation and ultimately serves to improve the competitiveness of the organisation (Sheng et al., 2011; Li et al., 2012; Saha and Banerjee, 2015; Danso et al., 2016).

Most importantly, the literature examined proposes the elements or themes that make up a hybrid competitive strategy framework as: (i) narrow market segment or particular buyer group (ii) high customer patronage focus (iii) low production costs (iv) perceived customer value (v) marketing (vi) Existing business networks (vii) flexible work system (Bae & Lawler, 2000), (viii) firm-specific innovation (ix) quality, reliability and durability, (x) vertical service differentiation and (xi) customer-centricity. Additionally, extant literature suggests certain variables as having a bearing on the success or otherwise of an implemented competitive strategy, and these relate to the manager leading the strategy implementation process as earlier stated (Hambrick and Cannella, 1989; Pettigrew, 1992; Hussey, 1996; Okumus, 2001; Armstrong, 2010; Hrebiniak, 2013; Klettner et al., 2014; Mangaisa, Matipira and Kanhai, 2014; Engert and Baumgartner, 2016). These variables as recommended by literature are (i) leadership and communication, (ii) commitment of management to the strategy, (iii) availability of

required resources, (iv) organisational culture, training and development, and (v) strategic leadership. Table 2.4 and figure 2.8 simultaneously depict the theoretical framework for a hybrid competitive strategy.

Table 2.4 Literature-driven framework for a hybrid competitive strategy

Porter's Competitive Strategies	Themes of a Hybrid Competitive Strategy framework	Requisite skills of a hybrid strategy implementation manager	Hybrid competitive strategy implementation variables	Hybrid strategy Implementation Stakeholders
Cost-Leadership *(Porter 1980, 1985)*	Low-Production Costs (*Valls-Gimenez, 2013*) High Customer Patronage *(Dolgui & Proth, 2010)*	Strategic Leadership Communication Commitment to Strategy Familiarity with organisational culture, Training, and development facilitator Availability of required resources *(Hambrick and Cannella, 1989;* *Pettigrew, 1992;* *Hussey, 1996;* *Okumus, 2001;* *Armstrong, 2010;* *Hrebiniak, 2013;* *Klettner et al., 2014;* *Mangaisa, Matipira and Kanhai, 2014;* *Engert and Baumgartner, 2016)*	Content-oriented approach to Reflection *(Hoskisson, Shi, Yi & Jin, 2013;* *Jensen, Cobbs, & Turner, 2015;* *Lin & Wu, 2014)* Defender Model of repositioning *(Hauser and Shugan, 1984;* *Hauser, 1988)*	Manager ECNL employees Focus Customers

Porter's Competitive Strategies	Themes of a Hybrid Competitive Strategy framework	Requisite skills of a hybrid strategy implementation manager	Hybrid competitive strategy implementation variables	Hybrid strategy Implementation Stakeholders
Differentiation (Porter 1980, 1985, Blankson et al., 2006; Mishra et al., 1996)	Perceived Customer Value (Valls-Gimenez, 2013) Marketing and Brand Awareness (Kwon et al., 2014) Existing business networks (Sheng et al., 2011; Li et al., 2012; 2015; Danso et al., 2016) Flexible Work System (Bae & Lawler, 2000) Firm-Specific innovation (Banker et al., 2011) Quality, reliability, and durability (Yunus, 2015) Customer centricity (Gebauer et al., 2011)		Availability of information systems (Arvidsson et al., 2014; Whittington, 2014; Yoshikuni and Jeronimo, 2013; Karpovsky and Galliers, 2015; Jaaskelainen and Luukkanen, 2017; Yoshukuni and Albertin, 2018)	

Porter's Competitive Strategies	Themes of a Hybrid Competitive Strategy framework	Requisite skills of a hybrid strategy implementation manager	Hybrid competitive strategy implementation variables	Hybrid strategy Implementation Stakeholders
	Vertical service differentiation (Kim and Wang, 2014)			
Focus (Hooley and Saunders, 1993; Lapersonne, Sanghavi, and Mattos, 2015)	Target Market /Particular buyer group (Tanwar, 2013; Awade, 2014),			

Figure 2.8 Literature-Driven Framework for a hybrid competitive strategy
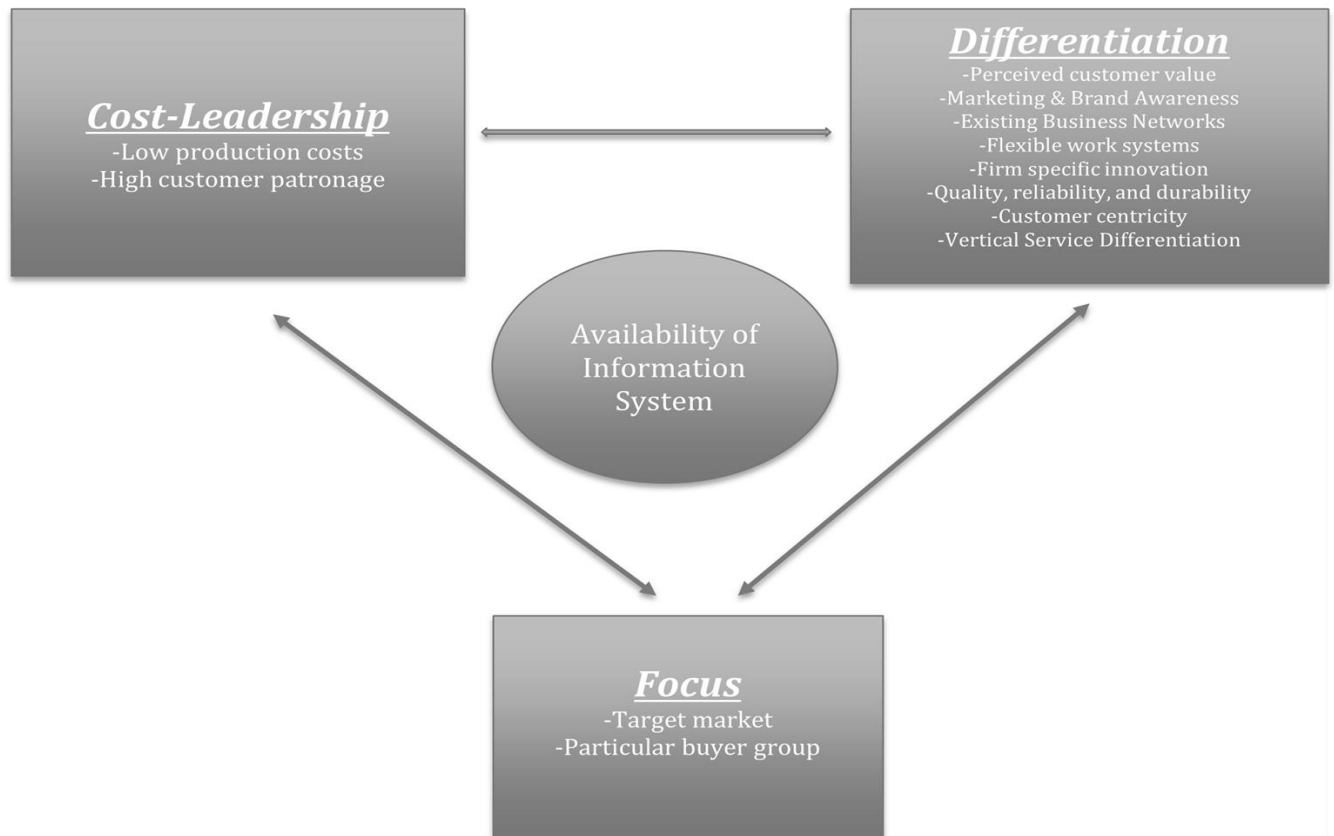
2.7   Formalization of research gap and research questions

There have been several empirical and theoretical studies relating to hybrid competitive strategy, however there is little or no study on a framework for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation, which will serve to guide practitioners and managers on how they can implement a hybrid competitive strategy within their organisation. Rather, the current literature surrounding hybrid competitive strategy focus more on the benefit of implementing a hybrid strategy in comparison with implementing a sole-strategy, and not an actual implementation framework that practitioners and managers can employ for the purpose of hybrid strategy implementation. Therefore, a framework for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy becomes most salient for managers and practitioners who intend to implement a hybrid

competitive strategy in their hybrid organisation to improve organisational competitiveness. Consequently, it is asserted that a major literature gap is the non-existence of an identified framework that managers and practitioners can utilize to implement a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid organisation.

Considering the major literature gap highlighted above, three research questions are addressed and the first of the research questions aims to fully appreciate the framework that managers and practitioners can employ in implementing a hybrid strategy in a hybrid youth-training organisation. Therefore, the following research question will be investigated:

- *RQ1: What is a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth training organisation?*

Studies have made it clear that a hybrid strategy is a focused strategy directed at a particular customer target group (Awade, 2014). Such strategy is equally said to involve tailoring services to the customer segment that form the focus of the hybrid organisation and can involve both cost-leadership and differentiation. Furthermore, since a hybrid competitive strategy is best suited for business environments that are both dynamic and turbulent, it becomes even more important to decipher the actual process that can be used by managers and practitioners when implementing a hybrid competitive strategy framework in a hybrid youth training organisation. Currently, there is an unmistakable lack of empirical research on this subject-matter, and this necessitates the following research question:

- *RQ2: How can a hybrid youth training organisation implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework?*

Once a hybrid competitive strategy is implemented, it is rational for managers and practitioners to feel the need to gauge the efficacy of the implemented strategy framework and appreciate if the intended purpose of implementing the strategy is being

achieved. And as earlier stated, customer perception (CUPE) of service offerings is vital to the competitiveness and overall existence pf a hybrid youth training organisation. However, there is currently no empirical literature that elucidates the indices by which managers and practitioners can gauge customer perception of service qualities in a hybrid youth-training organisation that has implemented a hybrid competitive strategy. Consequently, the following research question is investigated:

- *RQ3: How can a hybrid youth training organisation measure the customer perception of its training service offerings?*

2.8   Summary of Chapter

This chapter focused on the literature surrounding hybrid organisations, hybrid strategy implementation, as well as the various types of sole strategies that organisations can employ individually or combined to improve competitiveness. Also, this chapter elucidates how hybrid organisations can measure organisational performance, specifically vis customer perception of training service offerings. Furthermore, this chapter presents a framework, informed by my review of the literature, of a hybrid competitive strategy. Lastly, the chapter formalizes the research gaps and elucidates the research questions to be investigated in this study.

The following chapter discusses the methodology and methods of inquiry adopted in this study, in addition to the research approach and questions.

3   METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF INQUIRY

3.1   Chapter Introduction

This chapter elucidates the philosophical assumptions, philosophies and perceptions that underpin any research study, as well as the epistemological and ontological dimensions employed in any study. Furthermore, this chapter restates the organisational change objectives of this study, as well as expound on the methods of qualitative inquiry, that is, single case-study action research (AR) approach. The plan for data analysis will also be presented in this chapter, in addition how the data will be analysed and the methodology to be employed, such that subsequent chapters can be better appreciated in the light of the background provided in this chapter.

3.2   Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophies and perceptions of individual researchers have a bearing on the outcome of any piece of research Tai and Ajjawi, 2016); therefore, whatever research methodology employed in this study must be geared towards producing novel practical and professional knowledge and not merely academic or theoretical knowledge (QAA, 2014). Furthermore, high-quality research embodies a clear linkage between the philosophical approach and methods employed (Bleiker et al., 2019), consequently, I will be seeking to ensure an alignment between the philosophical approach of this study and methods detailed in subsequent paragraphs

Ontology refers to philosophical assumptions on the nature of reality and existence (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). In other words, ontology denotes a search for truth, premised on cause, effect, an appreciation of concepts and ideas (Bleiker et al., 2019). On the essence of ontology Olanrenwaju et al. (2019 p.4) state, "*It has been argued that ontological assumptions lead to epistemological assumptions; these, in turn, lead to methodological considerations; and these, in turn, lead to issues of instrumentation and data collection.* Four different types of ontological positions exist as shown in table 3.1, and they are realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Realism holds that knowledge can never be certain independent of a scientific inquiry which must test such knowledge claims to ascertain its veracity; and the longer a theory is in existence, the more certain its claims. Internal realism appreciates that a single truth exists, though accessing that single truth may be impossible. However, internal realists believe that where the single truth is accessed, "*it is absolute and independent of further investigation*" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012 p.19).

Relativism postulates that a single reality does not exist, and what exists are various perspectives on any single issue, while nominalism goes a step further than realism that there is no truth; rather what is paramount is to establish varying dimensions of truth.

Table 3.1 Four different ontologies

Ontology	Realism	Internal Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Truth	Single truth	Truth exists but is obscure	There are many "truths"	There is no truth
Facts	Facts exist and can be revealed	Facts are concrete but cannot be accessed directly	Facts depend on viewpoint of observer	Facts are all human creations

(Source: Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2012 p.19)

Similarly, studies have stated a linkage between an authors's ontological position and the epistemological approach that informs his or her research tools (Bleiker et al., 2019). As depicted in table 3.2 and 3.3, two contrasting epistemological positions employed by researchers, positivism and social constructionism, or objectivist and subjectivist (Bleiker et al., 2019). The aim of a positivist study is to generate laws that stipulate the ways in which organisations should conduct their affairs, that is, in a manner that reflects an objective, independent reality that provides the foundation for organisational learning (Johnson and Duberly, 2013). On the other hand, social constructionism implies an appreciation of the varying connotations and meanings that individuals ascribe to their lived experiences and is built on the premise that knowledge is a product of interactions that are influenced by culture, history and language (Thorpe and Holt, 2008).

Table 3.2 Contrasting implications of positivism and social constructionism

	Positivism	**Social Constructionism**
The Observer	Must be independent	Is part of what is being observed
Human interests	Should be irrelevant	Are the main drivers of science
Explanations	Must demonstrate causality	Aim to increase general understanding of the situation
Research progresses through	Hypotheses and deductions	Gathering rich data from which ideas are induced
Concepts	Need to be defined so that they can be measured	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of analysis	Should be reduced to simplest terms	May include the complexity of 'whole' situations
Generalization through	Statistical probability	Theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	Large numbers selected randomly	Small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons

(Source: Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2012, p.24)

Table 3.3 Methodological implications of different epistemologies.

Ontologies	Realism	Internal Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Epistemology / Methodology	Strong Positivism	Positivism	Constructionism	Strong Constructionism
Aims	Discovery	Exposure	Convergence	Invention
Starting Points	Hypothesis	Propositions	Questions	Critique
Designs	Experiment	Large surveys; multi-cases	Cases and surveys	Engagement and reflexivity
Data Types	Numbers and facts	Numbers and words	Words and numbers	Discourse and experiences
Analysis/ interpretation	Verification/ falsification	Correlation and regression	Triangulation and comparison	Sense-making; understanding
Outcomes	Confirmation of theories	Theory testing and generation	Theory generation	New insights and actions

(Source: Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2012 p.25)

Paradigms are "a systematic set of beliefs, together with their accompanying methods" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 p. 15). Table 3.4 depicts the four major paradigmatic positions that exist, which are functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). A functionalist paradigm advocates a research methodology where the rigour of the research distances the researcher from the outcome due to the scientific process of such research. An interpretive paradigm views the world as not possessing an external concrete form, rather the product of inter-subjective realities. A

radical humanist research paradigm is like an interpretive paradigm in the sense that both paradigms view reality as socially constructed. However, the difference lies in the fact that radical humanist's reality is the result of their own personal view of the world; this is termed the 'pathology of consciousness'. Lastly, a radical structuralist research paradigm views social reality as a fact. In other words, the reality of the world varies from an individual's construction of such reality.

Table 3.4 Four paradigm model of social theory

The Sociology of Radical Change

Subjective	'Radical humanist	'Radical structuralist'	Objective
	'Interpretative'	'Functionalist'	

The Sociology of Regulation

 (Source: Hassard, 1991 p.276).

3.3   Qualitative Action Research

Action Research (AR), being a form of qualitative inquiry, has been defined in varying ways by different authors, however, all definitions of AR embody the notion of collaboration to create deeper understanding of and solutions for the organisation. Here are few definitions of AR that capture its very essence:

"Action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations, to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p.162).

"Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008 p.1).

"Action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organisational knowledge and applied to solve real organisational problems. It is simultaneously concerned with bringing about change in organisations, in developing self help competencies in organisational members and adding to scientific knowledge. Finally, it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry" (Shani and Pasmore, 2010 p.439).

Accordingly, AR is employed as the qualitative research tool due to its emphasis on 'practical knowing' and its collaborative process of inquiry that integrates applied behavioural science and organisational knowledge to solve an existing organisational problem and bring about organisational change (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). The emphasis of AR is on both verbal and non-verbal language, questions, omissions, and the likes, and this makes it suited to this study. Additionally, AR is relevant to this study bearing in mind that organisational change is the premise of the research objective, and collaboration with other stakeholders is required through the research process. Furthermore, AR is a function of a number of philosophical approaches such as constructivism, critical theory, phenomenology and social constructionism, and has been described as both a sequence of events and an approach to organisational change through collaboration, democracy, and partnership (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014).

Additionally, AR is employed in this study for reason that this study is premised on qualitative data as opposed to numeric data and is more suited to a qualitative process of inquiry as opposed to a quantitative approach. Furthermore, AR will reveal the deeper perceptions of research participants, target customer groups and associated business stakeholders and counter-productive practices in ECNL and appreciating how these practices develop in the long term (Bluhm et al., 2011). Quantitative data is neither collected nor required for this study because what is to be evaluated is expressed via opinions and premised on motives and desires of research participants. 'Action Learning' (AL) is one of the modalities of AR and is the preferred AR modality for this study. According to Revans (2008 p.83), "*there can be no learning without action and no action without learning*", therefore, AL involved the coming together of 'people in organisations',

that is an Action Learning (AL) set, to share, create and challenge insights in a manner that generates data and, ultimately, learning (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). Consequently, AL in this study involved eight AL set participants in control of their own learning, and inclusive of the researcher as both the initiator and facilitator. The research questions for this study were investigated through one Action Research Cycle (ARC) of constructing action, planning action, taking action and evaluating action due to constraints of time that prevented a second ARC. The Thesis ARC, on the other hand, involved reflection on the core ARC, 'meta-learning', that is, learning about learning. Thus, while the actual ARC is taking place, there will equally be a simultaneous and subsisting personal inquiry as to how the steps in the actual ARC were being conducted, their consistency with each other, and how previous steps shaped subsequent steps. Figure 3.1 depicts the general empirical method via which Action Research takes place within an organisation .

Figure 3.1 The general empirical method of Action Research
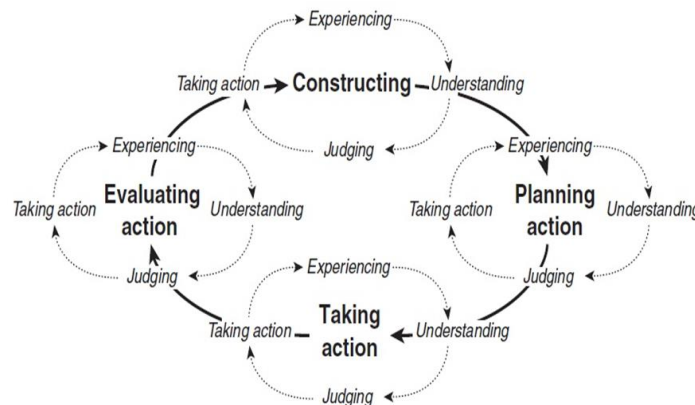
(Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick, 2014 p.30)

3.3.1 Case Identification

Emedith Consulting Nigeria Limited (ECNL) is the organisation in which a hybrid competitive strategy framework with its associated elements or themes is to be developed and implemented. Therefore, a single case-study of ECNL will ultimately enable the generation of a hybrid strategy implementation framework to be implemented

in hybrid youth training organisations for improved competitiveness. The case-study organisation- ECNL- has been introduced in Chapter 1, however, I will elaborate on ECNL in the subsequent paragraphs such that there is a clear idea, where ECNL was, where ECNL is, and where ECNL wants to be after implementing a hybrid competitive strategy.

3.3.1.1   ECNL- The Background

The number of unemployed individuals reached 25.1million in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020, and one in three employees are said to be living in extreme poverty while vulnerable employment is the situation of every three out of four workers (World Economic and Social Outlook: Trends 2020). Nigeria has a reported youth unemployment rate of 14% for 2019 (ILO 2019 Monitor), and as a result, youth entrepreneurship training is largely viewed as a fundamental means by which society can surmount its economic problems and youths can be both self-employed and self-reliant (Akeusola, 2012; Abari, Oyetola, and Okunuga, 2013). Again, entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is largely viewed as a fundamental means by which society can surmount its economic problems (Akeusola, 2012), as well as a means by which youths can be both self-employed and self-reliant (Abari, Oyetola & Okunuga, 2013). Youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring involves enabling and facilitating the acquisition of enterprising qualities and appropriate skills necessary for entrepreneurial success. Therefore, youth entrepreneurship training, in the form of entrepreneurship development programmes and training sessions, devoid of government initiation or management, has been opined to prepare unemployed youths to be both gainfully employed as well as employers of labour (Annaitive, 2006). Such informal and training is a significant factor in achieving economic growth, especially in developing countries like Nigeria (Akande, 2013). Consequently, a society that boosts youth entrepreneurship training is vital to enabling more youth businesses, especially the right idea and network and not just financial capability (Kalejaiye and Solaja, 2014). Research suggests that a few youth entrepreneurship service providers and trainers within the Nigerian ecosystem exists, however 'youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring' in this study focuses on capacity building and business support , which constitutes more than 50% of the Nigerian entrepreneurship ecosystem, and takes several forms such as capacity building, access to

finance, access to resources, access to markets, business support, and research & development (Fate Foundation, 2016)

3.3.1.2   ECNL- Incorporation of Company and value proposition

ECNL was incorporated as a private limited liability company by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) Nigeria on the 5th of February 2011, with a social objective to tackle rising youth unemployment and underemployment via affordable youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring. ECNL commenced business with me as the Head-Consultant in charge of the day-to-day operations and management of employees. Asides me, there were four other employees, three of which were middle managers in charge core aspects of the organisation such as social media management, graphic art, content research and development, and the last employee was the office assistant. Having commenced business, ECNL was solely focused on its social mission of reducing youth unemployment via low-cost youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring. ECNL did not consciously implement a competitive strategy even though an informal low-cost strategy was in place more to make the training and mentoring affordable to focus customers. Furthermore, ECNL value proposition is to provide affordable entrepreneurship training and mentoring to indigent aspiring and budding youth entrepreneurs, currently unemployed or underemployed and between the ages of 18 and 35. ECNL provides youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring by organizing regular 'youth entrepreneurship sessions' for its target customers, which are advertised on our social media platforms and participants registered according to their expression of interest and payment. A typical ECNL youth entrepreneurship session consisted of a five-hour long entrepreneurship class titled *'Starting and Sustaining a Business in Nigeria: The EMEDITH principles.'* This session centered around capacity building and business support and entailed eight key principles of entrepreneurship as relates to growing a business within the Nigeria environment. ECNL sessions were delivered face-to-face at ECNL office premises located in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria, with a maximum class size of fifty participants per session. The sessions were held monthly, and advertised on our social media platforms, website, email newsletter, and word of mouth. Participant registration was usually through email or website, and the cost of each session ranged from fifteen

dollars to twenty dollars depending on whether they were early bird or group bookings, as discounts usually applied to these categories.

3.3.1.3   ECNL- The need for organistional change

Between 2011 and 2015, ECNL averaged 70% of its entrepreneurship sessions uptake, which meant that ECNL averaged a class size of thirty-five participants per session. However, from 2016 ECNL noticed a decline in class size per session, and by June 2017 ECNL was averaging just 32% of its class size, that is, about 17 to 18 participants. As Head-Consultant, I was very concerned about this and began informal conversations and investigations to fully appreciate the reason behind ECNL's declining competitiveness. I found out that target customers were beginning to want more than just low-costs and a 5-hour long capacity building session. As a result, ECNL customers were being influenced by our competitors who were now marketing both a low-cost entrepreneurship session that claimed to be more robust and customer-focused than that of ECNL. In other words, a lack of a clear competitive strategy was diagnosed as the major problem, as we realized that competitors were matching our cost, as well as consciously attempting to differentiate their entrepreneurship service offering. Hence, it became apparent that ECNL required a more tailored strategy geared towards meeting changing customer needs especially in a business environment that is becoming increasingly challenging for several reasons, not least due to the current global pandemic. As a result, ECNL now seeks to implement a hybrid competitive strategy to solve the organisational problem highlighted above and ultimately cause the desired organisational change. Thus, this single case-study of ECNL is considered suitable for the organisational problem and research objective of this study because the research questions have designated clear boundaries that focus on answering 'what' and 'how' questions, and do not hinge on analysing cases, rather to clearly define and explore ECNL as a case-study, and a setting for an enhanced and thorough understanding of a solution to the organisational problem of a lack of an implemented competitive strategy (Cousin, 2005). Additionally, Thorpe and Holt (2008) credited a qualitative case-study approach as an effective way to gain new knowledge that culminates in context-specific/local theories, with Creswell (2013) confirming its suitability in situations where the researcher seeks an in-depth understanding of the case using multiple sources of data information like interviews,

observations, documents, and even audio-visual materials to gain such comprehensive understanding. Also, bearing in mind that this study is not aiming to make any claims of generalisability, but possible transferability of findings to similar settings, a single case-study is suitable for this purpose. Furthermore, four major reasons equally influence the choice of an AR single case-study approach (Yin, 2009):

1. The research questions and answers sought can be achieved via a single case-study of ECNL.
2. The organisational problem faced by ECNL is unique and rare, in the sense that it relates to a lack of an implemented competitive strategy.
3. ECNL is desirable of the organisational change being sought in this study, which is implementing a hybrid competitive strategy to improve performance.
4. ECNL desires competitiveness on a long-term basis that continues even after this study.

3.3.2   Research Questions

Studies have stated that the research methods and questions of any study should ideally be in consonance with the philosophical underpinnings of the research (Tai and Ajjawi, 2016; Berryman, 2019). Berryman (2019 p.273) states, *"Ontology and epistemology work together with the theoretical perspective of the researcher to shape the research questions"*. Therefore, the objectives and methods of this study are linked to the philosophical foundations already laid out in this chapter. Consequently, the primary research questions for this study is:

RQ1: What is a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth training organisation?

Additionally, the secondary research questions for this study are:

RQ2: How can a hybrid youth training organisation (ECNL) implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework?

RQ3: How can a hybrid youth training organisation (ECNL) measure customer perception of its training services?

3.4 Data Collection

I collected data using 2 techniques: (i) Action Learning (AL) set and (ii) semi structured one-on-one telephone interviews. However, in the light of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the World Health Organisation (WHO) COVID-19 advice for the public especially regarding the need for social distancing, it became imperative to avoid all face-to-face contact with research participants, therefore the action learning set focus group that started with in-person meetings had to be moved to the WhatsApp social media platform to adhere to the revised ethical approval for this study, and WHO guidelines. This is in addition to the semi-structured interviews which had to be conducted via telephone and not face-to-face.

3.4.1 Sampling and Setting

Purposive sampling was employed in this study (Giacomini & Cook, 2000; Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998), and as shown in table 3.5, a total of 20 research participants, including the researcher, were sampled for this study. No rigid rule existing as regards number of participants, and any number between 5 and 25 research participants is wholly acceptable (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005; Small, 2009), and 20 participants are enough to attain theoretical saturation (Creswell, 2013). In any case, whatever sample size should ideally give the researcher a clear idea of the subject under study, as well as assist in forming patterns, themes, and sub-themes (Creswell, 2005; Maxwell, 2005; Seidman, 2006). In sampling these research participants, it was important to capture <u>3 sets of voices</u> for the purpose of meeting the conceptual framework of a hybrid competitive strategy.

The inclusion criteria for research participants were:

    i.   managers of hybrid youth training organisations required for their expert knowledge on the structure and dynamics of the youth training industry

ii. target customers, that is, aspiring or budding youth entrepreneurs currently unemployed or underemployed seeking entrepreneurship training and mentoring expected to provide customer-focused data that would inform the hybrid strategy implementation process at ECNL

iii. ECNL employees with a sufficient degree of pre-understanding and appreciation of ECNL service delivery and business conditions.

The recruitment of all participants involved directly requesting participation via email, with all accompanying ethics documents sent to such potential participants to enable thorough appreciation of expectations and their right of refusal. These emails were supplemented with a telephone call from the researcher to managers of youth training organisations and sampled employees of ECNL to solidify participation and provide clarifications as were required. Social media adverts on the case-study organisation's social media platforms of Facebook Twitter and Instagram, were employed to recruit target customer participants, and individuals who expressed interest were vetted based on the inclusion criteria and streamlined to 12 based on the order of such expression of interest. I sent the 12 participants relevant ethics documents via email, followed by a telephone call by the researcher to provide clarification and encourage participation, bringing the total number of research participants to 20.

Table 3.5 Sampling of research participants

DATA COLLECTION METHOD	*TARGET GROUP*	*SAMPLING APPROACH*	*SAMPLE SIZE*
Action Learning Set- Managers	Managers of youth training Organisations within Lagos, Nigeria with expert knowledge	Purposive	5
Action Learning Set- Organisation Staff	ECNL employees with sufficient pre-understanding of organisational problem	Purposive	3
Semi-Structured Interviews- ECNL Target Customers	Aspiring or budding youth entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 35 seeking entrepreneurship training.	Purposive	12

DATA COLLECTION METHOD	TARGET GROUP	SAMPLING APPROACH	SAMPLE SIZE
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS			**20**

3.4.2 Action Learning (AL) set

This phase involved an AL set consisting of 8 research participants, inclusive of me, 5 managers in youth training organisations in Lagos, Nigeria, and 3 consultants employed with ECNL. AL set was initially held via face-to-face and then via WhatsApp chat once the restrictions on face-to-face communication became mandatory because of the global pandemic. The ARC commenced on the 10th of April 2019 at my office premises in Lagos, Nigeria, and initial in-person discussions were transcribed to my research journal. However, the AL set had to be suspended due to circumstances beyond my control in addition to the sudden global pandemic, however, the AL set had already met in-person three times. After the revised ethical approval was given, the AL set restarted in the light of the global pandemic on 16th April 2020. I created a WhatsApp group and the AL set deliberated via WhatsApp. I stimulated discussions and perused responses from the 'chat' discussions, which I reflected in private in my journal. Also, as moderator of the AL set, I introduced the set to the essence of the action research collaborative cycle process, which was to implement a hybrid competitive strategy to improve the competitiveness of ECNL. I equally emphasized the essence of a content and process-oriented approach to critical reflection (Hoskisson, Shi, Yi & Jin, 2013; Jensen, Cobbs, & Turner, 2015; Lin & Wu, 2014; Babafemi, 2015), to focus on competencies and resources to enable the development and implementation of the best possible hybrid competitive strategy that takes into account the changing needs of target customers, and ultimately improves the competitiveness of ECNL. Below is an excerpt from my introduction to the ARC,

"Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, once again thank you for accepting my request to be part of this study on developing and implementing a hybrid strategy framework for improved competitiveness. However, in other that our discussions are on the right track from the beginning, I would like to lay a foundation by explaining the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study. This action learning group is not about unearthing

any objective truths, it is about contributing to discussions based on your lived experiences and perspectives. Consequently, there is no right or wrong view. As you may already be aware, we will be going through an iterative cycle of constructing, planning, 'taking action', and evaluating the action taken."

In laying down the research objective – developing and implementing a hybrid competitive strategy at ECNL- I was particularly influenced by Yukl (2012), who stated, "*the essence of leadership in organisations is influencing and facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives*" (p.66). Therefore, to ensure a receptive climate and inspired by Raelin's (2003) notion of 'leaderful practice' to the effect that an equal degree of participation among leaders and followers should be a leader's core aspiration, and to ensure all participants felt included I stated the following,

"*It is important that all your voices are heard and captured in this AL set, I would want you all to feel comfortable enough to express your views candidly, as well as constructively evaluate the views of other members of this AL set. Remember, the aim of this AL set is to develop a hybrid competitive strategy framework for hybrid youth training organisations, and to do this, we need to leverage on the knowledge and experience of everyone, and not just a select few."*

Additionally, I laid down the Coghlan and Brannick (2014) guidelines for ARC learning set discussions, (i) participation, (ii) democracy and (iii) challenging the assumptions and biases of each other. As researcher-manager, I also ensured active information systems regarding communication and ensuring that relevant information is not withheld from members of the AL set via the creation of a WhatsApp group that aided the collaborative process (Ryan and Deci, 2006; Hogan and Kaiser, 2008; Chua and Ayoko, 2019). I was equally mindful to consciously internalize and exhibit the ingredients of successful strategy implementation such as leadership, systems, culture and shared values, and organisational structure (Hambrick and Cannella, 1989; Pettigrew, 1992; Hussey, 1996; Okumus, 2001; Armstrong, 2010; Hrebiniak, 2013; Klettner et al., 2014; Engert and Baumgartner, 2016). I fully understood that achieving a cohesion between these factors

would make the strategy framework formulation process much more successful, hence my following statement,

"We all have different backgrounds, beliefs and expectations and all these are very important to this AL set because through our diversity, we will be able to approach our objective in a manner that enriches discussions and enables the development of a comprehensive hybrid strategy framework for ECNL."

Additionally, I felt the need to build a system of trust with the AL set by 'sensemaking' and 'sensegiving', in line with my important role in instigating any change scenario (Giola and Chittipeddi, 1991; Nolan and Varey, 2003). Trust, sensemaking, and sensegiving was equally important to ensure that confidentiality would not be breached in a manner that would affect the research objective. Furthermore, in line with Raelin's (2003, 2010) notion of 'leaderful' behaviour and the four Cs of leaderful practice: collective, concurrent, collaborative, and compassionate, members of the AL set were invited to make contributions once I notice partial engagement, for example when I noticed that an employee of ECNL had been quiet for a while, I intervened with the following statement from which came her intervention,

"Cleo, I notice that you have been rather silent during this round of discussions, and I am wondering if there is a problem or if you require help via any clarification or amplification, because we would really like to hear your views."

I was equally aware of the role 'influence' and 'persuasion' would play in ensuring that all members of the AL process felt included in the process of developing and implementing a hybrid competitive strategy (Bell, 1975; Rost, 1993; Raelin, 2003; Yukl, 2012). Thus, collaboration was more important now more than ever, hence Raelin (2003) stated, "*as an influence process, it [collaborative leadership] asks all stakeholders to come into the circle and fully advocate their views and also to be prepared to listen to and deeply consider those of others...Collaboration represents a fundamental condition underlying leaderful practice*" p.55

Through the collaborative process, I was also conscious of the stages or change and the possible reaction of ECNL employees in the AL set regarding their possible reactions to change being denial, resistance, culmination, and aftermath (Isabella, 1990; Jaffe et al., 1994). For instance, one of the oldest employees of ECNL, Ms Kofo, exhibited these reactions especially when the issue of online partnership sessions to increase brand awareness was being discussed, and this brought about the following exchange,

Me: *"Kofo, you seem to be uneasy about the idea of these partnership sessons to increase brand awareness. Is there any reason for this?"*

Kofo: *"yes I am uneasy because it's like negating all our previous efforts and starting afresh, and I'm not sure how that makes me feel, especially as we have been a brand in business for some time and yet we are still talking about brand awareness."*

Me: *"Yes you make a good point Kofo, but remember we are attempting to cause positive orgnanisational change, which means that some things we are familiar with might need to change for greater good. I urge you to trust the process and you will experience a dissipation in the resistance you feel towards proposed changes."*

Furthermore, in line with my 'coaching image' (Palmer and Dunford, 2008) as facilitator and moderator of the AL set, I believed that I had to ensure that 'organisational silence' (Morrison and Milliken, 2000), 'flanelling' (Fleming and Spicer, 2003) and 'cognitive ambivalence' (Piderit, 2000) had not taken root due to unexpressed or unresolved dissatisfaction with the organisational change taking place. According to Morrison and Milliken (2000), organisational silence is usually because of fear that causes employees to withhold their comments and opinions. To describe 'flanelling', Fleming and Spicer (2008) stated,

 "This is a strategy of dissent that quietly subverts the rules of cultural control in such a manner that it is difficult for superiors directly to confront them because employees are technically doing what they have been asked to do." p.172.

An example of this can be seen in the following intervention by Pete,

"I am happy to hear that we [ECNL team] are moving in the direction of reintroducing the brand to our target customers. I also think the fact that these zoom sessions will be free will also serve to draw our targets closer to us. I will design flyers for the first two sessions such that these flyers can be put on our social media platforms prior to the proposed dates of the two sessions."

From this statement and the implied sarcasm, I knew that Pete had unexpressed or unresolved dissatisfaction with the idea of reintroducing the brand to target customers, therefore, I invited him to express whatever concerns he may have, and he stated the following,

"I just feel like we are running away with this idea of reintroducing the ECNL brand, without critically evaluating the potential negative consequences, which is undermining the integrity of the brand and in effect making the brand less competitive than it already is."

With this intervention, it was clear that Pete had gotten 'load' off his chest and was more inclined towards discussions as there was more of a team synergy and a confidence that everyone's voice was being heard and that made a lot of difference. Thus, all through the inquiry process I was concerned about ensuring team synergy, and in that regard was conscious of Kirkman and Rosen's (2000) study on empowered work-teams and their instructive definition of an empowered work team,

"a group of individuals working independently toward common goals and whose members are mutually accountable for task achievements… theoretically by collective effort, teams can achieve goals far beyond the sum of their individual members' effort. In other words, successful team achieve synergy" p.49.

3.4.3   Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were aimed at tackling the secondary research questions of ensuring a customer-driven process by which ECNL can implement a hybrid strategy implementation framework, as well as indices by which the efficacy of ECNL training services can be measured. A major element of a hybrid strategy is that there be a clear target market, that is, particular buyer group (Hooley and Saunders, 1993; Lapersonne, Sanghavi, and Mattos, 2015). Therefore, it was important that I capture the voices of our target market to answer the secondary research questions of this study. I ultimately identified 5 questions critical in exploring these secondary research questions, and I employed open-ended questions that invited the participants to fully exhaust their views with flexibility (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Ozuru et al., 2013), which bordered on:

- hybrid competitive strategy implementation process suited to ECNL as a hybrid youth training organisation
- indices to measure training services from the perspective of target customers

As shown in table 3.6, questions 1, 2 and 3 aimed to show the strategy implementation process that ECNL requires to implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework, and questions 4 and 5 uncovers the indices through which ECNL training services can be measured after the hybrid strategy implementation process. I used social media adverts on ECNL social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for the recruitment of target customer participants and individuals who expressed interest. I then vetted these individuals using the inclusion criteria of aspiring or budding youth entrepreneur within the ages of 18 and 35 and streamlined to 12 based on the order of such expression of interest. These 12 participants were then sent relevant ethics documents via email, followed by a telephone call from me to provide clarification and encourage participation. Therefore, 12 semi-structured open-ended telephone interviews were conducted during the cumulative 9-month period of the action research cycle, specifically between April and May 2020. Each interview was held via telephone, due to ethical restrictions on face-to-face communication resulting from the prevailing global pandemic and lasted about

30 to 60 minutes each. These interviews were recorded, transcribed in my journal before being converted to a word document and then sent to the interviewees to be validated. All interviewees were assured again verbally, in addition to the participant information sheet, of the confidentiality of all interactions and responses.

Table 3.6 Interview protocol

Subject to be Measured	Questions	Sources
ECNL hybrid competitive strategy implementation process:	1. What is the ideal outlook, content, duration and cost of a youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring session?	Abari, Oyetola & Okunuga, 2013
	2. What is the right sort of relationship that should exist between aspiring youth entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship training organisations?	Kalejaiye & Solaja, 2014
	3. How should youth entrepreneurship training or mentoring sessions be delivered in the absence of face-to-face delivery?	WHO, 2020
Customer-driven indices for measuring efficacy of ECNL training services	4. How would you measure your interest in the services of a youth training organisation?	Kaplan & Norton, 1992.
	5. How can youth training organisations ascertain continuing interest of youth entrepreneurs in their services after a training or mentoring session	Yoshikuni et al., 2014, Reefke and Trocchi, 2013, Park et al., 2017

From the outset of each individual interview, I made the areas of interest very clear to the participants, and sometimes the lines of inquiry were changed during the interview,

which was okay because the interviews were semi-structured and did not warrant strict adherence, for example, I stated to all interview respondents,

"Thank you for opting to take part in these semi-structured interviews aimed at ensuring a customer-driven process by which ECNL can implement a hybrid strategy implementation framework, as well as indices by which the efficacy of ECNL training services can be measured. These interviews invite you to share your opinion and thoughts, however, can I please urge you to try as much as possible to stay within the remits of the questions asked so that I do not have to interrupt you where I feel you are digressing."

Furthermore, I employed the technique of 'laddering' and 'probes' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2012) that enabled more precise responses from participants, as well as reveal the premise of their responses, that is, their value base. For instance, on the question on the right sort of relationship between target customers and youth training organisations, I had to probe further to get focused responses from some of the respondents, examples,

"When I use the word' relationship' I mean professional relationship not personal relationship, in other words I am referring to a formal relationship with training organisations and not mere friendship. In that case, kindly throw more light on what sort of professional relationship you find most beneficial?'

"Can you explain what you mean by a continuing training?"

"I would like to know more about your idea of a business-improving content?"

With regards to 'laddering up', an example of my utilisation of this technique can be seen in the following statement,

"Can you give me an idea of the sort of mentoring you may require?"

I asked this question to appreciate the value base of the respondent regarding mentoring, which she had stated to be key to her continuing interest in the training services of a youth training organisation. I *laddered down* to appreciate the last time a respondent attended any youth entrepreneurship by specifically asking,

 "*When was the last time you attended a youth entrepreneurship training session?*"

The reason I employed this technique was to fully appreciate the respondent's inherent understanding of youth entrepreneurship training. Therefore, the interview protocol was merely a guide and was not necessarily followed strictly in all circumstances (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

3.5   Data Analysis

I employed an applied thematic data analysis approach to analyse data from the AL set and semi-structured interviews, and in doing so I was largely influenced by Braun (2008); Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012); and Guest, Macqueen and Namey, (2014). The reason behind the choice of a thematic analysis lies in the fact that the research questions required an exploratory and content-driven analysis that will recognise the implied and overt ideas within the dataset. The analysis equally aims to build a data-driven framework for a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation such as ECNL. Therefore, an exploratory data analysis and the results will be used to refine the previously literature-deduced framework for a hybrid competitive strategy to fill in the gaps it left in terms of 'how' exactly a hybrid competitive strategy for a hybrid youth training organisation looks in practice. However, with regards to actual methodology, I found the 'Gioia methodology' to be most instructive due to its focus on a process of analysis that ensures qualitative rigor through enabling a thorough understanding of how I progressed from raw data to themes and terms. Furthermore, the data structure that the Gioia methodology presents facilitates the representation of data into a "*sensible visual aid*" (Gioia et al., 2012 p.20). Prior to commencing a thematic data analysis, I reflected on the following questions (Guest et al., 2014): (i) what is the practical purpose of the analysis? (ii) what is the analytical purpose? (iii) how is the analysis connected to

the research questions? (iv) what is my timeline? (v) what resources do I have at my disposal? (vi) how large is my data set? (vii) how heterogenous are my data types? (viii) which data should I use for a particular analysis? (ix) who is the audience for my analysis, and how will members judge the process and subsequent findings? Having reflected on these questions, I was then able to couch the practical objective of this study, as well as sub-objectives; the practical objective being *to develop a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth training organisation*, and the other sub-objectives as appreciating *how ECNL can implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework* and equally appreciating *how ECNL can measure the efficacy of its training services from a customer-perspective*.

3.6   Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is most salient in validating a qualitative study and "is a matter of concern to the consumer of inquirer reports" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.328). It implies the solidifying of the research findings as well as the effect and influence of such findings on the audience (Collier-Reed, Ingeman and Berglund, 2008). For a piece of qualitative research to be considered trustworthy, Lincoln and Guba (1985) opine that such research should be credible, transferable, and dependable, as opposed to merely being valid and reliable. As explicated by Collier-Reed et al. (2008), 'credibility' denotes the truth-value of the research, 'transferability' signifies the applicability of the research findings, while 'dependability' represents the idea of consistency through the data analysis phase. Thus, as opined by Collier-reed et al. (2008), "developing trustworthiness is essential in building relationships between the object of study (and the situation it is in), the context of the researcher, and research purpose and outcome (including its tentative impact)." (p.6).

Consequently, to ensure credibility, transferability, and dependability, I employed quotes, themes, codes, and an accompanying codebook that cumulatively served to increase the trustworthiness of the identified framework and process models. Quotes played a very essential role in my data analysis narrative, as it should in any thematic analysis, and I carefully selected interventions from the AL set, and derived the themes

represented in this study from these quotes, as well as responses to questions from the semi-structured interviews. I purposely selected these themes because they identify boundaries around the quote and identify key characteristics of such quotes. Having deciphered themes from the quotes, I developed aggregate dimensions and accompanying definitions that I entered in a codebook. I coded the data twice within the same week to ensure that I did not miss out on important constructs or themes, and where I found that additional themes existed, or some themes required re-adjustment, I equally re-adjusted the definitions of such aggregate dimensions in the codebook. An example from research question one is the aggregate dimension 'brand awareness'. Brand awareness had initially been defined in short in the codebook as '*Attracting customer loyalty' and* the full initial definition was,

"*Refers to process of Introducing or re-introducing a brand to target customers*".

However, after coding a second time, I discovered that the theme 'attracting patronage' was missed, hence the short definition changed to "attracting customer loyalty and patronage", while the full definition was changed to,

"*Refers to a process of Introducing or re-introducing a brand to target customers with an intention to attract patronage*".

Therefore, the codebook was altered to reflect the missing theme of 'attracting patronage' under the aggregate dimension of 'brand awareness (see table 4.1). Another example is from analysis of the data for research question 2 regarding the aggregate dimension 'advertising', which I subsumed under a new aggregate dimension of 'continuing engagement' during the second round of coding the full definition was initially captured in the codebook as,

"*Refers to any effort at marketing to target participants that involves free program(s) to garner the interest of the aspiring or actual youth entrepreneurs before the paid program*",

however, upon coding a second time and changing the aggregate dimension, I streamlined the definition to,

"Refers to any effort at advertising or marketing to target participants to create mutual enthusiasm between trainers and training participants even after the training".

This was done for ease of understanding and ultimately for an effective and accurately defined codebook (see table 4.3). A practical and detailed elucidation of the analysis process is provided in the subsequent chapter.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Gullemin and Gillam (2004) elucidate two ethical dimensions, that is, procedural ethics, and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics in this study was characterized by my seeking ethical approval for the data collection methodology to be employed, as well as ensure all research participants appreciated the extent of their participation via a distributed participant information sheet and granted their consent to such participation. This consent is evidenced in the consent form that was signed by all research participants, and I emphasized the option to withdraw at any time to ensure the absence of any form of duress in the minds of research participants. Ethics in practice, on the other hand, involved issues with the actual insider AR that presented its own challenges. I had no problem with access to the case-study organisation, as I already was responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of the organisation.

I obtained ethical approval from the University of Liverpool on the 16th of November 2017, however, my ethical approval was revised to exclude face to face data collection in the light of the COVID-19 global health pandemic on the 16th of April 2020. While collecting data, I continually reflected on the quality of relationship between the research participants and me. Additionally, I was guided by the four process imperatives of making decisions during the ARC, that is, attentiveness to the data, intelligence in inquiry, reasonability in making judgements and utmost responsibility in making decisions and taking action (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). I also guaranteed the anonymity and

confidentiality of the research participants, and the needs of research participants were balanced and actualised. Confidentiality is guaranteed by keeping all responses in a passworded laptop computer, to be deleted in precisely five years from the official date of completion of this study, while manual transcripts and notes are to be shredded upon completion of this study. Voice recordings from semi-structured interviews were deleted after transcription, and WhatsApp chats were equally deleted after transcription to ensure confidentiality. Also, all pictures or video recordings employed during this study are also saved on a passworded laptop computer. The cumulative effect of the ethical decisions regarding the collection of data enabled the safety of research participants against any or all potential harm to both their privacy and integrity, which could effectively have influenced the quality of data generated. Similarly, the case-study organisation was equally protected against any breach of confidential information that could put the integrity or operations of the organisation at risk.

3.8   Summary of chapter

This chapter introduced the philosophical positions that underpin any study, in addition to the approach and methods that best tackle the research questions under consideration in this study. The chapter further explained the AR process of inquiry, using a single-case study of the focus hybrid youth training organisation, and elucidates the specific steps by which data was collected and analysed. To conclude the chapter, I discussed the ethical issues associated with the collection of data.

The next chapter details the single Action Research Cycle (ARC) of constructing action, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action, thereby taking a more critical look at the generation and collection of data from the AL set and semi-structured interviews respectively, and the thematic data analysis process that led to the findings of this study.

4 ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

4.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

This chapter organises and analyses the Action Research Cycle (ARC), that is, the opinions and contributions of the Action Learning (AL) set, as well as target customer viewpoints regarding a hybrid strategy implementation framework for a hybrid youth training organisation, the process by which ECNL can implement that framework, and the indices by which the efficacy of ECNL training services can be measured. I chose Action Research (AR) as the qualitative research tool for this study because of its emphasis on 'practical knowing' and collaboration as the process of inquiry. The critical reflection that the action research cycle embodies along with all other attributes best serve the research questions, and my ARC lasted an intermittent period of nine months and involved five steps, (i) constructing the initiative and desired outcomes with AL set, and generating research data to be thematically analysed, (ii) planning action resulting from data generated and collected, which involved evaluating data generated and collected, and conducting a thematic analysis of all data, (iii) taking action based on findings from thematic analysis, (iv) evaluating the action taken leading to (v) further action. Figure 4.1 depicts the ARC process of this study.

Figure 4.1- Action Research Cycle
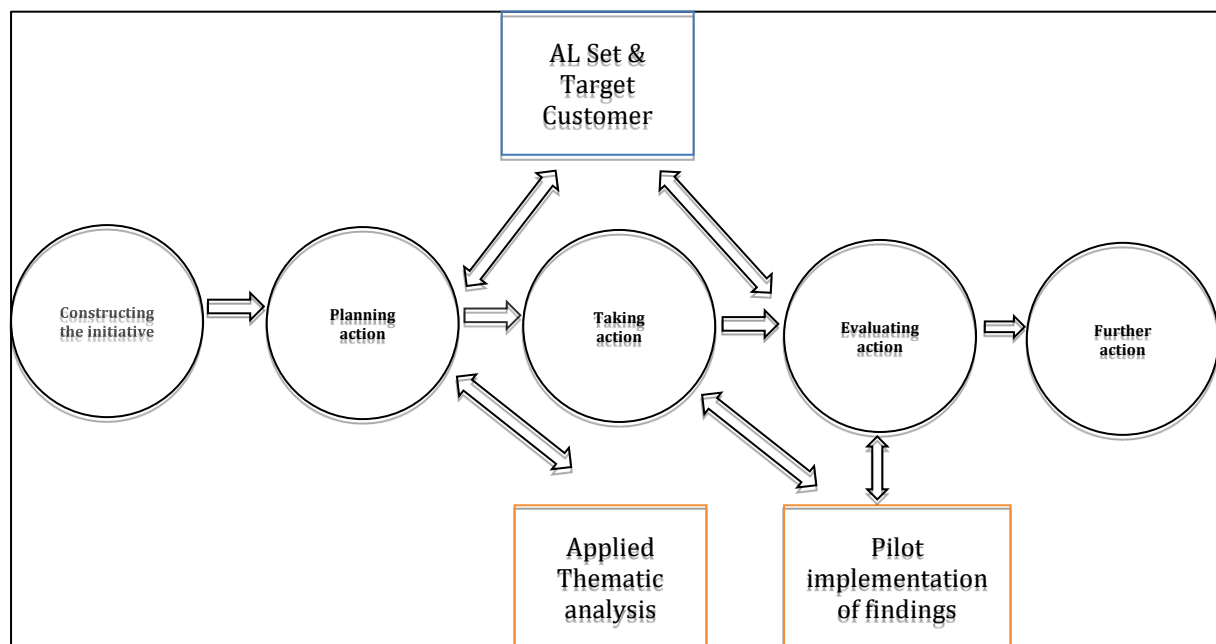
4.2 Constructing the initiative and desired outcomes

Constructing the AR initiative and its desired outcomes was the first step of my ARC, and as moderator of the AL set, it was my responsibility to clearly state my role as researcher-manager-moderator of the ARC process for the avoidance of doubt and clear understanding. Subsequently, I enunciated the practical objectives and desired outcomes from the Action Research Cycle (ARC), which are, developing and implementing a hybrid competitive framework for ECNL, decipher how focus customers impact the framework for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy, and finally, explore how the performance of the organisation can be measured having implemented a hybrid competitive strategy. In constructing the initiative, I deemed it necessary to explain the trajectory of ECNL from inception, as elucidated in the preceding chapter, to give the members of the AL set who may be unaware of ECNL a clear understanding of where ECNL has been, where ECNL is, and where ECNL desires to be. Furthermore, I explicated the conceptual framework garnered from the review of the literature such that all members could have a clear direction for collaboration and critical reflection. A quote reflected in my journal captures my effort at constructing the initiative and desired outcomes:

"*The desired outcome is to develop and implement a hybrid competitive strategy to improve the competitiveness of ECNL. You all are part of this action research study because it is my belief that you can contribute meaningfully to discussions due to your individual positions within ECNL and industry experiences. Therefore, in collaborating and critically reflecting, we should be mindful of the elements that make up the conceptual framework of implementing a hybrid competitive strategy that I have just explained. Feel free to seek clarifications whenever required*"

As stated in chapter 1 of this study and from the review of the literature, the elements of a hybrid competitive strategy to be implemented are (i) narrow market segment or particular buyer group , (ii) high customer patronage, (iii) low production costs, (iv) perceived customer value, (v) intellectual property protection, (vi) marketing, (vii) post-

sales service, (viii) flexible work system, (ix) firm-specific innovation, (x) vertical differentiation, (xi) Customer Centricity.

4.2.1 Systematically generating AL set data

I systematically generated data from the AL set by laying out the theoretical and practical foundations of action, and then asked questions in line with the primary research objective of developing and implementing a hybrid competitive strategy for ECNL. I subsequently captured the views and observations that were key to the research question. The major question was the thoughts and opinions of the ideal hybrid competitive strategy framework to be implemented at ECNL, being the case-study organisation. To give a feel of the AL set interaction and some of the data generated, below is my initial question to the AL set,

"Having explained a hybrid competitive strategy, its essence and elements therein, it would be most helpful if you can give your thoughts and opinions on the ideal hybrid competitive strategy framework for ECNL, based on you lived, professional, and industry experiences". *(Dated 16th April, 2019)*

In asking this question, I intended to draw on the lived and industry experiences of the set, and bearing in mind that at this stage, collaboration was held in-person. Uch[1] who was sitting at the back of the conference room stated in response to my question:

"From what you have explained about ECNL history and where ECNL currently is, your goal as an organisation is to have a quality service at an affordable rate, such that there is the right blend of quality and price that will add perceived value to ECNL service offerings. However, since we are implementing a hybrid competitive strategy, ECNL must not lose sight of ensuring the lowest possible cost for its youth entrepreneurship training". **(Dated 10th April, 2019)**

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[1] Pseudonym used to designate a member of the AL set who is associated with a youth information technology organisation in Lagos, Nigeria.

Subsequent to the initial intervention was another by Kofo[2], who signalled with her hand and said:

"In my time at ECNL, I have come to appreciate the advantage of keeping our costs low, and the flexibility it affords, however, since we are developing a hybrid strategy framework for implementation, we must equally be mindful of the need for some level of innovation, especially as competitors seem to be innovating as well, which is why we are losing our competitive edge. Innovation is differentiation, and based on the definition of vertical differentiation, innovation is synonymous to a customer perception of quality in my opinion. Therefore, whatever innovation we come up with to achieve a vertically differentiated service should be customer driven such that we can say that the 'focus' aspect of hybrid strategy was incorporated into the mix". (Dated 10th April, 2019)

It did seem as though these two initial interventions stimulated critical reflection from the other members of the AL set, as over the course of the rest of the ARC key interventions were made by all members, with some dissenting interventions. Interventions relevant to the research questions and from which the key themes emerged are represented in table 4.3, however, I have captured some key dissenting voices from the AL set below as reflected in my journal:

"I appreciate the idea of a hybrid strategy including low-costs, however, I believe we should try to take a more realistic approach to the idea of the cost aspect of the strategy. Maybe we should consider industry costs and then put more effort in our vertical differentiation such that we are emphasizing quality and not price. I mean if you are trying to be more competitive in the industry, I do not see how a low-cost approach solves the problem. Everybody appreciates that quality is not cheap, so perhaps it is worth clarifying if the target market maintains an expectation of low-costs in the intense sense" (Dated 20th April 2019- Hilda[3])

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[2] Pseudonym used to designate a member of the ECNL team
[3] Pseudonym used to designate a member of the ARC learning set engaged in youth empowerment initiatives

"I can see the point in Hilda's question and concern, in the sense that ECNL has been in existence, so one might expect that there should already be some degree of brand awareness..." **(Dated 15th May 2020- Uch)**

"As much as this sounds like a good idea, which it no doubt is, we should equally be wary of expecting too much from the free sessions in terms of reach and re-engagement with the brand. Yes, there is no doubt that there will be a degree of re-engagement of our target customers with the brand through these free sessions, however, it may not go far enough and we may need to re-evaluate other ways we can increase engagement." **(Dated 16th May 2020 – Kofo)**

I captured these quotes in my research journal not only because they focus on the practical objective of the AL set, which is to develop an appropriate hybrid strategy implementation framework for ECNL, but they deviate from the general trends of the AL set. As a caveat, I am not asserting that these are the only relevant quotes from the AL set, and as earlier stated, a more exhaustive list of quotes that are representative of the themes that make up the hybrid competitive strategy framework is found in table 4.3

4.2.2 Collecting data via Semi-structured interviews with ECNL target customers

The semi-structured interviews conducted answered the secondary research questions research questions 2 and 3 of how a hybrid youth training organisation innovate to differentiate its services for the purpose of hybrid strategy implementation, and how organisational performance can be measured after hybrid strategy implementation. Consequently, I conducted 12 semi-structured telephone interviews with target customers of ECNL, that is, aspiring and budding youth entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Questions 1, 2, and 3 were centred on the process by which ECNL can implement a hybrid strategy framework, while questions 4 and 5 sought to uncover customer-driven indices by which a hybrid youth training organisation, such as ECNL, can measure the efficacy of its training services. It was important to explore these

viewpoints of ECNL target customers not only because the 'focus' aspect necessitated this, but also to shed light on how to differentiate ECNL youth entrepreneurship training services for the services of competitors (Mishra et al., 1996; Blankson et al., 2006). The questions I couched were open-ended questions such that the participants could explicate their viewpoints exhaustively and flexibly (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Ozuru et al., 2013). The interviews were conducted via telephone between the 25th and 31st May 2020, and each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews questions were as follows:

Q1. What is the ideal outlook, content, duration and cost of a youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring session?

Q2. What is the right sort of relationship that should exist between aspiring youth entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship training organisations?

Q3. How should youth entrepreneurship training or mentoring sessions be delivered or facilitated in the absence of face-to-face delivery?

Q4. How would you measure your interest in the services of a youth training organisation?

Q5. How can youth training organisations ascertain continuing interest of youth entrepreneurs in their services after a training or mentoring session?

4.3 Planning action resulting from data generated and collected

This phase of planning action involved engaging with the research participants to review the data generated from the AL set and collected from the semi-structured interviews of ECNL target customers. This phase also involved conducting an applied thematic analysis of the data generated and collected to uncover themes. I began by familiarizing myself with the data (Braun, 2008; Maguire and Delahunt, 2012) and having done so I began to uncover initial constructs from the various AL set quotes and semi-structured interviews

transcribed in my journal, particularly those that related to the research question under consideration (Pandza and Ellwod, 2013). Having abstracted the quotes to uncover initial constructs, I derived second order themes from these constructs, and aggregated these second order themes to dimensions, from which emerged the hybrid competitive strategy framework for hybrid youth training organisations in response to research question 1, the hybrid strategy implementation process in relation to research question 2, and indices by which a hybrid youth training organisation can measure the efficacy of its training services in relation to research question 3. Furthermore, I developed a codebook to aid the interpretation of the aggregate dimensions and how the deciphered 2nd order themes fit into these dimensions (Guest et al., 2014). For the sake of transparency and validity, I equally highlighted data analysis process as shown in figure 4.2, the representative quotations from data of all second order themes, the identified hybrid competitive strategy framework, as well as processes for both implementation and measuring service efficacy. I take a more detailed look into the applied thematic analysis process in the subsequent paragraphs prior to taking and evaluating pilot action based on the findings from the analysis of data generated.

Figure 4.2 Applied thematic data analysis process
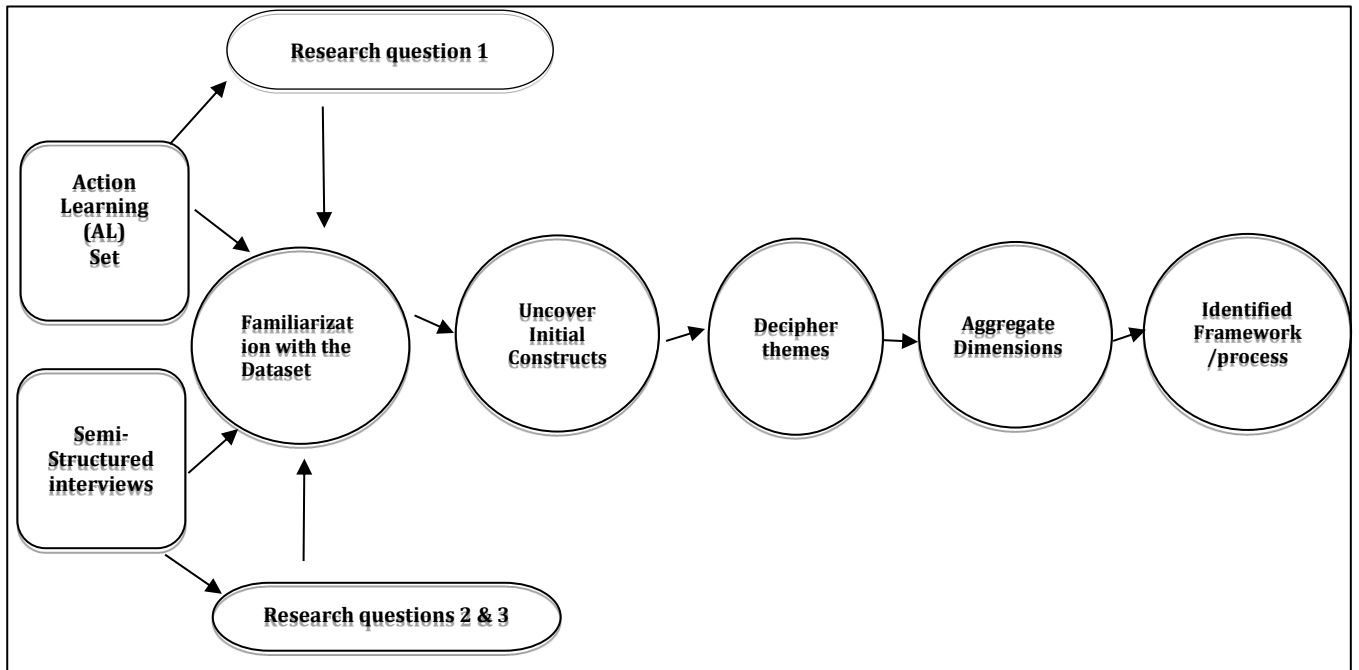
4.3.1   Applied thematic analysis of AL set data

In reviewing the data generated from the AL set, I carefully perused my journal on three separate occasions, seeking for those interventions that most closely related to developing a hybrid competitive strategy framework for ECNL, which have been highlighted in the preceding paragraph. Some of these representative quotations are highlighted below, while all representative quotations are detailed in table 4.2 For instance, for the 2nd order theme of 'flexible', the following quotations from the AL set were coded to generate this theme,

"I am of the opinion that even though ECNL operates a low-cost, such cost cannot be a fixed low-cost, and most be amenable to adjustment if and where necessary" **(Kofo: ECNL team)**

"In my time at ECNL, I have come to appreciate the advantage of keeping our costs low, and the flexibility it affords because economic situation can always call for a revision of our costs and we should be ready to meet the moment" **(Uch: ECNL team**).

"As much as I appreciate the notion of low-cost being a major part of a hybrid strategy, I am concerned as to its suitability and sustainability especially in the world we live in, and there must be an opportunity to revise such low-costs as circumstances may demand". **(Bern: Youth training professional)**

Similarly, I derived the theme 'trade-offs' from the following quotes,

"So, there might be need for concessions especially as regards ensuring that the element of low-production costs is not overlooked because it is absolutely critical" *(Pete)*

"If I were asked what I feel has been ECNL's strongest point, I would say is the fact that our overheads have been kept at a minimum, and we must be mindful of this core requirement of operating costs that are much below industry average (Cleo).

"To my mind it is impossible to offer costs below the industry standard if we have operational costs that are not below industry operational costs" (Kofo)

I derived a total 13 second-order themes from the data generated from the AL set, that is, low and flexible, social mission, affordable, quality, below industry costs, innovation, customer-expectation, trade-offs, attracting patronage, no-cost, partnerships, and free medium. From these 13 themes, I derived 3 aggregate dimensions of low-cost, differentiation, and brand awareness. The initial constructs, themes, and aggregate dimensions are represented in figure 4.3, and the identified hybrid competitive strategy framework for hybrid youth training organisations is represented in figure 4.4 below, while the accompanying codebook is represented in table 4.1.

Figure 4.3 Data structure for research question 1

1st Order Constructs	2nd Order themes	Aggregate Dimensions
-Ensuring lowest possible costs / -Flexibility regarding low-costs / -Intentionally ensuring low-costs	Low and flexible	
-Low-cost integral to social mission / -Social mission synonymous with hybrid organisation / -Costs should reflect social mission	Social Mission	Low-Cost
-Quality service at affordable rate / -Training affordable to targets / -Targets concerned with ability to pay	Affordable	
-Quality at the forefront of service / -A distinct focus on quality / -Cost cannot compromise quality / -Right blend of quality and price	Quality	
-Incompatible with industry price / -operate below industry price / -significantly lower costs than competitors	Below industry costs	
Differentiate services from competitors / -Inexpensive to ensure low overheads / -link between differentiation and innovation / -Enticing to target customers	Innovation	
-Customer thought at the forefront / -Clarify ideas with target customers / -Reflection through customer lens / -Customer-driven approach	Customer-expectation	Differentiation
-Concessions regarding production costs / -Operating costs below industry average / -Overheads kept at a minimum	Tradeoffs	
-Ingenuity to draw targets / -Enticing targets towards brand / -Beneficial to make effort to attract target	Traction	
Gaining loyalty and patronage / -Generate increased customer base / -Create awareness of brand's existence	Attracting patronage	
-Attract customers at no cost / -Expenditure incompatible with hybrid strategy	No cost	Brand Awareness
-Heightened awareness via partnerships / -Visibility to target customers / -Leaning on other brands	Partnerships	
-Free mediums are effective / -Free platforms employed for awareness / -Advertising via free mediums	Free mediums	

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Table 4.1 Codebook for research question 1

	Code	Brief Definition	Full Definition	When to Use	When not to use	Example
1.	Brand Awareness	*Attracting customer loyalty and patronage*	*Refers to process of Introducing or re-introducing a brand to target customers with an intention to attract patronage.*	*Apply this code to all references to any process aimed at attracting patronage*	*Do not use this code for reference to customer perception or customer expectations.*	*"It is very important that we find ingenious ways to draw target customers to our brand, that is, those that know we exist and those that do not"*
2.	Low-Cost	*Quality and affordable service offerings*	*Refers to the right blend of quality and price through intentionally ensuring the lowest possible flexible costs that are below industry costs and resulting from a social mission.*	*Apply this code to all references to quality service offerings that are below the industry cost of such service*	*Do not use this code for reference to differentiation, innovation, low-production costs, trade-offs, partnerships, or free mediums*	*""In my time at ECNL, I have come to appreciate the advantage of keeping our costs low, and the flexibility it affords because economic situation can always call for a revision of our costs and we should be ready to meet the moment"*
3.	Differentiation	*Customer-focused Innovation*	*Refers to a customer driven focus on low-budget innovation via trade-offs*	*Apply this code to all references to innovation, low-production costs, customer expectation and trade-offs*	*Do not use this code for references to low costs or efforts at gaining the loyalty and patronage of customers.*	*"If we are thinking of quality service offering then we should be thinking of inexpensively differentiating our services in a manner that does not affect current overheads"*

Table 4.2 Data supporting a hybrid competitive strategy framework for hybrid organisations

Theme	Representative quotations
	Low-Cost
Flexible	*"I am of the opinion that even though ECNL operates a low-cost, such cost cannot be a fixed low-cost, and most be amenable to adjustment if and where necessary" (Kofo: ECNL Manager).* *"In my time at ECNL, I have come to appreciate the advantage of keeping our costs low, and the flexibility it affords because economic situation can always call for a revision of our costs and we should be ready to meet the moment" (Uch: ECNL Information technology consultant).* *"As much as I appreciate the notion of low-cost being a major part of a hybrid strategy, I am concerned as to its suitability and sustainability especially in the world we live in, and there must be an opportunity to revise such low-costs as circumstances may demand". (Bern: Youth training professional)*
Below industry costs	*"Again, even though we did not operate an intentional strategy in the past, our social mission as a hybrid organisation equally suggest that we cannot operate on industry price, and out costs must reflect the hybrid nature of ECNL" (Pete: ECNL information technology consultant).* *"In my opinion to operate a low-cost simply means to operate below the price of your competitors, which means charging for services below the average competitor pricing" (Obi: Youth dance training instructor).* *"Our costs must be significantly lower than the average competitor" (Cleo: ECNL consultant).*
Social mission	*"However, since we are implementing a hybrid competitive strategy, ECNL must not lose sight of ensuring the lowest possible cost for its youth entrepreneurship training" (Uch).*

Theme	Representative quotations
	"Again, even though we did not operate an intentional strategy in the past, our social mission as a hybrid organisation equally suggest that we cannot operate on industry price, and out costs must reflect the hybrid nature of ECNL" (Pete). *"ECNL cannot claim to be a hybrid organisation if it opts to charge the same price as its competitors, because as a hybrid youth training organisation with a social mission to reduce youth unemployment through entrepreneurship training, the cost of such training must be so low as to showcase a dedication to the social mission"* **(Hilda: Youth empowerment coach)**
Affordable	*"From what you have explained about ECNL history and where ECNL currently is, your goal as an organisation is to have a quality service at an affordable rate" (Uch).* *"Let us not forget that part of what has worked well for us an organisation is that our entrepreneurship sessions can be afforded by our targets, and I believe that we should not forfeit this" (Kofo).* *"Youths are often concerned with their pockets and ability to pay for service, how much more unemployed youths who are already struggling. I believe ability of your targets to pay is key. (Bern)*
Quality	*"In anything ECNL chooses to do, I believe quality should also be at the forefront of service offerings" (Hilda).* *"From what I have understood, part of the issues around competitive positioning began when competitors began to emphasize quality, therefor it is prudent that we pay close attention to quality" (Cleo).* *"Quality service offering should be ranked as important as low cost" (Obi)* *"Such that there is the right blend of quality and price that will add perceived value to ECNL service offering" (Uch)*
Differentiation	
Innovation	*"A successfully differentiated service is synonymous to a customer perception of service quality in my opinion" (Kofo)* *"If we are thinking of quality service offering then we should be thinking of inexpensively differentiating our services in a manner that does not affect current overheads" (Hilda)* *"Can we really separate quality service from some level of differentiated service offering that entices our target customers? I do not think we can or we should" (Bern)*
Customer expectation	*"I believe we are putting our thoughts at the forefront of the discussion when we should be putting the thoughts of the customers at the forefront" (Obi)* *"So, I agree with the notion that any idea we have about the appropriate hybrid strategy implementation framework is worth clarifying with target customers" (Pete)* *"The mistake organisations make is to see things from their own lens instead of the lens of the customer to know exactly what their expectations are" (Bern).* *"Whatever we come up with should be customer driven such that we can say that the 'focus' aspect of hybrid strategy was incorporated into the mix" (Kofo)* *"To put the thoughts of customers at the forefront would mean to actually reflect on what quality might mean to them, because part of the elements elucidated by MrEmedith revolves around the customer perception of quality, and this I think is linked to the very idea of vertical differentiation" (Obi)* *"Innovation to differentiate ECNL service offering should naturally produce quality service in the customer's eyes" (Obi)*
Trade-offs	*"So, there might be need for concessions especially as regards ensuring that the element of low-production costs is not overlooked because it is absolutely critical" (Pete)* *"If I were asked what I feel has been ECNL's strongest point, I would say is the fact that our overheads have been kept at a minimum, and we must be mindful of this core requirement of operating costs that are much below industry average (Cleo).* *"To my mind it is impossible to offer costs below the industry standard if we have operational costs that are not below industry operational costs" (Kofo)*
Brand-Awareness	
Traction	*"It is very important that we find ingenious ways to draw target customers to our brand, that is, those that know we exist and those that do not" (Cleo)* *"We have spoken about a lot of issues, but we have not really considered the need to devise ways to draw target customers towards our brand so they can enjoy our service offering. So, we should be discussing how to draw target customers towards the ECNL brand" (Pete)* *"I found that making the effort to attract customers to my brand has been very beneficial because most times, customers have to know your brand before they patronize you, so how you enable them know your brand is key to success" (Uch).*
Attracting patronage	*"And I know from catering to youths that a brand really has to intentionally place themselves in the minds of youth to gain their loyalty and patronage." (Uch)* *"It is pertinent to create renewed awareness of the brand in order to generate an increasing customer base" (Obi)* *"How do you gain patronage if you don't create awareness that you exist or that your services have changed for the better? Personally, I don't see how!" (Bern)*
No cost	*"We just cannot afford to spend any money to try to lure customers towards our brand, so we may as well think of ways to do so at no extra cost" (Kofo)*

Theme	Representative quotations
	"From my understanding of a hybrid strategy, the very idea of spending money on brand awareness is inimical to the strategy itself" (Pete).
Partnerships	*"I would want to know after implementing planned actions, if you share my view that you may gain a heightened brand-awareness by engaging in some sort of partnership" (Bern)* *"Sometimes the cumulative effect of leaning on another brand serves to make both brands more visible to target customers" (Hilda).* *"I have actually once proposed the idea of seeking partnerships at a team meeting, so I am fully aligned with that idea of partnering with other brands" (Cleo)*
Free mediums	*"I also think the fact that these zoom sessions will be free will also serve to draw our targets closer to us" (Uch).* *"My suggestion would be that we make use of free social media platforms and advertising mediums for brand awareness purposes, adverts, and the likes" (Pete).* *"And free mediums can be employed in advertising these trainings" (Bern).*

4.3.2 Applied thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews

In relation to the semi-structured interviews I conducted via telephone, I recorded these interviews via my mobile device, and then transcribed the recording verbatim into my research journal and then into a word document that was then sent to the 12 interview respondents for verification. Upon verification, I proceeded to thematically analyse the data in two stages. The first stage was in relation to research question 2, that is, how ECNL can implement a hybrid strategy framework. The second stage related to research question 3, which is how hybrid youth training organisations can measure the efficacy of their training services. Questions 1,2, and 3 were analysed in relation to research question 2, and questions 4 and 5 were analysed in relation to research question 3. To analyse semi-structured interviews in order to answer research question 2 and 3, I initially familiarised myself with the data from the interviews by reading through the responses. In reading the responses, I decided to segment text from the responses to focus on the research question. An exhaustive list of representative quotations from which the themes for research questions 2 and 3 emerged is found in tables 4.4 and 4.6. However, examples of some segmented text from which initial constructs for the theme 'online academy' were derived for research question 2 are:

"I would prefer something that is continuous and not about just a few days, probably like some sort of an online Youth Entrepreneurship Academy that will involve continuing

training and interaction with participants in order to assess how individuals are benefiting from it" (Respondent 1).

"I would say a 3-month academy that is robust and has various impactful entrepreneurship topics explored and at the end an opportunity to market and sell products to customers via affiliate marketing with more established organisations" (Respondent 3).

"I would say that I prefer an online academy based on the nature of my job. An academy would mean a fixed meeting, probably on a particular day, where we all gather online at a particular time, then the facilitator enlightens us more about entrepreneurship" (Respondent 5).

The initial constructs derived from the segmented text above are: 'an online youth training academy', '3 month robust and impactful academy', and 'an online forum that lasts about 3 months'. For research question 3, examples of the segmented text from which I derived the theme 'engagement' are,

"When I look forward to future events, and I come back to your website or social media to see what I can benefit from an upcoming training" (Respondent 1).

"If I continue communicating with them even before the training via the contacts I have obtained from their website or social media handle" (Respondent 2).

"if I find myself perusing their social media handles, especially their Instagram handle even before the training, this would also show that I am engaged with the brand" (Respondent 3).

"if I find myself checking their website and social media pages to know what is new and also for things coming up" (Respondent 6).

The initial constructs derived from the segmented text above, and from which the theme 'engagement' emerged are 'level of social media engagement', 'participant engagement with training organisation', and 'continuing communication with participants'. For research question 2, I derived a total of 35 constructs, from which 11 themes emerged based on their frequency of occurrence, and they are, 'practical and interactive', 'extended duration', 5000 Nigerian Naira standard cost', 'online academy', 'business-improving content', 'zoom', 'WhatsApp', 'social media engagement', 'marketing', 'mutual enthusiasm', and 'tailored mentoring'. From these themes, 3 aggregate dimensions emerged, 'andragogy', 'social media' and 'continuing engagement'. The identified process of implementing a hybrid competitive strategy at ECNL, along with accompanying codebook, are represented in figure 4.6 and table 4.3 respectively. For research question 3, I categorised the 9 themes of 'engagement', 'practicality', 'interactivity', 'mentoring', 'anticipation', 'referrals', 'feedback', 'note-taking', and 'action-planning', into the following 3 aggregate dimensions or codes of 'pre-training', 'in-training', and 'post-training'. The dataset for research question 3 is represented in figure 4.7, and the discovered process for measuring the efficacy of youth training services is represented in figure 4.8. I elucidate the findings to all 3-research question in the subsequent chapter.
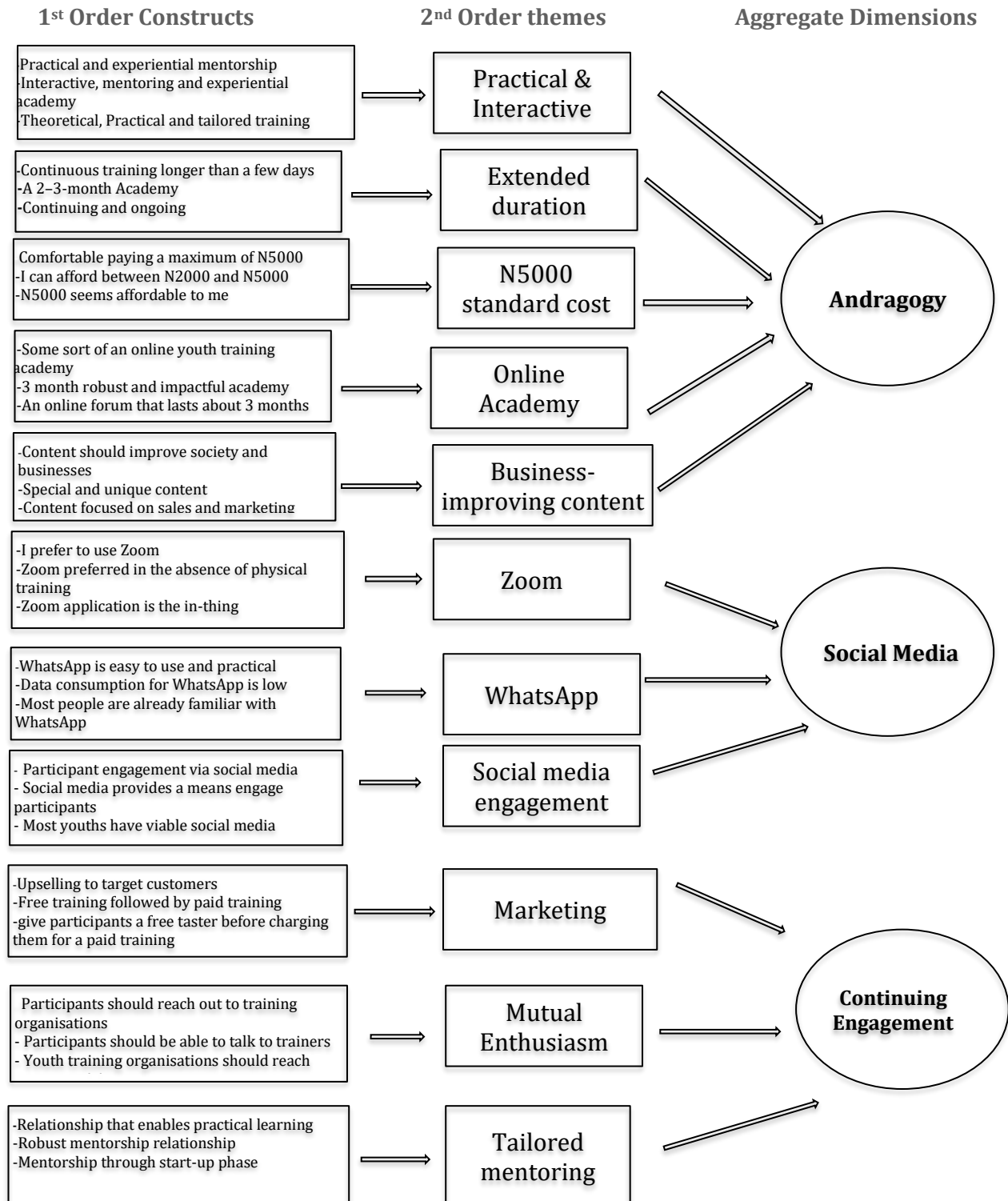
Figure 4.4 Dataset for research question 2

1ˢᵗ Order Constructs   **2ⁿᵈ Order themes**   **Aggregate Dimensions**

1ˢᵗ Order Constructs	2ⁿᵈ Order themes	Aggregate Dimensions
Practical and experiential mentorship / -Interactive, mentoring and experiential academy / -Theoretical, Practical and tailored training	Practical & Interactive	
-Continuous training longer than a few days / -A 2–3-month Academy / -Continuing and ongoing	Extended duration	
Comfortable paying a maximum of N5000 / -I can afford between N2000 and N5000 / -N5000 seems affordable to me	N5000 standard cost	**Andragogy**
-Some sort of an online youth training academy / -3 month robust and impactful academy / -An online forum that lasts about 3 months	Online Academy	
-Content should improve society and businesses / -Special and unique content / -Content focused on sales and marketing	Business-improving content	
-I prefer to use Zoom / -Zoom preferred in the absence of physical training / -Zoom application is the in-thing	Zoom	
-WhatsApp is easy to use and practical / -Data consumption for WhatsApp is low / -Most people are already familiar with WhatsApp	WhatsApp	**Social Media**
- Participant engagement via social media / - Social media provides a means engage participants / - Most youths have viable social media	Social media engagement	
-Upselling to target customers / -Free training followed by paid training / -give participants a free taster before charging them for a paid training	Marketing	
Participants should reach out to training organisations / - Participants should be able to talk to trainers / - Youth training organisations should reach	Mutual Enthusiasm	**Continuing Engagement**
-Relationship that enables practical learning / -Robust mentorship relationship / -Mentorship through start-up phase	Tailored mentoring	

Table 4.3 Codebook of interpretations for research question 2

	Aggregate Dimensions	Brief Definition	Full Definition	When to Use	When not to use	Example
1.	ANDRAGOGY	*Participant-oriented focus*	*Refers to a practical and interactive online academy for an extended duration with business-improving content for a standard cost of N5000*	*Apply to all references to content, duration, or cost. or*	*Do not use for reference to participant-engagement*	*"In terms of duration, I would say that that an ongoing training would be appropriate, something that happens about 3-5 times every week for 1 or 2 months".*
2.	SOCIAL MEDIA	*Social media engagement*	*Refers to the engagement of training participants via social media, Zoom, and WhatsApp*	*Apply to all references engagement of participants through social media, Zoom, or WhatsApp*	*Do not use for reference to participant-focus, accessibility, or tailored mentoring.*	*"Youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring organisations should be able to reach out to youths who are into online businesses, especially via social media".*
3.	CONTINUING ENGAGEMENT	*Marketing and Advertising*	*Refers to any effort at advertising or marketing to target participants to create mutual enthusiasm between trainers and training participants even after the training*	*Apply this to marketing, advertising, mentorship upselling, or any effort to create enthusiasm in target customers.*	*Do not use for references to Participant engagement via social media, extended training duration, or business-improving content.*	*"For instance, if I have a mentor guiding me through the entrepreneurship journey, such would be very useful"*

Table 4.4 Data supporting interpretations for research question 2

2nd Order themes	Representative quotations
	Andragogy
Online Academy	*"I would prefer something that is continuous and not about just a few days, probably like some sort of an online Youth Entrepreneurship Academy that will involve continuing training and interaction with participants in order to assess how individuals are benefiting from it" (Respondent 1).* *"I would say a 3-month academy that is robust and has various impactful entrepreneurship topics explored and at the end an opportunity to market and sell products to customers via affiliate marketing with more established organisations" (Respondent 3).* *"I would say that I prefer an online academy based on the nature of my job. An academy would mean a fixed meeting, probably on a particular day, where we all gather online at a particular time, then the facilitator enlightens us more about entrepreneurship" (Respondent 5).*
Practical and Interactive	*"I would like a practical class and an interactive class where I get to ask questions at the end of the training, having stated my own understanding of the training, such that I can feel that the training impacted me personally" (Respondent 2).* *"I would prefer an interactive and practical session that I can put into practice to enhance the learning. In terms of length, I would suggest 2-3 months for an interactive, practical and mentoring academy" (Respondent 5)* *"I would like an academy via zoom where we can get proper training and mentoring and interact with other participants and learn from each other. I would also like to be exposed to the general overview of Entrepreneurship, then guiding us along our line in the area we want to go; that is practical training along our chosen entrepreneurship area" (Respondent 10)*

2nd Order themes	Representative quotations
Extended Duration	*"I would say that that an ongoing training would be appropriate, something that happens about 3-5 times every week for 1 or 2 months" (Respondent 2).* *"In terms of length, I would like a long-term thing as any short-term training may not yield the desired fruits" (Respondent 4).* *"In terms of duration, I would say 2-3 months" (Respondent 9).* *"Ideally, I think it should be continuing and ongoing" (Respondent 11).*
N5000 Standard Cost	*"I would be comfortable paying N5000 for the sort of training I have highlighted" (Respondent 2).* *"In terms of cost, I would say N5000 would be an affordable amount for youths without any stress or hassle of raising funds" (Respondent 3).* *"I would be comfortable paying N5000 for such an Academy" (Respondent 8)* *"In terms of cost I would say N5000" (Respondent 9)*
Business-improving Content	*"In terms of content, things that can improve our society and help the Nigerian youths grow and enable them to earn their own living by the businesses that are able to start and sustain" (Respondent 2).* *"I would want the content to appeal to me in a special and unique way" (Respondent 4).* *"I think it should focus on sales and marketing, where we get to see different techniques of marketing our goods because people branch into businesses and they don't know how to sell or market, so it'd be good for this to be well covered in a training session" (Respondent 6).* *"I would opt for a seminar that covers what one needs to further to move to the next level, especially as regards access to finance" (Respondent 7).*
	Social Media
Zoom	*"my preferred method is online, and the online dimension that tickles is Zoom" (Respondent 5).* *"In the absence of the face to face physical training and mentoring, my top training methods is Zoom" (Respondent 9)* *"In the absence of face-to-face training, online training is most desirable, and in order of priority as regards the online medium, I would say Zoom" (Respondent 11)* *"I think Zoom is by far the best, and I'm not sure any other medium has the capacity of Zoom" (Respondent 12)*
WhatsApp	*"Therefore, in terms of the best method of delivery in the absence of face-to-face delivery, I feel WhatsApp is the best to use" (Respondent 1).* *"In the absence of physical face to face training, the online platforms I find most useful is WhatsApp" (Respondent 3).* *"In the absence of physical face to face communication, I would prefer the online methods WhatsApp" (Respondent 7).*
Participant Engagement	*"Even if they are not organizing training classes, they should be sending out helpful information and tips on their page on Instagram or through other social media" (Respondent 1)* *"Youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring organisations should be able to reach out to youths who are into online businesses, , especially via social media" (Respondent 3)* *"The training organisations enlighten the youths more about entrepreneurship especially via a platform that youths are active on, and also advertise their service in a way that those who are interested would be aware and patronize such services" (Respondent 10).*
	Continuing Engagement
Marketing	*"Even if it is not an extensive class, just a tip or two a week will go a long way because it will help a lot of people, and then they can also use this to tell small business owns that if they want more information, they can come to them" (Respondent 1)* *"They can begin the relationship by setting up a free program to garner the interest of the aspiring or actual youth entrepreneurs and then those that are keen can progress to the paid 2nd stage" (Respondent 5).*
Mutual Enthusiasm	*"Therefore, youth entrepreneurship training organisations should make the effort to make themselves easily reachable" (Respondent 2)* *"I feel the youth entrepreneurship training organisations should try and reach out more" (Respondent 6).* *"Therefore, there should be a constant flow and check up by training organisations on aspiring youth entrepreneurs" (Respondent 8)*

2nd Order themes	Representative quotations
	"it should be based on mutual enthusiasm and entrepreneurship training organisations should reach out more because there are a lot aspiring and budding entrepreneurs out there who need training and mentorship to both start their business and also take it to the next level through available support" (Respondent 9).
Tailored Mentoring	*"Youth entrepreneurship training organisations should do more to reach out to aspiring and actual youth entrepreneurs especially at the early stages of their entrepreneurial journey" (Respondent 4)* *"I think it should be more like a mentorship because your mentor will always follow you up, you will not fall back rather he would keep pressuring and pushing you until you achieve what he wants you to achieve" (Respondent 5)* *"A relationship that enables customer practicalise what is being taught and also come back without feeling withdrawn" (Respondent 11).*

Figure 4.5 Dataset for research question 3
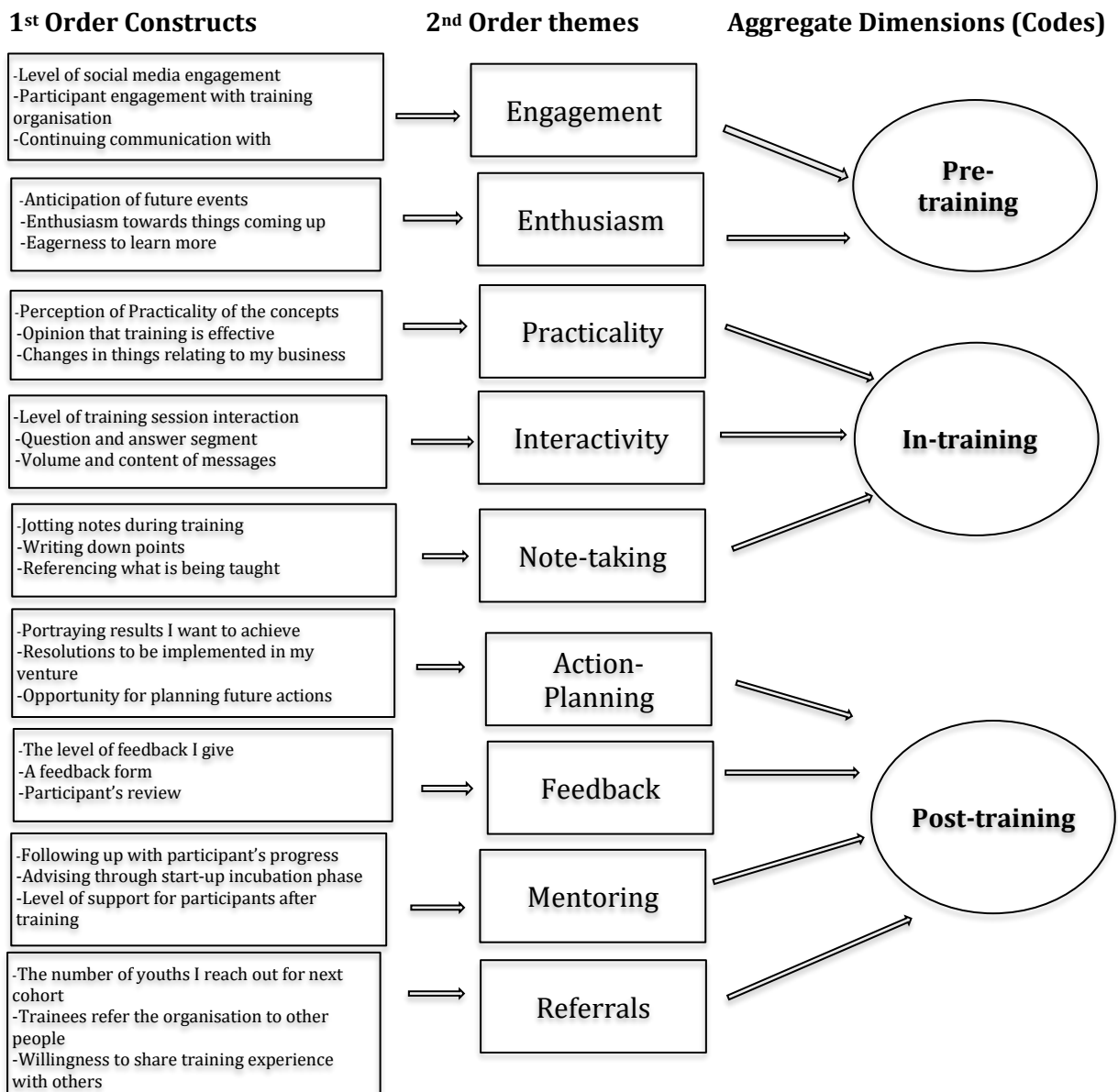
Table 4.5 Codebook of interpretations for research question 3

	Aggregate Dimensions	Brief Definition	Full Definition	When to Use	When not to use	Example
1.	PRE-TRAINING	*Engagement*	*Refers to engaging target customers to produce enthusiasm and eagerness, as well as anticipation towards the training*	*Apply to all references to engagement and enthusiasm of target customers prior to training*	*Do not use for reference to interactivity during training, practicality of training, or note-taking during training, action planning, feedback, mentoring, and referrals*	*"if I am of the opinion that it is effective, it would foster continuing engagement with the youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring organisation"*
2.	IN-TRAINING	*Practicality*	*Refers to the level of interactivity and practicality of the training, as well as the degree of notetaking during the training.*	*Apply to all references to interactivity, practicality, or note-taking of and during the training*	*Do not use for reference to enthusiasm, eagerness, or anticipation prior to training.*	*"The extent of the ideas I get from the training session, the number of reference books and materials from the training also would determine value"*
3.	POST-TRAINING	*Feedback*	*Refers to any effort at providing participants with a means of action-planning, giving feedback on the training, mentoring after the training, and referring target participants to subsequent trainings.*	*Apply to all references to action-planning, feedback, referrals, and mentoring after the training.*	*Do not use for references to engagement and enthusiasm before the training, and interactivity, practicality and note-taking during the training.*	*"Also, a feedback form should also have a question to this effect, and the answers given can be used as a measuring tool"*

Table 4.6 Data supporting interpretations for research question 3

2nd order themes	Representative quotations
	Pre-Training
Engagement	*"When I look forward to future events, and I come back to your website or social media to see what I can benefit from an upcoming training" (Respondent 1).* *"If I continue communicating with them even before the training via the contacts I have obtained from their website or social media handle" (Respondent 2).* *"if I find myself perusing their social media handles, especially their Instagram handle even before the training, this would also show that I am engaged with the brand" (Respondent 3).* *"if I find myself checking their website and social media pages to know what is new and also for things coming up" (Respondent 6).*
Enthusiasm	*"When I look forward to the things I can benefit from the training organisation" (Respondent 1)* *"My eagerness to learn more and expand my horizon via furthering my knowledge from the same training organisation"(Respondent 5)* *"if I find myself checking their website and social media pages to know what is new" (Respondent 6)*
	In-Training
Interactivity	*"I would say the number of questions would determine the level" (Respondent 3)* *"I believe questions and answers from participants can be used to measure" (Respondent 9)* *"The volume and content of messages during the duration of the academy" (Respondent 10)* *"Factors can be questions asked, the answers received" (Respondent 11)*

Practicality	*"It would primarily depend on the effect of the initial training and mentoring session on me" (Respondent 3)* *"This would be dependent on how effectivel feel my key takeaways are" (Respondent 5)* *"I would say that readiness to put what has been learnt into practice" (Respondent 9)*
Note-taking	*"This would depend on the level of my taking down the important keys with writing materials" (Respondent 5)* *"I would say taking notes is a major sign for me" (Respondent 6)* *"In a session where different people are speaking to me about different issues and I am probably taking notes" (Respondent 11)*
	Post-Training
Action Planning	*"I would say action plans that portray what I want to achieve as a result of the training session" (Respondent 8)* *"Therefore, factors will include Action Points, resolutions made" (Respondent 11)*
Feedback	*"Furthermore, the level of feedback I give as a youth entrepreneur" (Respondent 8)* *"Also, a feedback form should also have a question to this effect"* (Respondent 9) *"As well as feedback received after the actual training session"* (Respondent 12)
Mentoring	*"The level of support provided" (Respondent 7).* *"Keeping communication open either via phone calls or chatting" (Respondent 8)* *"Morale boosting encouragement" (Respondent 11)*
Referrals	*"My willingness to share current experiences with others after the session" (Respondent 5)* *"The number of youths I reach out/refer to after the duration" (Respondent 10)* *"Where trainees refer the organisation to other people" (Respondent 12)*

4.4 Taking action (pilot application of findings)

I presented the findings from a thematic analysis of the data to the AL set and based on these findings from all 3 research questions, and subsequently, actionability of these findings via a pilot project. The objective of this pilot project was to apply the findings from the thematic data analysis to ECNL, that is, implement the developed hybrid competitive strategy framework at ECNL, whilst employing the customer-driven implementation process deciphered by research question 2, and then measure the efficacy of the youth training academy using the indices developed by the third research question.

4.4.1 Background to pilot project

The pilot project focused on implementing the elements of a hybrid competitive strategy as revealed by the data at ECNL, that is, brand awareness, differentiation and low-cost, via a customer-driven process that focuses on the andragogy, social media and continuing engagement. Brand awareness involved gaining *traction* for ECNL to *attract the*

patronage of aspiring and budding youth entrepreneurs. Such brand awareness drive involved *partnering* with other individuals and brand at *no cost* as *free social media mediums* were utilized. Similarly, differentiation involved *customer driven innovation* I deciphered via my semi-structured interviews, and the low-cost factor meant that such innovation must be *low* in terms of *production costs*, which would mean ECNL having to engage in *trade-offs* of some sort. Furthermore, the low-cost element also implied that the costs of youth training academy would *be low, though flexible, below the industry costs* in line with a *social mission* of reducing youth unemployment and underemployment via *quality* and *affordable* youth entrepreneurship training.

4.4.2   Pilot Project (Hybrid Strategy Implementation at ECNL via customer driven process

Being an Action Research (AR) thesis project, the pilot project provided me with the opportunity for actual 'action', in the form of taking practical steps to implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework at ECNL. Consequently, the pilot project involved various action items that I had the responsibility of spearheading to culminate in an implemented hybrid competitive strategy framework. These specific action items are detailed in the subsequent paragraphs.

4.4.2.1 Brand Awareness Partnership Sessions

My first action item was to task Ms. Kofo to arrive at specific dates for the three free brand awareness partnership sessions as already agreed by the AL set while I critically reflected on potential guests to invite to each of the brand awareness partnership sessions, which also included a panel discussion. I subsequently reached out to the potential guests and invited them to join me on for a partnership series via the 'Zoom' application. All the potential guests confirmed both availability and attendance at their individual sessions. Flyers were designed by Mr.Pete, with pictures of the guests on the flyers, and these flyers were posted and advertised on my social media handles of LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp 'status', as well as the social media handles of ECNL. These

adverts enabled the free Zoom brand awareness partnership session to attract the desired attention of target customers, and the first session was held on the 15th of June 2020 at 7pm West African Time (WAT), titled 'The Art of Professional Public Speaking'. The second session was held on the 29th of June 2020 and was titled 'Survival Strategies for Small Businesses in the New Normal'. The third session, which was the panel discussion, was held on Monday, 7th July 2020 and was titled 'Effective Selling: Improving your Sales Performance.' The guest for the first session was a professor of marketing and seasoned public speaker, the guest for the second session was an entrepreneur and seasoned SME consultant, and the panel discussion had two sales experts as guests, with one based in Lagos, Nigeria and the other in Slough, United Kingdom.

4.4.2.2   Practical, Interactive, and business-improving online youth training academy

My second action item was to spearhead the articulation of a participant-oriented youth entrepreneurship content that was made up of 20 practical and interactive business-improving modules such as 'generating a business idea', 'opportunity analysis', 'market and needs finding', pitching and prototyping', 'branding and marketing', 'funds and investment', 'post-covid business survival strategies', to mention a few. August 27th 2020, was chosen as the start date for the 3-month online academy titled 'Emedith Low-cost Youth Entrepreneurship Academy' (ELYA), and in line with the data analysed, N5000 (five thousand Nigerian naira) was charged as the standard cost for each month of the 3-month academy, bringing the total cost for the academy to N15, 0000 (fifteen thousand Nigerian Naira). This cost is considered affordable, and production costs low, bearing in mind the trade-off of a virtual academy and the social media nature of the marketing campaign. Consequently, the only financial costs incurred is the monthly subscription of the Zoom application that amounts to $14.99 (fourteen dollars and ninety-nine cents), and when converted to Nigerian Naira using the prevailing rate at the time, that amounted to N5846.10 (five thousand eight hundred and forty-six Nigerian naira and ten kobo). Consequently, this cost was easily borne by the academy from its revenue, and since the branding and social media marketing of the ELYA did not incur any costs, it can

be concluded that the elements of low costs and low-production costs were given due regard during the pilot project.

4.4.2.3   Marketing, participant engagement, and facilitation

My third action item was to distribute roles and responsibilities to ECNL team members such as the responsibility of designing flyers for ELYA online advertising, as well as incorporating information on the website for the consumption of target customers. All ECNL team members including me were jointly responsible for advertising ELYA via social media marketing on their platforms, being an effective low-cost marketing and advertising tool to engage target customers. As a result of the social media marketing drive on the ECNL website, WhatsApp and Instagram, 79 registrations were received. The registered participants were aspiring and budding entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 35 and put in two WhatsApp groups prior to the start of the cohort. One of the WhatsApp groups were purely for information purposes, and the other was a networking group where participants were free to express concerns, share insights, engage in ELYA tasks and the likes. Additionally, I, along with some other facilitators, facilitated the actual entrepreneurship online training via the 'Zoom' application for the duration of this pilot project.

4.4.2.4   Incorporating customer expectation and continuing engagement

My fourth action item involved ensuring customer-expectations and continuing engagement of participants deciphered through the semi-structured interviews are incorporated into ELYA. The specific buyer group have been stated to be aspiring and budding entrepreneurs within the ages of 18 and 35 years, being the group sampled for the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, customer-expectation implied focusing on this group to fully appreciate their customer expectations to ensure they view the ELYA as valuable. Elements of what ECNL focused on to create the perception of value for ELYA were as deciphered from the semi-structured interview. Therefore, in ensuring customer expectations are met, the training, features, and benefits of ELYA were elucidated in the flyers that were graphically designed for marketing via social media. These features and

benefits were equally captured on the ECNL website, such that target customers perceived the value of ELYA as a catalyst for registration. Continuing engagement for the pilot project took the form of continuing mentoring scheme, where ELYA participants were moved to a WhatsApp entrepreneurship mentorship group I coordinated. The aim of this free group is continuing entrepreneurship coaching and mentoring in the form of providing continuing, robust, and cohesive mentorship to aspiring and budding entrepreneurs. This is in addition to providing networking opportunities for members of the group, therefore, ECNL interaction with, and service to the ELYA participants did not end with the conclusion of the online academy. Additionally, customer expectation also implied that I produce feedback forms for ELYA participants that incorporate the indices of measurement that resulted from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview. These indices are 'engagement', 'enthusiasm', 'practicality', 'interactivity', 'note-taking', 'feedback', 'referrals', and 'action-planning'.

4.5 Evaluating Action (Results of the pilot project)

The last stage of the Action Research Cycle (ARC) is the evaluating action stage that assesses the outcomes of the pilot project, and ways the implemented hybrid competitive strategy can be optimised for the immediate future. Consequently, at the end of the pilot project, I along with members of the AL set met to evaluate the action taken regarding implementing a hybrid competitive strategy at ECNL, as well as plan further action, though such further action is outside the scope of this study. However, it is imperative that ECNL appreciate improvements and adjustments that can be made to further maximise the implemented hybrid competitive strategy. In the following paragraphs, I detail the results of the pilot project in relation to specific components of the strategy, as well as variations going forward.

4.5.1 Brand Awareness series

The free Zoom partnership brand awareness series were held as advertised by the ECNL team. I hosted the series with the guests as advertised on the brand awareness flyers, and from the participants that attended the session, there was a rise in the number of

participants with each session. 'The Art of Public Speaking', which was held on the 15th of June 2020 saw a maximum of twenty-four attendees, while 'Survival Strategies for Small Businesses in the New Normal' held on the 29th of June 2020, saw a maximum of thirty-one participants. Finally, the last of these free brand awareness partnership sessions, 'Effective Selling: Improving your Sales Performance', held on Monday 7th July, 2020, saw a maximum of seventy-four participants; a rise of almost more than 100% from the previous session. Therefore, the AL set was pleased with the traction, that is, interest and attendance of ECNL target customers in this phase of re-introducing the ECNL brand to target customers via free brand awareness partnership sessions. At the' evaluation of action' meeting, having informed the AL set of these results from the free brand awareness partnership sessions and called for comments and contributions from the learning set. Mr Uch was the first to comment and stated,

"I think we can as well thank Ms Bern. For the great suggestion on partnerships for the ECNL brand. As we can see from Mr. Emedith's feedback, it worked like magic and attendance was very encouraging Indeed."

To this Ms Bern stated,

"Thank you very much Mr. Uch for your gracious words, though we have all ourselves to thank, as I merely gave a suggestion that was accepted and fleshed out by this learning set, so the success belongs to all of us. Also, I think it is worth hearing from Mr. Emedith why he thinks there was a much better turnout with the partnership than when he was solo. It is critical that we appreciate what we did differently or what our target customers perceived differently."

The two other members of the AL set agreed with Ms. Bern's suggestion that it was necessary to articulate the huge difference in turnout such that ECNL can maintain as well as build on what has worked. in response, stated that he believed the idea that the sessions featured another individual, and in one case two other individuals, was key to increased target customer engagement. Consequently, for further action, it was

unanimously agreed that subsequent brand awareness partnership series would feature two individuals and not one individual.

4.5.2   Emedith Low-cost Youth-entrepreneurship Academy (ELYA)

At the start of this study, I stated that ECNL had consistently averaged about 32% uptake of its youth entrepreneurship trainings considering a full class size of fifty participants. Having now implemented a clear competitive strategy in the form of a hybrid competitive strategy, characterised by the continuing brand awareness partnership sessions that allows for traction and patronage, the researcher asserts that the findings point to initial responsiveness to the implemented framework, especially considering the uptake of the ELYA which received seventy-nine registrations, a remarkable rise from previous session uptake of 32%. Registration for another edition of the ELYA beginning in January 2021 is currently ongoing with customer feedback incorporated along the lines of 'engagement', 'enthusiasm', 'practicality', 'interactivity', 'note-taking', and 'action-planning'. For instance, under the 'practicality' indices, ECNL added more case-studies to the training sessions as demanded by participants. According to one participant feedback on practicality and interactivity,

"I like the training a lot and the trainers gave clear examples, but I really enjoyed the case study in the 'pitching and prototyping' module, I learnt a lot from it and wish that all other modules can have case studies. It will really help raise the level."

Another participant said,

"The training was not as practical as I expected, there were too many examples that sometimes confused me. Maybe the facilitator was trying to make it practical for us, and get our contributions, but I feel the case-study was more effective in doing that. So, more case-studies and less abstract examples will be better. By case studies, I mean allowing us to use our business and potential business to understand the concepts. I really enjoyed that."

On 'engagement' and 'enthusiasm', the following feedback are some of the comments I noted in my journal due to their constructively critical nature,

"There can certainly be better use made of social media to 'ginger' (stimulate) potential participants to enroll for ELYA. I do not think it is enough to just put flyers up and hope that target participants would see it. You guys can also try out other means of engagement, for instance, competitions that people can win, giveaways even If not monetary.it can be something beneficial to the participants business."

"There should be more emphasis on the content of ELYA in the advertising, I mean the content is so rich and there is very little mention bout the essence apar from merely statin it on the flyer. Maybe you can go a little in the objectives and benefits to participants, as this might create more interest."

"I think the company needs a talented social media consultant to help with the social media interaction and engagement with participants and potential participants. The truth is it is no longer enough to use social media as a side-thing. There are so many talented individuals who fully appreciate how to effectively use social media to the benefit of the individual or organisation."

"I was enthusiastic about ELYA from the adverts via social media and the very engaging zoom series, but I feel that the company can explore the benefits and reach of social media a lot more, as there are so many new and exciting ways to market and advertise through social media, and it will be beneficial to attracting more participants."

I took the feedback on board and hired a social media consultant specifically to continually engage participants and potential participants in various ways, with the trade-off being that it must be via low-costs or no-cost means and adverts. Consequently, ECNL is currently enjoying a higher degree of uptake as the previous ELYA at this stage of registration, and this implies that ECNL is beginning to see a consistent level of youth training session uptake having applied hybrid strategy implementation framework.

Therefore, it is asserted that there is now an identifiable and clear strategy for ECNL that now takes advantage of online opportunities created by the restriction on face-to-face contact, and a clear synergy now exists between the implemented framework and ECNL's available resources. Furthermore, the implemented framework is consistent with ECNL's social mission of providing affordable and quality youth entrepreneurship training sessions to aspiring and budding entrepreneurs. Consequently, ECNL is no longer operating an unintentional strategy resulting from trying to be all things to all people and implementing a hybrid competitive strategy framework for ECNL certainly offered a boost to the organisation's competitiveness. Moreover, the perception of the ELYA participants on the overall quality experience of the academy was vital in discerning ECNL competitiveness after the ELYA. Video testimonials as well as written testimonials, comments and feedback were largely favourable, especially in relation to the 3 case-study sessions that engrained the concepts of ELYA in the minds of participants. Furthermore, the researcher is of the informed view that ECNL's focus on quality and innovation were most instrumental to the customer perception of service differentiation. Some of the comments from the ELYA participants centred on the virtual nature of the academy and its affordability, flexibility of the module schedules, the accessibility of the facilitator, the ease of understanding presented by the modules, and the number of modules and information contained.

Participants of the ELYA believed the academy exceeded their expectations, especially in relation to the quality and delivery of the modules. These views are apparent from spontaneous feedback in the WhatsApp group, specific feedback via the Academy feedback form, and video testimonial from some participants. The cumulative effect of these views was that the cost, in addition to quality, worked together to create a customer perception of value. For example, one of the participants effectively stated that he would attend the academy again and again due to how robust he felt it was and how much practical knowledge he had gained. Here are a few feedback comments that suggested that participants were largely appreciative of the ELYA,

"I appreciate how the facilitator tried to carry us along every step of the way, especially from laying the right foundation in letting us know the right way to generate a business idea, all the way to how we can access funding."

"The case-studies were very effective in making us learn more. I was able to appreciate how these concepts would apply directly to my own business. Please add more case-studies in upcoming academies."

"I like the fact that we were able to come to action plans for after the academy, as well as post-session mentoring. I believe these will go a long way in ensuring that participants actually put into practice what they have learnt."

"This academy was very high in quality especially considering the price which was very affordable. I like this new approach of ECNL to youth entrepreneurship training, and I would recommend this academy to anyone and everyone who is looking or high quality and affordable entrepreneurship training. Thank you Emedith."

4.6 Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I detailed the action research cycle of constructing the initiative and desired outcomes, planning action because of data generated from the AL set and collected via semi-structured interviews. I equally elucidate the process of taking action in the form of implementing the hybrid competitive strategy framework at ECNL via a pilot project involving brand awareness sessions and an online youth entrepreneurship training academy titled 'Emedith Low-cost Youth-entrepreneurship Academy' (ELYA). I conclude the chapter by evaluating the pilot project, that is, the brand awareness sessions and ELYA cohort via scrutinising the feedback from participants and planning further action via incorporating such feedback into subsequent brand awareness series and ELYA cohorts.

In the next chapter, I take a detailed look at the findings from the thematic analysis of the data generated and collected.

# 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Chapter Introduction

Following the ARC detailed in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the key findings from the thematic data analysis, specifically elucidating the aggregate dimensions and elements required to answer and implement the three research questions for which this study is concerned. To re-iterate, the research questions for this study are (i) what is a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth training organisation? (ii) How can a hybrid youth training organisation (ECNL) implement the hybrid competitive strategy framework? (iii) how can a hybrid youth training organisation (ECNL) measure customer perception of its training services?

5.2 The identified hybrid competitive strategy framework

The first research question of this study investigates the formulation of a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth training organisation like ECNL, and as depicted in figure 5.1, the findings reveal that a hybrid competitive strategy for a hybrid youth training comprises three aggregate dimensions of (i) brand awareness, (ii) differentiation, and (iii) low costs. A hybrid competitive strategy framework in a hybrid youth training organisation begins with introducing the brand to target customers where the brand is a new entrant into the market, or to re-introducing the brand to target customers, where the brand is an already existing brand.

Figure 5.1 Identified hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid youth-training organisation.
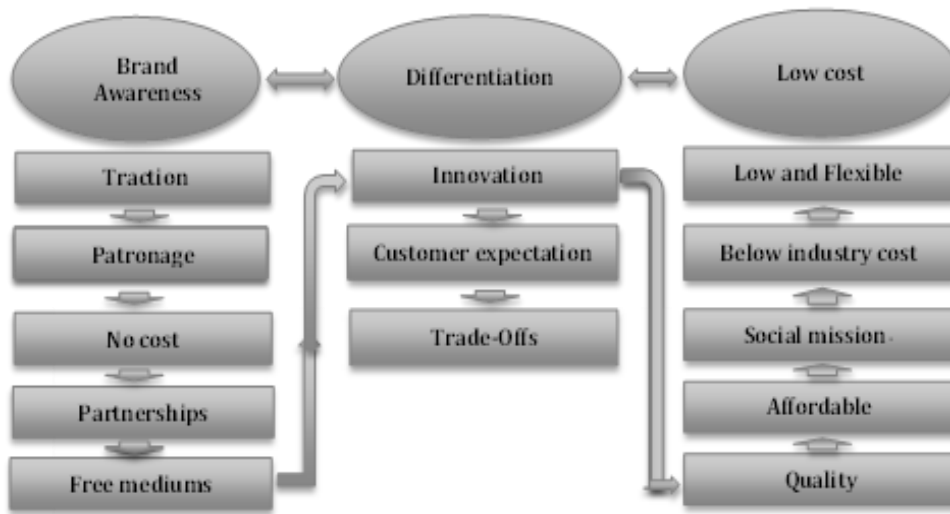
5.2.1 Brand awareness

The findings reveal that to introduce or re-introduce the brand involves five elements, and they are traction, patronage, no-cost, partnerships, and free mediums. 'Traction' implies the ability of the hybrid youth training organisation to employ ingenious means by which to draw target customers towards the brand. This means that 'traction' denotes the process of enticing targets towards brand, as the data revealed that it is beneficial to the hybrid youth training organisation to make all reasonable effort to attract target customers to a new or existing brand. Furthermore, the data stipulates that making the effort to attract target customers to a brand is most beneficial because target customers must identify with a brand before they patronize such a brand, therefore, how a brand is able to present itself to target customers such that such customers can feel a sense of belonging is vital to the success of such brand, and the quotes below illustrates this:

"We have spoken about a lot of issues, but we have not really considered the need to devise ways to draw target customers towards our brand so they can enjoy our service offering. So, we should be discussing how to draw target customers towards the ECNL brand" (ECNL team).

"I found that making the effort to attract customers to my brand has been very beneficial because most times, customers have to know your brand before they patronize you, so how you enable them know your brand is key to success" (Uch: ECNL team).

The data equally reveal 'patronage' as one of the central themes of 'brand awareness' and refers to the actual gaining of loyalty and patronage, that is, increased customer base and actual awareness of the existence of the brand by the brand's target customers. The data equally reveal that intentionality is what places brands in the minds of youth to gain patronage, and where the brand already exists, such intentionality creates renewed awareness of the brand that generates an increasing customer base. Therefore, though similar, from the dataset, the relationship between 'traction' and 'patronage' is that 'traction' leads to 'patronage', and without 'traction', there can be no substantial 'patronage'. 'No-cost', as postulated by the data, refers to the idea that any 'brand awareness' campaign that a hybrid youth training organisation undertakes as part of a hybrid competitive strategy to attract customers must be at no cost. This is for reason that the data stipulate that any expenditure is incompatible with a hybrid competitive strategy. In other words, a hybrid youth training organisation operating a hybrid competitive strategy cannot afford to incur any expenditure in luring customers to the brand, as that would be inimical to the strategy itself,

"We just cannot afford to spend any money to try to lure customers towards our brand, so we may as well think of ways to do so at no extra cost" (Kofo- ECNL team).

To further support 'brand awareness', the findings point to the notion of 'partnerships' as a vital element and central theme, which refers to the idea that partnerships create a heightened awareness of a brand in the minds of target customers. The data equally

reveal that brands are more visible to customers via partnerships because through partnerships, a brand is leaning on another brand, which creates a ripple effect of increased brand visibility, as Hilda explains,

"Sometimes the cumulative effect of leaning on another brand serves to make both brands more visible to target customers" (Hilda- strategic partner).

Additionally, the research findings show that 'brand awareness' should be implemented via free mediums, which implies that a hybrid youth training organisation that is operating a hybrid competitive strategy should employ free social media platforms and advertising medium for brand awareness purposes. This idea is in line with that which I have previously stated to the effect that extra capital expenditure is at odds with a hybrid competitive strategy as the quotes below by one of ECNL's strategic partners:

"My suggestion would be that we make use of free social media platforms and advertising mediums for brand awareness purposes, adverts, and the likes" (Pete- ECNL team).

"And free mediums can be employed in advertising these trainings" (Bern: Strategic partner).

5.2.2 Differentiation

Having then concluded 'brand awareness', the data suggest that the hybrid youth training organisation apply the *'differentiation'*, dimension of the hybrid competitive strategy framework. The data define the differentiation dimension as the process of differentiating service offerings from those of competitors, and involve the elements of innovation, customer expectation, and trade-offs as depicted in figure 5.1. Innovation, according to the data, refers to the process by which a hybrid youth training organisation differentiates its services from its competitors via inexpensive means, thereby keeping overheads low, while enticing target customers towards its services. The data reveal that a successfully differentiated service offering is synonymous to a customer perception of

quality, which ultimately improves competitiveness. However, the data also points to the pertinence of cost-effective innovation that keep overhead costs low:

"A successfully differentiated service is synonymous to a customer perception of service quality in my opinion" (Kofo- ECNL team).

"If we are thinking of quality service offering then we should be thinking of inexpensively differentiating our services in a manner that does not affect current overheads" (Hilda- strategic partner).

"Can we really separate quality service from some level of differentiated service offering that entices our target customers? I do not think we can or we should" (Bern: Strategic partner).

'Customer expectation' refers to the idea of placing the thoughts of customers at the forefront of the differentiation process. The data suggest that it is important for clarifying ideas for differentiation with target customers, engaging in reflection through the lens of the customer, and ultimately taking a customer-driven approach to differentiation. The findings suggest that a customer-driven approach that puts the thoughts of customers at the forefront of the differentiation process implies a continuous reflection on the question: *what does quality mean to the customer?* This is explained by a strategic partner:

"To put the thoughts of customers at the forefront would mean to actually reflect on what quality might mean to them, because part of the elements elucidated by MrEmedith revolves around the customer perception of quality, and this I think is linked to the very idea of vertical differentiation… Innovation to differentiate ECNL service offering should naturally produce quality service in the customer's eyes" (Obi- strategic partner)

The research findings also postulate 'trade-offs' to be a central theme of differentiation and define it as concessions regarding production costs to ensure that the operating costs of the organisation are below industry average by keeping overheads at a minimum. In other words, it implies the hybrid training organisation taking whatever steps are

necessary to ensure that operational costs are kept at the lowest during the differentiation process, bearing in mind the criticality of low operational costs to the success of a hybrid competitive strategy. This importance of keeping overheads low is expressed by one of our team members,

"If I were asked what I feel has been ECNL's strongest point, I would say is the fact that our overheads have been kept at a minimum, and we must be mindful of this core requirement of operating costs that are much below industry average (Cleo- ECNL team).

5.2.3   Low costs

To ensure affordability for target customers, the findings of this study reveal that having differentiated its service offerings, the hybrid youth training organisation then ensures that a *'low-cost'* dimension is ensured on such service offerings. Low costs, from the data analysed, refers to the right blend of quality and price through intentionally ensuring the lowest possible flexible costs that are below industry costs and resulting from a social mission of the hybrid youth training organisation. Low costs involve five elements of quality, affordable, social mission, below industry costs and lastly, and low and flexible costs, and the data suggests that once these elements are incorporated into the service offerings, such hybrid youth training organisation can be said to have completed the process of implementing a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid organisation. Form the data, 'quality' as a central theme of 'low-costs' connotes the idea of quality at the forefront of the services of hybrid youth training organisation operating a hybrid competitive strategy. This implies that the organisation should have a distinct focus on quality that should not be compromised by the emphasis on low overhead costs. Therefore, as explained by ECNL team members, and strategic partners, a hybrid youth training organisation operating a hybrid competitive strategy should find a right blend of quality and price:

"In anything ECNL chooses to do, I believe quality should also be at the forefront of service offerings" (Hilda- strategic partner).

"From what I have understood, part of the issues around competitive positioning began when competitors began to emphasize quality, therefor it is prudent that we pay close attention to quality" (Cleo- ECNL team).

"Quality service offering should be ranked as important as low cost" (Obi- strategic partner)

"...such that there is the right blend of quality and price that will add perceived value to ECNL service offering" (Uch- ECNL team).

The data equally reveal "affordable' as a vital element of the low-cost dimensions of a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation and implies that training services should be deemed affordable from the perspective of target customers. Therefore, as explained by a strategic partner, the prices of services should alleviate the target customer's concern about their 'ability to pay', bearing in mind that they are often unemployed and struggling:

"Youths are often concerned with their pockets and ability to pay for service, how much more unemployed youths who are already struggling. I believe ability of your targets to pay is key. (Bern Strategic partner)

Furthermore, from the data, 'social mission' as a central theme of 'low-costs' refers to low-costs as being integral to the social mission of hybrid youth training organisations. By the very definition of a hybrid organisation as espoused in this study, a social mission is synonymous with hybrid organisations, therefore service costs of hybrid organisations should reflect that social mission. Thus, as explained by a member of our team, a youth training organisation cannot lay claim to being a hybrid organisation if it opts to charge the same price as its competitors, as such pricing would portray a lack of dedication to the social objective of such organisation,

"Again, even though we did not operate an intentional strategy in the past, our social mission as a hybrid organisation equally suggest that we cannot operate on industry price, and our costs must reflect the hybrid nature of ECNL" (Pete- ECNL team).

The findings also show 'below industry costs' as being a central tenet of the 'low-cost' dimension of a hybrid competitive strategy framework for a hybrid organisation. This implies that a hybrid youth training organisation operating a hybrid competitive strategy must ensure that service offerings are significantly lower than competitors who operate on industry average pricing:

*"In my opinion to operate a low-cost simply means to operate below the price of your competitors, which means charging for services below the average competitor pricing" (Obi: strategic partner**).***

In other words, such hybrid youth training organisation must operate below the industry average price because the social mission of a hybrid youth training organisation suggests that costs must reflect the hybrid nature of the organisation by charging for services below the average competitor pricing. Also, from the data, to be 'low and flexible', as a central theme of 'low costs, implies that a hybrid youth training organisation that operates a hybrid competitive strategy should intentionally ensure the lowest possible flexible service costs. The word 'flexibility' means that such low costs cannot be fixed and should be amenable to adjustment if and where necessary as external and unforeseen circumstances may determine. Consequently, as expressed by a strategic partner, there must be an ever-present opportunity for the hybrid youth training organisation to revise such low costs if the economic situation calls for such revision:

"As much as I appreciate the notion of low-cost being a major part of a hybrid strategy, I am concerned as to its suitability and sustainability especially in the world we live in, and there must be an opportunity to revise such low-costs as circumstances may demand". (Bern: Youth training professional)

Hence, the research findings show that to implement a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation implies implementing the aggregate dimensions of brand awareness, differentiation, and low costs, as explained in the paragraphs above, to improve the competitiveness of the organisation.

5.3 The hybrid strategy implementation process for ECNL

In research question 2, I investigate the process by which a hybrid youth training organisation like ECNL can implement a customer-focused hybrid competitive strategy framework. The findings from research question 1 suggest that differentiation is a key dimension of a hybrid competitive strategy framework, and equally reveal a key element of differentiation to be customer expectation. Therefore, research question 2 seeks to appreciate the customer expectation in relation to ECNL's service offerings, and as shown in figure 5.2, the findings disclose that customer expectations run across three dimensions of (i) andragogy, (ii) social media, and (iii) continuing engagement.

Figure 5.2 Discovered hybrid strategy implementation process for ECNL
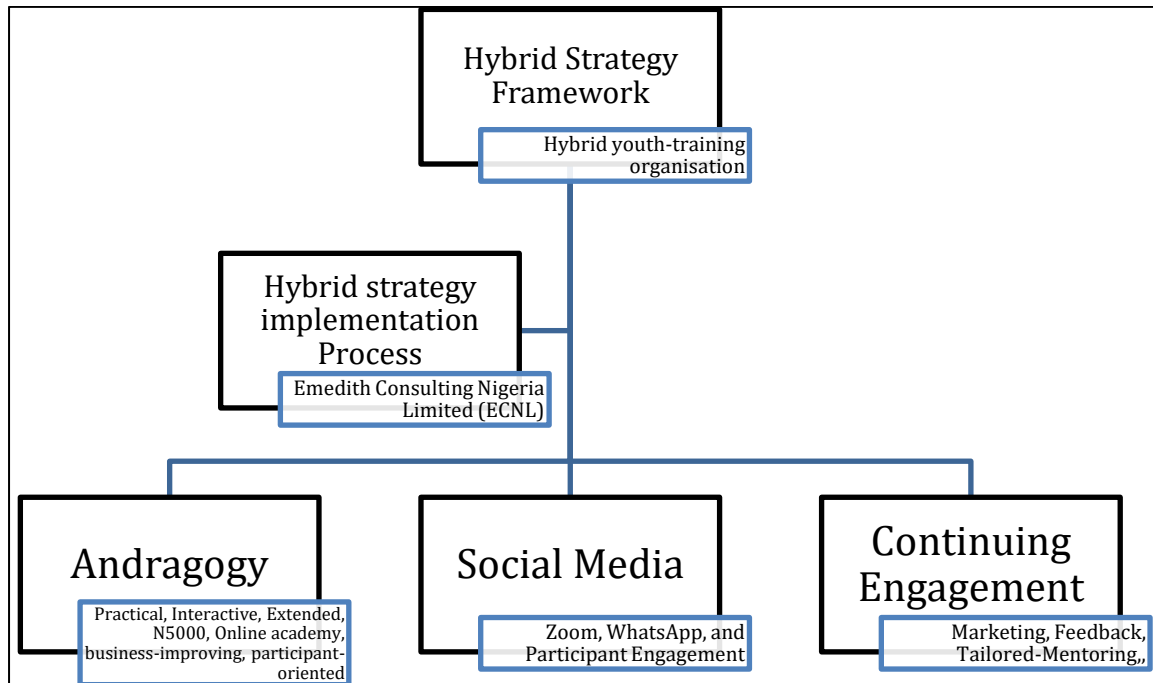
5.3.1 Andragogy

From the data, under a hybrid competitive strategy framework, andragogy as regards an ECNL youth entrepreneurship training refers to a practical and interactive online academy for an extended duration with business-improving content for a standard cost of five thousand Nigerian Naira (N5000). The elements of the youth entrepreneurship training andragogy for ECNL are (i) online academy, (ii) practical and interactive, (iii) extended, (iv) business-improving, and (v) N5000. According to the findings, 'online academy' refers to a three-month robust and impactful academy to be conducted online. In other words, an online forum that provides for continuing interaction with participants that lasts much longer than the usual trainings of a day or a few days where the facilitator enlightens the participants about salient aspects of the entrepreneurship journey, as illustrated in the following quotes from target customer respondents:

"I would prefer something that is continuous and not about just a few days, probably like some sort of an online Youth Entrepreneurship Academy that will involve continuing training and interaction with participants to assess how individuals are benefiting from it" (Respondent 1).

"I would say a 3-month academy that is robust and has various impactful entrepreneurship topics explored and at the end an opportunity to market and sell products to customers via affiliate marketing with more established organisations" (Respondent 3).

"I prefer an online academy based on the nature of my job. An academy would mean a fixed meeting, probably on a particular day, where we all gather online at a particular time, then the facilitator enlightens us more about entrepreneurship" (Respondent 5).

Similarly, 'practical and interactive' refers to a tailored training that employs a question-and-answer approach, as well as draws on peer-to-peer interaction and facilitators' experiential knowledge to train target participants and enhance learning. The data shows that participants want to be exposed to the general overview of entrepreneurship, as well as feel a personal impact from the training.

"I would like a practical class and an interactive class where I get to ask questions at the end of the training, having stated my own understanding of the training, such that I can feel that the training impacted me personally" (Respondent 2).

"I would prefer an interactive and practical session that I can put into practice to enhance the learning.

"I would like an academy via zoom where we can get proper training and mentoring and interact with other participants and learn from each other. I would also like to be exposed to the general overview of Entrepreneurship, then guiding us along our line in the area we want to go; that is practical training along our chosen entrepreneurship area" (Respondent 10)

Also, the research findings postulate 'extended' to mean a long-term, continuing, and ongoing training that happens a minimum of three times a week for one to three months, as illustrated by the following quote from a target customer,

"I would say that that an ongoing training would be appropriate, something that happens about 3-5 times every week for 1 or 2 months" (Respondent 2).

Based on the cumulative effect of target customer desire for an extended and online academy, ECNL conceived and implemented the pilot project titled 'Emedith Low-cost Youth-entrepreneurship Academy' (ELYA), and I have elucidated details of ELYA in the previous chapter. The data further reveals 'business improving' to be an important element of andragogy as explained by a target customer respondent,

"In terms of content, things that can improve our society and help the Nigerian youths grow and enable them to earn their own living by the businesses that are able to start and sustain" (Respondent 2).

Consequently, 'business improving' refers to special and unique content that covers what participants require to take their entrepreneurship journey to the next level. Specifically, as illustrated in the quote below, such content should emphasize sales and marketing, provide useful business tips, and ultimately enable participants to earn a living by starting and sustaining their own businesses,

"I think it should focus on sales and marketing, where we get to see different techniques of marketing our goods because people branch into businesses and they don't know how to sell or market, so it'd be good for this to be well covered in a training session" (Respondent 6).

Consequently, ELYA and its inherent entrepreneurship modules sought to meet and surpass these objectives as elucidated in the pilot project that I detailed in the previous chapter. The data reveals the final element of andragogy as 'Five thousand Nigerian Naira (N5000) standard session cost', which denotes the amount that target customers have

indicated comfortability paying to attend the training. Consequently, bearing in mind the low-cost and flexibility elements of the hybrid competitive strategy framework detailed in the previous paragraph, ELYA was charged at five thousand Nigerian Naira (N5000) per month of the three-month training. Thus, for the purpose of costing, each month of the three months was viewed as a session, thereby bringing the total number of sessions to three, thereby costing a total of fifteen thousand Nigerian Naira (N15000).

5.3.2   Social media

The findings for research question 2 depict the 'social media' dimension of ECNL's hybrid strategy implementation process as involving engagement of target customer participants through the social media platforms of 'Zoom' and 'WhatsApp'. Accordingly, the data makes known the elements of 'social media' to be (i) participant-engagement, (ii) Zoom, (iii) WhatsApp. These findings unveil 'participant engagement' as referring to the idea that ECNL, the hybrid youth-training organisation, send out information and reach out to target customers via their social media pages being youth-active platforms. According to the data, through social media, interested target customers can be aware of specific information concerning the training services. The findings also reveal that in the absence of physical youth training sessions, that the 'Zoom' application is the preferred online dimension, as illustrated with the following quotes:

"In the absence of the face-to-face physical training and mentoring, my top training methods is Zoom" (Respondent 9)

"In the absence of face-to-face training, online training is most desirable, and in order of priority as regards the online medium, I would say Zoom" (Respondent 11).

Moreover, the data equally reveals that 'WhatsApp' was seen as complementary to Zoom in terms of preferability as respondents thought that WhatsApp would provide a useful online method in the absence of face-to-face training delivery.

5.3.3   Continuing engagement

According to the findings of research question 2, 'continuing engagement' for target customer participants denotes mutual enthusiasm between ECNL youth entrepreneurship training participants and youth training organisations, marketing of subsequent service offerings to target customers, and tailored mentoring of participants who have attended an ECNL youth entrepreneurship training. The data specifically defines 'continuing engagement' as any effort at advertising or marketing to target participants to create mutual enthusiasm between trainers and training participants even after the training. The data also reveals the elements that make up 'continuing engagement' as (i) marketing, (ii) mutual enthusiasm, and (iii) tailored mentoring. 'Marketing', according to the data, refers to a continuous process by which the hybrid youth training organisation garners the interest of target customers, that is aspiring and actual youth entrepreneurs. 'Mutual enthusiasm' is defined by the data as denoting the idea of both the hybrid youth entrepreneurship training organisation and the aspiring or actual youth entrepreneurs making the effort to make themselves easily reachable to each other. Furthermore, mutual enthusiasm, according to the data, suggests a constant flow and check-up between youth training organisations and target customers. Finally, the findings for research question 2 unveil 'tailored mentoring' as a pertinent element of 'continuing engagement', and refers to the idea of following up with target customers in a manner that enables them to be positively pressured to achieve their entrepreneurship goals, as explained by a target customer:

"I think it should be more like a mentorship because your mentor will always follow you up, you will not fall back rather he would keep pressuring and pushing you until you achieve what he wants you to achieve" (Respondent 5).

Furthermore, the data also suggests that tailored mentoring refers to a relationship that enables the customer practice taught entrepreneurship principles under expert guidance.

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5.4 Measuring ECNL service offerings from a customer perspective

The final research question investigates the indices by which a hybrid youth training organisation can measure the customer perception of its service offerings. This research question stems from the relationship between the customer perception (CUPE) of its service offerings of a hybrid youth training organisation, and the overall competitiveness of such organisation. This is in addition to the idea that if a hybrid youth training organisation like ECNL can appreciate the key indices by which target customers measure their service offerings, then the organisation can ensure competitiveness by ensuring a continuous focus on ensuring a positive customer experience in those areas. Consequently, the findings of research question 3 reveal that the indices for measuring service offerings from a customer perspective are categorised along three aggregate dimensions, of (i) pre-training, (ii) in-training, and (iii) post-training (see figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3 Indices for measuring ECNL services offerings
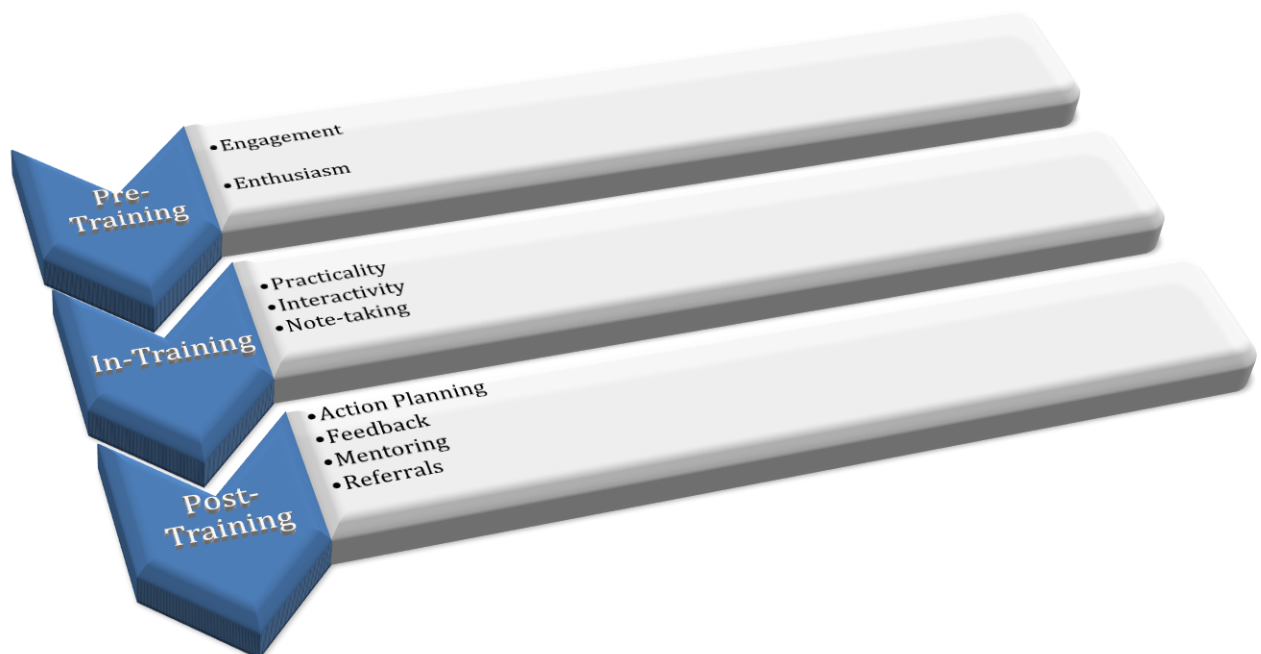
5.4.1   Pre-training

From the data, 'pre-training' refers to the process of engaging target customers to produce enthusiasm and eagerness, as well as anticipation towards the training. The data reveals that the indices by which target customers measure service offerings prior to an actual training sessions or academy are (i) engagement, and (ii) enthusiasm. As explained by target customer respondents, engagement connotes exploring social media pages of the hybrid youth training organisation like ECNL to appreciate training benefits, and ultimately opening communication lines between target customers and the hybrid youth training organisation:

"When I look forward to future events, and I come back to your website or social media to see what I can benefit from an upcoming training" (Respondent 1).

"If I continue communicating with them even before the training via the contacts I have obtained from their website or social media handle" (Respondent 2).

"if I find myself perusing their social media handles, especially their Instagram handle even before the training, this would also show that I am engaged with the brand" (Respondent 3).

"if I find myself checking their website and social media pages to know what is new and also for things coming up" (Respondent 6).

The data reveals that 'enthusiasm' refers to an eagerness on the part of target participants to learn and expand their horizon through furthering their entrepreneurship knowledge at the training. It equally refers to an anticipation of upcoming training events by target participants, as well as a continuing zeal and inclination towards the youth training organisation. The following quotes from target customer respondents illustrate the element of 'enthusiasm':

"When I look forward to the things I can benefit from the training organisation" *(Respondent 1).*

"My eagerness to learn more and expand my horizon via furthering my knowledge from the same training organisation" *(Respondent 5).*

"if I find myself checking their website and social media pages to know what is new" *(Respondent 6).*

5.4.2   In-training

'In-training' refers to the measuring of service offering via the level of interactivity and practicality of the actual training, as well as the degree of notetaking during the training. From the data, the indices of measuring an actual youth entrepreneurship training are (i) practicality, (ii) interactivity, and (iii) notetaking. 'Practicality' as a core element of the 'in-training' dimension is revealed by the data to refer to the perceived efficacy of the training session in relation to an accompanying readiness to put the knowledge gained into practice. It equally refers to an overarching opinion that the actual training is effective and will cause positive changes to the businesses of participants. As illustrated by the quotes below, 'interactivity' refers to the level of questions and answers, as well as the volume and content of messages during the duration of the actual training session or academy:

"I would say the number of questions would determine the level" *(Respondent 3).*

"I believe questions and answers from participants can be used to measure" *(Respondent 9).*

"The volume and content of messages during the duration of the academy" *(Respondent 10).*
"Factors can be questions asked, the answers received" *(Respondent 11).*

Finally, the data reveals 'notetaking' as one of the elements of 'in-training', and this refers to participants taking down notes because of the perceived importance of the concepts being taught. The following quotes from target customer respondents are responses to the question of measuring participant interest during a training session, and the responses reveal this element of notetaking:

"This would depend on the level of my taking down the important keys with writing materials" (Respondent 5).

"I would say taking notes is a major sign for me" (Respondent 6).

"In a session where different people are speaking to me about different issues, and I am probably taking notes" (Respondent 11).

5.4.3   Post-training

Lastly, the findings of this study identified 'post-training' as a major dimension of measuring the service offering of a hybrid youth training organisation. 'Post-training' refers to any effort at providing participants with a means of action-planning, giving feedback on the training, mentoring after the training, and referring target participants to subsequent trainings. Consequently, the 'post-training' indices as uncovered by the data are: (i) action planning, (ii) feedback, (iii) mentoring, and (iv) referrals. Data analyses reveal action planning to be plans of action that portray what a participant seeks to achieve as a result of a training academy or session, as well as resolutions to be implemented in the participant's business venture. Therefore, action planning creates the opportunity for participants to plan future actions. Furthermore, data analysis results equally show 'feedback' to refer to the review of the participant on the training session or academy. The findings equally identify feedback as a yardstick for measuring service efficacy post-training, in relation to the level of feedback that a participant is willing to give. The data reveals the following responses to the question of measuring customer engagement after a training service, which illustrates the element of feedback:

"Furthermore, the level of feedback I give as a youth entrepreneur" (Respondent 8).

"Also, a feedback form should also have a question to this effect" (Respondent 9).

"As well as feedback received after the actual training session" (Respondent 12).

'Mentoring', as identified by the data, refers to the level of support provided by youth training service providers to participants of their youth training services after the actual training. In other words, it denotes keeping the lines of communication open, following up with participant's progress, providing morale boosting encouragement, and advising through the start-up incubation phase of their business. 'Referrals', as stipulated by the data, refers to the willingness of training participants to share their experience with other target customers and refer the organisation to other people. The following quotes, from the data, in response to a question on ascertaining continuing interest in the training service of a hybrid youth training organisation denote the idea of referrals:

"My willingness to share current experiences with others after the session" (Respondent 5).

"The number of youths I reach out/refer to after the duration" (Respondent 10).

"Where trainees refer the organisation to other people" (Respondent 12).

Consequently, the findings of this study in relation to the number of people a training participant shares their training experience with after the training academy depicts the view of such participants on the efficacy and quality of such training.

5.5   Summary of chapter

In this chapter, I detailed the findings of this study in relation to the three research questions: a hybrid competitive framework for a hybrid youth training organisation, a hybrid strategy implementation process for ECNL, and indices by which the customer

perception of ECNL service offerings can be measured, in addition to the elements and themes under each research question.

In the next chapter, I discuss the matters surrounding a hybrid competitive strategy implementation in a hybrid youth training organisation, as well as highlight my views on the relationship between the literature-driven framework of a hybrid competitive strategy implementation, and the identified framework. Furthermore, I highlight the limitations of this study, the implications of this study for both theory and practice, as well as my ideas for future research.

6   DISCUSSION

6.2 Chapter Introduction

In this study, I investigated how the competitiveness of ECNL- a hybrid youth training organisation- can be improved by developing and implementing a hybrid competitive strategy framework. The approach of this study is to decipher the dimensions and elements of a hybrid competitive strategy framework, which a hybrid youth training organisation will need to implement, examine the process by which the deciphered hybrid competitive strategy framework can be implemented at ECNL, and lastly, how the training services offered by ECNL can be measured from the perspective of target customers. Therefore, this chapter sheds light on the realities of a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation like ECNL, specific issues surrounding its implementation in a hybrid youth training organisation, and the relationship between the literature-driven framework and the deciphered framework to highlight nuances and variations between extant literature and my study findings. Furthermore, in this chapter, I highlight the implications of this study on both theory and practice, as well as its limitations and ideas that can benefit from subsequent research.

6.3 Realities of a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid organisation

This paragraph aims to highlight the most pertinent study results from my perspective as researcher-manager, thereby discussing what struck me most regarding the study findings in a manner that sheds light on the core substance of implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation.

6.2.1   Invaluable role of Porter's sole strategies

The findings of this study support the position that to develop and implement a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation involves an appreciation of sole strategies of Porter (1980, 1985), that is, low-cost, differentiation, and focus strategies. However, from the findings of this study and as elucidated in the subsequent

paragraph, it is important that customer perception remain at the forefront of the process when articulating a Unique Selling Point (USP) or Point of Difference (POD) that forms the crux of the differentiation dimension of the hybrid competitive strategy such that the USP or POD is customer-driven and not management-driven. Thompson et al. (2012) stated that an organisation is said to operate a hybrid competitive strategy when the service, and the services are lower priced than those of competitors and are of high quality. In essence, combining all three generic strategies of Porter (1980; 1985): cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies to improve organisational performance by providing improved benefits to target customers. The findings of this study did mirror the literature, though clear nuances exist to the effect that a hybrid organisation is said to operate a hybrid competitive strategy where the services are of high quality, and flexibly priced below the industry average, and combining the three aggregate dimensions of brand awareness, differentiation, and low costs.

Therefore, implementing a hybrid competitive strategy at ECNL entailed a careful synergy and calibration of the elements of these three aggregate dimensions especially where there exists a turbulent or dynamic business environment (Beal and Yasai-Ardekani, 2000; Gopalakrishna and Subramanian, 2001; Kim, Nam and Stimpert, 2004; Spanos, Zaralis and Lioukas, 2004). Even though the findings of this study can neither affirm nor disregard this notion, I can categorically state that the business environment as at the time of implementation was far from calm or normal especially considering the COVID-19 global pandemic existing at the time of writing.

6.2.2   Importance of a solid differentiation strategy

The findings of research question 1 support the position that implementing a hybrid competitive strategy involves, among others, a solid differentiation strategy (Blankson et al.,2006; Mishra et al., 1996) from a multi-dimensional perspective that served the needs of target customers based on the distinctive quality of ECNL training service offerings. Remarkably, Miller & Dess et al. (1993), Acquaah & Ardekani (2006), and Baroto, Abdullah and Wan (2012) had effectively argued that a hybrid competitive strategy

creates a business environment of profitability and superior organisational performance specifically due to the perception of value that is created by differentiation, as well as low prices that creates the cumulative effect of a dual advantage over sole strategy implementation. The findings of this study align with the idea of a dual advantage of lower competitive cost and high service quality that creates profitability and superior organisational performance, as evident from the pilot implementation of ELYA elucidated in the previous chapter. Notably, differentiation through innovation and trade-offs that focused on the expectations of the customer was, to my mind, the most important dimension of a hybrid strategy implementation framework. And this is due to the peculiar nature of ECNL as a hybrid organisation with a social mission of providing affordable entrepreneurship training to unemployed and underemployed youths within the ages of 18 and 35 years. The findings of this study reveal that the role of trade-offs in the hybrid competitive strategy implementation process, especially as relates to the aggregate dimension of differentiation cannot be underestimated or overemphasized, as it was important for ECNL to innovate to differentiate and keep overhead costs at the barest minimum. Therefore, from the findings, I can agree with Lapersonne et al. (2015) to the extent that organisations seeking to implement a hybrid competitive strategy appreciate this pertinent role of trade-offs. As a result, when the process of implementing the identified framework was revealed by research question 2, I was particularly mindful of ensuring superior training services under the 'andragogy' dimension, that would be deemed meaningful to target customers. As corroborated by the findings, this is coupled with some level of service innovation during the differentiation process of implementing a hybrid competitive strategy (McNally et al. 2010, Rijsdijk et al., 2011; Healy et al., 2017). Also, bearing in mind that the data agrees that in implementing the findings for research question 2, the ECNL team as part of the implementation process are most vital to the process and will equally be vital to sustaining the competitiveness gained via implementing a hybrid competitive strategy at ECNL (Prajogo & Oke, 2016; Delery & Roumpi, 2017). Though in chapter 2, I stated that ECNL would equally have to manage strategic ambidexterity in managing the development of service qualities, the findings suggest this is much less relevant than trade-offs, as the findings simply reveal that in implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation, such

organisation must appreciate the important role of trade-offs in the service differentiation process.

6.2.3 The benefits of an existing brand

From the data analysis, I found that partnerships were equally pivotal to boosting organisational performance especially where the partnering brand is an existing brand, through a 'brand awareness' drive that forms the first of three dimension of a hybrid competitive strategy framework in a developing country like Nigeria. Similarly, as suggested by the literature and confirmed by the findings, social media is invaluable to the hybrid strategy implementation process especially where the brand is an existing brand with some level of following. This aided the process in the form of enabling ECNL to host free zoom partnership sessions that showcased the ECNL brand in a positive light, thereby reintroducing the brand to the consciousness of target customers (Kim et al., 2015; Godey et al., 2016; Alalwan et al., 2017). Moreover, the strategy implementation process was much more complex because ECNL was not a new entrant into the market even though this also had its benefit, and the possibility of this occurrence had been insinuated by Lapersonne et al. (2015). I will attribute this complexity to ECNL's reputation as a low-cost youth entrepreneurship training provider, and the fact that as stated in the first chapter, target customers began to rank qualities as opposed to just cost of the service offerings. However, due to ECNL's already existing status in the youth entrepreneurship training ecosystem within Lagos, Nigeria, and because the youth training entrepreneurship industry can neither be described as emergent nor mature, implementing a hybrid competitive strategy presented a unique opportunity to ascertain its viability in what I would term an 'intermediate market'. An intermediate market is one that I describe as neither emergent nor mature. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that a third implementation route, in addition to those elucidated by Lapersonne et al. (2015), is where an organisation with a social mission and without any implemented competitive strategy begins to lose competitiveness, and then seeks to implement a hybrid competitive strategy as a result. This differs from the two ways that had been postulated that organisations like ECNL seeking to implement a hybrid competitive

strategy can only do so if we already have a sole differentiation strategy in place or a low-cost strategy in place. However, the findings negate this notion, as ECNL did not operate any prior competitive strategy, though one might argue that the fact ECNL services prices were very low could mean that a low-cost strategy was in place, albeit an informal one.

6.3 Managerial intervention in hybrid competitive strategy implementation

This paragraph discusses the issues associated with implementing a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth training organisation from the perspective of researcher manager. Though the literature had revealed four typologies of strategy implementation (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1984), that is, evolutionary, managerial, sequential, and complex interventions, however, data analysis discovered that this study is concerned with managerial intervention, that is, I as researcher-manager spearheading the research process and ensuring necessary factors that influence the strategy implementation process were in place.

6.3.1 Factors relevant to the hybrid competitive strategy implementation process

Now that I was to spearhead the process, the ten factors that were argued by Okumus (2001) to influence strategy become most essential. These factors are formulation, organisational structure, culture, communication, environment, resource allocation, operational planning, people, control, and outcome. However, the research findings, showed the most significant factors affecting the process to be formulation, communication, operational planning, people, and outcome. Formulation is considered a necessary factor in the sense that it is essential that the hybrid competitive strategy implementation process is formulated in line with the framework, and only when this is done can the formulated process then be implemented. Communication is certainly essential in getting the step-by-step message across to team members during and after the strategy implementation process. Communication also involved marketing, advertising, and disseminating key messages to target customers via social media. Operational planning means ensuring a clear and shared direction regarding the steps to

take in the hybrid strategy implementation process. 'People' can be viewed as a general reference to human capital invested into the hybrid competitive strategy implementation process. Lastly, 'outcome' is an important factor because it ties everything together and justifies the strategy implementation process in the sense of achieving the ultimate goal of improved competitiveness. Other factors listed by Okumus (2001) that I did not view as necessary in the hybrid strategy implementation process are organisational structure, culture, resource allocation, and control. These factors were considered unnecessary because I did not find them to be of any relevance to my strategy implementation process. The structure of ECNL was never an issue, and was not pivotal to the implementation process, what was important is encapsulated in 'people', and that sufficed. Culture did not play a major part of the process, though it may have an ephemeral effect on the implementation process because there hitherto existed an appreciation of the cultural values of the 'people' being an existing market player and not a new entrant into the market. Also, resource allocation is not a necessary factor simply because from the study findings, an aggregate dimension of a hybrid competitive strategy framework is 'low-cost', thus keeping overheads low is central to achieving the low-cost dimension of a hybrid competitive strategy framework. Consequently, resource allocation was never an issue as free mediums were employed to ensure overheads were kept low. Similarly, 'control' was not a necessary factor, as ECNL operates a high-performance work team that appreciates what their roles and responsibilities and require no disciplinary procedures to be put in place.

6.3.2   Protecting the implementation process

Through the implementation process of the hybrid competitive strategy, I was still very mindful of the possible breakdown of the strategy implementation process, especially as Nienaber (2019) warned of the dangers that such breakdown could pose to society at large. Consequently, to implement the findings of research question 2, it was important that I had everything I required to implement the hybrid competitive strategy framework

that had been revealed by research question 1. In so doing, a factor that I found to be very crucial was adequate time for strategy implementation, especially bearing in mind, as advised by Alexander (1985), the unanticipated setbacks and situations that could interrupt the process, and therefore prudent that organisations ensure that they take into full consideration the minimum timeline for implementing a hybrid competitive strategy framework. Research question 2 equally revealed the relevance of delegation of responsibility as relates to the strategy implementation process, as this was found to very helpful in overcoming time-constraints, especially with regard to defining the roles and responsibilities of ECNL team members that enabled maximising a limited timeline to implement a hybrid competitive strategy. Consequently, as stated by Odhiambo (2006) and corroborated by the findings, it is crucial to the strategy implementation process that all potential issues that could arise in the strategy implementation process be carefully considered before the commencement of the strategy implementation process. To do this in this study, I ensured that all employees that were to be involved in the strategy implementation process were part of the Action Research Cycle (ARC) such that they would have the required confidence in the hybrid strategy implementation process (Cummings and Worley, 2005).

6.4 Relationship between the literature-driven and identified frameworks.

Based on a synthesis of the literature in chapter two and analysis of the data, a minor contrast is evident when comparing the literature-driven and identified framework. I listed the elements that make up a hybrid competitive strategy framework as i) narrow market segment or particular buyer group (Tanwar, 2013; Awade, 2014), (ii) high customer patronage focus (Dolgui & Proth, 2010), (iii) low production costs (Valls-Gimenez, 2013), (iv) perceived customer value (Valls-Gimenez, 2013), (v) marketing (Kwon et al., 2014), (vi) Existing business networks (Sheng et al., 2011; Li et al., 2012; Saha and Banerjee, 2015; Danso et al., 2016). (vii) flexible work system (Bae & Lawler, 2000), (viii) firm-specific innovation (Banker et al., 2011), (ix) quality, reliability, and durability (Yunus, 2015), (x) vertical service differentiation (Kim and Wang, 2014) and (xi) customer-centricity (Gebauer et al., 2011). However, the findings of this study reveal that the elements that encapsulate a hybrid competitive strategy in a hybrid youth

training organisation are (i) traction, (ii) patronage, (iii) no cost, (iv) partnerships, (v)free mediums, (vi) innovation, (vii) customer expectation, (viii) trade-offs, (ix) low and flexible, (x) below industry costs, (xi) social mission, (xii) affordable, and (xiii) quality.

6.4.1   Recognising the framework variations

It is evident from both the literature-driven framework and identified framework that the elements that make up a hybrid strategy implementation framework are related to a large extent in both a conventional organisation and a hybrid youth training organisation, though some variations exist between both. Correlations are seen, for instance, in the element 'marketing' from the literature-driven framework and 'traction' from the deciphered framework, as the latter was defined earlier in this chapter as an "*Ingenious means by which to draw target customers towards the brand*". Similarly, 'customer-centricity' from the literature-driven framework and 'customer expectation' from the identified framework connote the same thing in essence, as they both postulate that target customers should be front and center of the service differentiation process. 'Business networks' in the literature-driven framework and 'partnerships' in identified framework equally can be used interchangeably. A much clearer similarity, however, are in the elements of 'patronage', 'innovation' and 'quality', which both appear in both the literature-driven and identified framework, while the elements 'social mission', 'free mediums', and 'trade-offs' from the identified framework are totally absent and bear no correlation to the literature-driven framework.

6.4.2   Measuring youth training service efficacy of a hybrid organisation.

In the review of the literature relating to research question 3 and detailed in chapter two of this study, I stated that an assessment of an organisation's performance after strategy implementation be measured along multiple dimensions (Mostaghel et al., 2015; Sen et al., 2017; Jaaskelainen and Luukkanen, 2017), and specifically cited Kaplan and Norton's (1992) balance scorecard approach as a viable index of measurement. The indices contained in the balance scorecard approach are financial performance (FIPE), customer performance (CUPE), organisational growth and learning perspective (GLPE), and

internal process performance efficiency (IPPE). I equally highlighted the particular relevance of CUPE to this study, bearing in mind the social mission of the hybrid youth training case-study organisation, the viewpoint that organisational performance in a hybrid youth-training organisation is premised on the customer's perception of training services. CUPE, as stated in chapter two, refers to how an organisation can guarantee value-creation for target customers through their service offerings (Leon-Soriano et al., 2010; Mostaghel et al., 2015). Abd as stated in the previous chapter, the indices by which the customer perceives training services offerings are centred around the dimensions of: (i) pre-training, (ii) in-training, and (iii) post-training.

6.5 Theoretical and Practical implications of Study

From the findings of this study, the knowledge generated revolves around a hybrid competitive strategy framework for hybrid youth training organisations, the process of implementing this framework, and the way by which a hybrid youth training organisation that has implemented the framework can measure the efficacy of its training service from a customer perspective. In paragraph 4.4, I elucidate specific details of how I took action in my organisation-ECNL- regarding my study findings, consequently, in this paragraph I expound the implication of the findings for managers of hybrid youth training organisations seeking improved competitiveness, as well as its contribution to existing literature.

6.5.1 Originality and theoretical implications

This study adds to the existing literature on hybrid competitive strategy by espousing the following: a framework for implementation in a hybrid youth training organisation, a process of implementing that framework, as well as indices by which the efficacy of the strategy can be gauged. The findings of this study indicate that hybrid youth training organisations who are experiencing turbulence in business, reduced competitiveness, or who may not have an existing competitive strategy can also implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework. Additionally, organisations, hybrid or not, who may be experiencing a decline in competitiveness can equally take advantage of the findings of

this study. By taking advantage of this opportunity to implement a hybrid competitive strategy framework, hybrid youth training organisations become tougher and more competitive within their industry, since they will be combining three strong dimensions of brand awareness, differentiation, and low costs. Furthermore, this study contributes to existing literature by underscoring the essence of differentiation and low costs to the success of a hybrid competitive strategy. Consequently, as a result of the findings of this study, it is asserted more hybrid organisations will benefit from the strong competitive positioning that implementing a hybrid competitive strategy framework provides. Studies that support the implementation of a hybrid competitive strategy framework view it as a solution to an unsteady and erratic market environment (Beal and Yasai-Ardekani, 2000; Gopalakrishna and Subramanian, 2001; Kim, Nam and Stimpert, 2004; Spanos, Zaralis and Lioukas, 2004). The aim of this study was to develop and implement a hybrid competitive strategy to improve the competitiveness of a hybrid youth-training organisation. Hence, the pertinent insights generated from this study such as a hybrid competitive strategy framework, a process of implementing this framework in a hybrid youth-training organisation, and the indices for measuring training service efficacy, demonstrate the dynamic view of the strategy formulation and implementation process, with the two often involving distinct activities. Hence, it is my view that the findings of this study plug the knowledge gap of a hybrid competitive strategy framework best suited for a hybrid organisation, specifically, a hybrid youth-training organisation. Again, this study confirms the customer-focused interaction between service innovation and perception of service value. The applicable typology to hybrid competitive strategy implementation in a hybrid youth-training organisation, that is, managerial intervention, as well as the factors of formulation, communication, operational planning, people, and outcome, as factors that affect the strategy formulation and implementation are all notable points revealed by this study. This study equally emphasizes the need for flexibility of costs to operate alongside low costs in a hybrid competitive strategy framework. By this emphasis, this study adds important nuances and variations to the existing literature on cost-leadership as a dimension of hybrid strategy, and its application in emerging economies and industries. Additionally, the findings of this study add to another important study on hybrid strategy (Lapersonne et al., 2015), by adding a

third hybrid strategy implementation route to the espoused two routes, as highlighted in the previous chapter. This new hybrid competitive strategy implementation route gives hybrid organisations who may be new entrants to the market or who may not be new entrants but have no implemented competitive strategy, a chance to benefit from the competitiveness that a hybrid strategy offers. Additionally, hybrid youth-training organisations can measure the efficacy of their training sentences by employing a three-dimensional Customer Perception (CUPE) model. The three dimensions of this model as the findings of this study revealed are pre-training, in-training, and post-training, thereby validating and adding to the CUPE dimension of the Kaplan and Norton (1992) balance scorecard approach. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study lies in the definitions for the aggregate dimensions that are espoused to constitute a hybrid competitive strategy framework, as well as an elucidation of all the constituent elements of each of these dimensions. Consequently, the identified framework of this study will assist researchers, whether academics or professionals or both, in clarifying some of the numerous inquiries into hybrid strategy formulation and implementation.

6.5.2   Managerial implication and applied contribution

The findings of this study assert that by implementing the identified hybrid competitive strategy framework, senior management of hybrid youth training organisations can improve the competitiveness of their brand. As a manager, implementing a hybrid competitive strategy entails systematically ensuring that three dimensions of (i) brand awareness, (ii) differentiation, and (iii) low costs with all their associated elements are incorporated into the organisation through the dimensions espoused via research question 2, that is, (i) andragogy, (ii) social media, and (iii) continuing engagement. Furthermore, as revealed by research question 3, management will equally do well to measure the efficacy of the training services from a customer perspective, to appreciate the perception of the service offerings, which will serve as a means of gauging the competitive positioning of the organisation. Consequently, managers of hybrid youth training organisation that are not new market entrants, and who may not have hitherto implemented any competitive strategy can certainly benefit from the hybrid competitive

strategy framework advocated by this study, along with its associated findings. Conversely, hybrid youth training organisations who may be operating any of the sole strategies enunciated by Porter (1980, 1985) can do away with their current sole competitive strategy and implement the hybrid competitive strategy framework espoused by this study to improve their service offerings, and ultimately the competitiveness of their organisation. Another important implication of this study for managers is the formal procedure, comprising of dimensions and elements, that is required to bring the identified hybrid competitive strategy framework to life. Therefore, managers of hybrid training organisations seeking to implement a hybrid competitive strategy must give due regard and reflection to the process by which the identified hybrid competitive framework can be brought to life. Taking such additional steps to ensure a flawless implementation process of the identified hybrid competitive strategy framework will certainly improve the outcome on the hybrid youth training organisation for managers and their organisations.

6.6 Limitations

This study presented some limitations that are readily acknowledged, and largely due to circumstances that could not have been reasonably foreseen. However, it is pertinent to categorically state that none of these limitations is considered to significantly affect the reliability and actionability of the findings of this study. In other words, the effect of these limitations on the overall study is considered minimal. Furthermore, due to limited time in which to complete this study, as well as the imbalance, disruption and uncertainty created by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the ARC was limited to one cycle. It is acknowledged that this study would have benefited from a second iteration, where the results from the evaluation of the pilot application of the findings would be applied. This may have added even more clarity, rigour and reliability to the findings. Again, though there are no stringent rules on sample size, this study may have benefited from an increased sample size of more than a modest 12 participants. This may have served to increase the themes I analysed, and effectively add to the resulting hybrid competitive strategy framework that hybrid youth training organisations can employ to improve competitiveness. Additionally, the resulting framework from this single case-study of

ECNL may be considered more generally applicable if other youth training organisations were equally studied, especially in relation to the applicability and efficacy of the identified framework on the competitiveness of their organisations.

6.7 Extensions and recommendations for further study

Over the course of reviewing the literature around strategy, strategy implementation, competitiveness, and the youth entrepreneurship training industry, particularly in Lagos, Nigeria, the researcher identified knowledge gaps that may benefit from further research. A knowledge gap exists in appreciating the relationship between hybrid strategy implementation and Strategy Decision Implementation (SDI). This knowledge gap relates to the concept of strategy implementation being associated with the SDI (Leonardi, 2015; Engert & Baumgarten 2016). However, this association has been contended by authors, as both strategy implementation and SDI are viewed as different in both practice and theory (Peters, Adam, Alonge, Agyepong, & Tran, 2014; Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015). Another view is that SDI incorporates varying approaches that results in a multi-faceted concept, therefore, detailed description on the relationship, if any, between SDI, hybrid strategy implementation and competitiveness can benefit from further research. Again, I identify knowledge gaps between factors affecting SDI and organisational performance especially in relation to the organisation's socio-dynamics, as I believe a detailed review of the factors that affect SDI in relation to the organisations' socio-demographics will be most valuable to the scholar-practitioner and the professional-practitioner alike. Furthermore, this study appreciates the invaluable role of strategic information systems (SIS) in the strategy implementation process, especially as it relates to its impact on strategic performance and competitiveness (Arvidsson et al., 2014; Whittington, 2014). Managers have been said to be major beneficiaries of SIS within an organisational context, and this is due to reason that strategic communication and awareness is heightened because of SIS, which ultimately enables distribution of strategic objectives of the strategy to be implemented (Yoshikuni and Jeronimo, 2013; Yoshukuni and Albertin, 2018). However, to my knowledge, there is no study that has

been conducted in relation to the impact of SIS on strategy formulation, organisational capability, and innovation. Further research on this area would be a most valuable contribution to the literature on hybrid strategy implementation as it will assist in enabling more thorough strategy formulation processes for the hybrid youth training organisation resulting from more effective communication. Furthermore, another area that can benefit from further research is if, how, or to what extent any or all the other elements of Kaplan and Norton's (1992) balance scorecard affect hybrid youth training organisations that have implemented a hybrid competitive strategy framework. These other elements are financial performance (FIPE), organisational growth and learning perspective (GLPE), and internal process performance efficiency (IPPE).

6.8 Summary of chapter

This chapter began by discussing the findings from the three ARQs evaluated in this study, as well as the theoretical and managerial implications of this study. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the limitations of this study, as well as the knowledge gaps that can benefit from further research.

The concluding chapter entails my reflection on my development as a scholar-practitioner during this study, as well as my plans going forward.

7   REFLECTION

This study presented me with a unique opportunity to develop my ability to operate effectively as researcher-manager and scholar-practitioner, with a mandate to conduct research into my organisation, and in a bid to solve the organisational problem of a lack of competitiveness. As researcher-manager of the case-study organisation, navigating the inherent challenges provided a great opportunity for me to improve learning and further appreciate the theory-practice divide. Consequently, the following paragraphs are intended to enable a thorough appreciation of my growth as a scholar-practitioner during the course of this study.

7.1   Sourcing the Literature

Sourcing for relevant literature, reviewing such literature, as well as synthesizing the literature certainly enabled a high level of scholar-practitioner growth. Initially I was not too sure how to go about searching for relevant literature and was engaged in a random search around the core areas of hybrid strategy, strategy implementation, competitiveness, and youth entrepreneurship training. However, upon supervisor review, the concept of a literature review methodology was introduced to me, which was of great assistance in enabling a systematic and documented process of reviewing the literature and deciphering literature that was most relevant to this study. This systematic and documented process was inspired by Centobelli (2019) and relates to selecting relevant literature and synthesizing such literature via critical analysis. I found that in reviewing the literature, keywords were enormously vital in finding relevant peer-reviewed literature. I equally found 'Google Scholar', 'Scopus' and 'Discovery' to be the most relevant databases in churning out relevant literature, and review of the literature remained an ongoing process during this study. Also, the requirement to be as up to date as possible necessitated review of the literature reviewed, to ensure that all new information on the subject areas evaluated are captured in the study. A particular quote that I found most helpful was that by Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), "*a good literature review will ensure that the research undertaken fits in with the existing wider research*

within the focal area" (p.103). Consequently, all through the literature review process, it was imperative for me to ensure that any literature considered relevant has a clear fit into the wider research context of the study.

7.2   Synthesizing the Literature.

Effective synthesis of the literature reviewed involved a critical review, systematic review, and supportive search. Critical review involved evaluation of the literature to appreciate any previous studies and weaknesses, and to evaluate such in a way that elicits core arguments. I found that a clear distinction existed between reviewing the literature and critically reviewing the literature. Initially, I was not as critical as required, however, I began to fully understand expectations regarding synthesising the relevant literature. To my understanding, synthesis implied situating the literature reviewed in the context of the organisational problem under study and enabling a direct corelation between reviewed literature and conceptual framework to tackle such problem. Therefore, I experienced personal development in the areas of mapping, assessing the quality and relevance of literature, as well as identifying the gaps in the reviewed existing body of literature.   Another area that I gained valuable understanding and capacity is the continuing nature of a literature review. Initially I believed a literature review was to be done once and for all, however, it became clear as the study progressed that reviewing the literature was a continuous exercise during the study, and necessary to prove or disprove aspects of the data collected, as well as ensure the study was not missing new and relevant literature not contained in the researcher's original review.

7.3   Interviews and Analysis

I found the semi-structured interviews conducted to be most challenging, especially regarding preparation for the interviews. My first hurdle was getting the right structure and deciding on semi-structured interviews, thereby discerning those choices had to be continually made on how to follow up on responses from participants, especially as regards how to proceed in terms of questioning. There were varying moments when I

was uncertain as to whether to pursue a line of questioning or move to the subsequent question. Despite my guide that shaped the level and extent of questioning, I still found that the guide was not exhaustive in dealing with unanticipated areas of questioning that one could refer to as ripple effects. This process enabled my appreciation of the subjective nature of interviews and results, especially because the decision regarding what lines of inquiry are interesting enough to be pursued lies solely with the researcher as interviewer. Additionally, I found that it was often difficult to stop a participant from going further in his or her narrative, even where I had obtained enough information. However, I was able to alleviate this problem by subsequently making it clear ab-initio the areas that I expected the focus and concentration of the participant, to avoid needless verbosity; thus, growing my skill and facility in conducting qualitative research interviews.

Again, I found that it was often difficult to fully appreciate participant responses both because of unclear articulation by participants, hence it became imperative to relay the summary of participants responses back to them from time to time to clarify that what was being captured was the true intention of the participant. I equally learnt and applied the skill of 'laddering' that enabled participants better answer questions posed by the researcher, especially 'laddering down'. Laddering down provided the researcher with the opportunity to elicit examples to provide more clarity on the participant's responses. I also employed 'probes' to add clarity to participant's responses and found this to be useful in ensuring that the participant's intention is mirrored by my captured responses.

7.4   Single and Double loop Learning

The learning process that led to 'taking action' through the ARC consisted of single, double, and triple-loop learning (Argyris, 1978). Single loop learning took the form of the ECNL being able to apply elements of the hybrid strategy implementation framework in the manner we felt best suited the organisation. In other words, the findings of research question 2 that I elucidated in chapter 5 is evidence of single loop learning as it spelt out the process by which ECNL can apply the hybrid competitive strategy framework unveiled via research question 1 of this study. Double-loop learning was in the form of

ECNL making major changes to its practices and policies via a new competitive strategy; thus, its youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring services had become low-cost, more focused, and customer-driven. ECNL team members were also more involved and engaged resulting from their inclusion through the process of organisational change and their appreciation of their various roles through the process. Single and double loop learning were further evident in the findings that led ECNL to leverage on business and professional networks and ensure a brand awareness campaign that involved partnerships with these high-value external stakeholders.

The ARC equally involved a transition from theoretical knowing to practical knowing, that is, bridging the theory-practice divide of the youth entrepreneurship training industry in Lagos, Nigeria. Consequently, three forms of reflections encapsulated the ARC: (i) content reflection where I reflected on the issues and what I believed to be happening, (ii) process reflection where I thought about strategies and procedures and how things were being done and (iii) premise reflection where I critiqued underlying assumptions and perspectives. Similarly, through the semi-structured interviews, I fully explored the application of a hybrid competitive strategy framework from the perspective of the target-customer. This implies that the findings of research question 2 and 3 enables an understanding of the ECNL target customer, as well as their perception of the youth entrepreneurship training and mentoring industry within Lagos, Nigeria.

7.5   Reflection-in-Action

Reflection-in-action involved continuing reflection on ethics, my preunderstanding, in addition to the power dynamics associated with being an insider-action researcher with the dual role of researcher and manager. Ethics, as relates to this study, involved ethical approval obtained by the researcher from the University of Liverpool on 16th November 2017. This ethical approval was revised to exclude face to face data collection in the light of the COVID-19 global health pandemic, and the revised approval was granted on 16th April 2020. Furthermore, research participants were given full information on the research study, in addition to their unreserved right to withdraw from the study at any

time during its course. Ethics equally involved my continuous reflection on the quality of relationship between myself and the research participants, that is, both the ARC and interviewees. Additionally, I was guided by the four process imperatives of making decisions during the ARC, that is, attentiveness to the data, intelligence in inquiry, reasonability in making judgements and utmost responsibility in making decisions and taking action (Holian and Coghlan, 2013). Consequently, I categorically state that at no point during the study was there any abusive behaviour, concern or allegation raised by any research participant. However, a constant concern for me was the ever-present possibility that the desire for consensus during the ARC iterations could degenerate into group think, and Kumar (2013), cautioned insider action researchers on this real possibility. Hence, I constantly tried to encourage the learning set to challenge the assumptions and biases of each other to produce more refined action points for ECNL.

Suffice to state that 'preunderstanding' in this study resulted from my "knowledge, insights and experiences" (Gummerson, 2000 p.57) prior to commencing the ARC, and involving both the researcher's tacit and explicit knowledge of ECNL. Consequently, I was intentional about detaching myself from my prior knowledge of the organisation to objectively critique the organisation. This is in addition to ensuring that assumptions during the interviewing process were kept at the barest minimum, if at all. Hence 'epistemic reflexivity' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014) was a constant for me during the duration of this study. This enabled me to analyse my lived experiences relating to ECNL, as well as resulting presuppositions. Consequently, I imbibed the skill of journaling through the process of learning set interactions to highlight the eventual differences between his tacit and explicit knowledge.

Additionally, the political dynamics of researching my own organisation cannot be negated or understated. However, appreciating the subversive quality of action research, I learnt to be a political entrepreneur (Buchanan and Badham, 2008), employing tactics, strategies, and critical reflection in managing the changing dynamics of the ARC through the cycle of constructing, planning, taking and evaluating action. Additionally, continuing reflection enabled some level of expertise on the need to be cautious of the fine line

between acting as a political entrepreneur and acting unethically, hence it was important that a relationship of trust was built between research participants and me.

7.6   Going Forward

I have unspeakable appreciation of my journey as a scholar-practitioner from the start of this study, and I have gained a great deal of skill and facility in conducting qualitative action research. Learning and conducting far-reaching literature reviews was one of the major advantages of my doctoral journey, and a skill that I consider most valuable. Synthesizing the content of reviewed literature with the organisational problem under scrutiny is equally acknowledged as an invaluable attribute that has improved through the course of this study. Finally, having now largely appreciated the dynamics of action research, I am committed to continue to improve on this appreciation, manage the researcher-manager dichotomy in subsequent studies, and continue to conduct studies that solve organisational problems, as well as bridge the theory-practice divide.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 ECNL certificate of incorporation

Appendix 2 An ECNL youth entrepreneurship training session.

Appendix 3 First Brand Awareness Flyer

Appendix 4 Second Brand Awareness Flyer

Appendix 5 Third Enhancing Brand Awareness Marketing Flyer

Appendix 6 Newspaper Column on ELYA

Appendix 7 ELYA Marketing Flyer 1

Appendix 8 ELYA Marketing Flyer 2

Appendix 9 ELYA Marketing Flyer 3

Appendix 10 ELYA online academy showing 79 Participants.
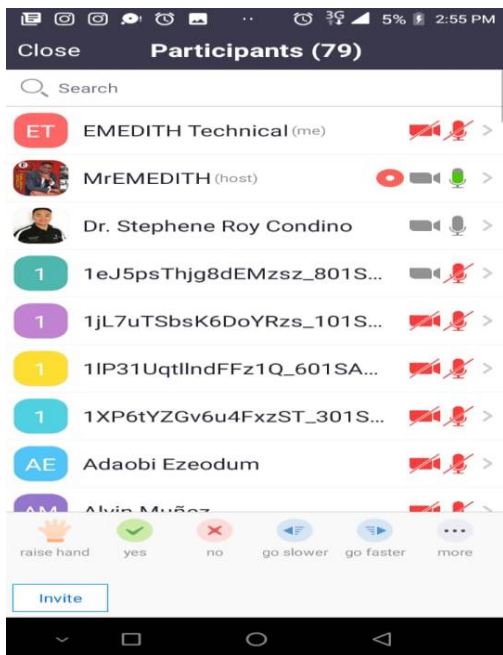
Appendix 11 ELYA Session showing researcher-facilitator and co-facilitator
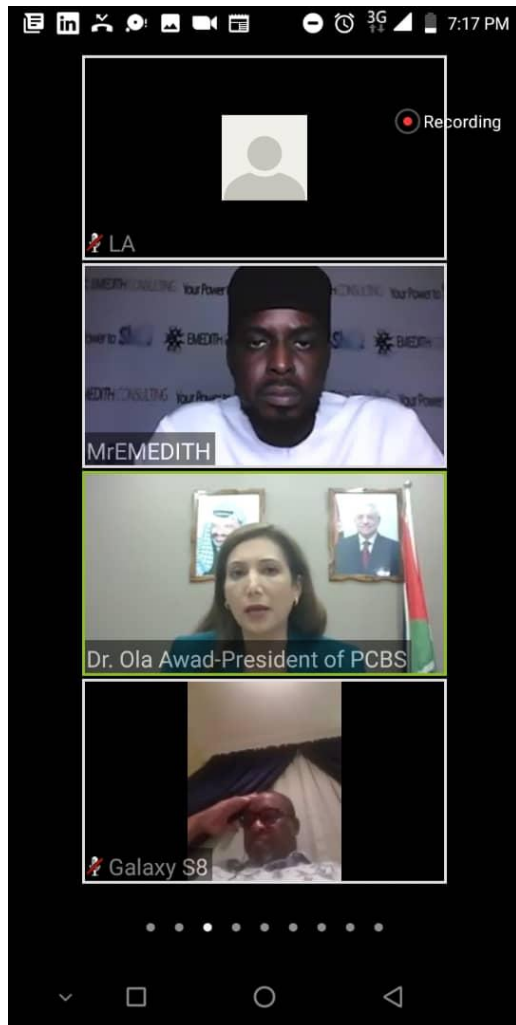
Appendix 12 ELYA Sample Evaluation Form

EMEDITH CONSULTING
Your power to Shine
RC: 934937

EEA ACADEMY COHORT EVALUATION FORM

1. Please rate this academy cohort in terms of **Facilitator's Expertise, Clarity, Cultural Appropriateness, Time Management,** and **Responsiveness** to your entrepreneurship and general needs. Provide any additional feedback in the **Comments** section. Circle the appropriate numbers.

RATING SCALE: 1 = LOW   3 = MEDIUM   5 = HIGH

Facilitator Name(s)	Expertise	Clarity	Culturally Appropriate			Time Management			Responsiveness		
Dr. Emeka	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1	2 3 4	5	1 2 3	4 5	1	2 3	4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1	2 3 4	5	1 2 3	4 5	1	2 3	4 5

Comments:
I must say, I am completely trilled by such a wonderful, dynamic and different entrepreneurial academy. Everyone is carried along, case studies to put knowledge learned to work, time management really on point though on very few occasions that leads to a really fast pace but it is understandable because of time restraints. In meeting up to that, there is always a summary which covers it all up, really great.

A great privilege for being a part of this academy

2. Please review the following list of knowledge and skills statements. Give some thought to what you knew before this academy and what you learned during this academy cohort. Circle the number that best represents your knowledge and skills **before** then **after** this academy.

RATING SCALE: 1 = LOW   3 = MEDIUM   5 = HIGH

BEFORE ACADEMY	SELF–ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS RELATED TO:	AFTER ACADEMY
1 2 3 4 5	Assessing participants as learners.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Assessing participants training needs.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Learning outcomes.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Instructional plan per Module	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Learning experiences.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	Implementing (delivering) learning experiences	1 2 3 4 5

OVERALL EVALUATION OF ACADEMY COHORT

3. Please take a moment to answer the following questions. Your comments are an **important contribution** as we design learning experiences to meet your entrepreneurial and general needs.

What will you do **differently** with your brand as a result of this academy cohort?

I will constantly use all modules learnt to do a regular check on my prospective brand this way I can keep my brand on top, I will continue to do a personal case study with the templates and scenarios given to keep the knowledge and the application alive. Just to mention a few…

What do you feel were the **strengths** of this academy cohort?

Simplicity, Expertise (Knowledge + Experience), Trust of her content

What do you feel were the **weaknesses** of this academy cohort?

Well, I can't think of anyone

How can we **improve** the academy cohorts in the future?

More case studies or assignments to keep participants really engaged, if possible after each module. This will help bring the participants into the training.

What **additional entrepreneurship capacity building** training-development do you require?

None for now, ALL has been covered by the academy.

4. Please rate the following statements using a 1 through 5 scale where:

1 = Disagree Strongly	5 = Agree Strongly

_4___ The **difficulty level** was about right.
_5___ I can **apply the information** in my business.
_5___ The academy met my **entrepreneurial needs**.
_5___ The facilitator **actively involved** me in the learning process.
_4___ As a result of this academy, I feel **more confident** in my capacity to maximize my entrepreneurial potential.

Appendix 13 Post ELYA participant's mentoring guide

EMEDITH CONSULTING
Your power to Shine

POST-ACADEMY MEETING (P.A.M) PROCEDURE

1) Set up Meeting with the Facilitator
At the end of the day, it is *your* development and *your* brand. You are responsible for proactively ensuring that your brand development is in line with your own performance expectations or entrepreneurial aspirations.

2) Take the Time to Review Your Plan before you meet with the facilitator
As you examine your action plans, ask yourself the following questions:

    a. Do I have to set new goals or milestones because I reached the old ones?
    b. Are my milestones or goals still achievable, or do I need to readjust the timeline?
    c. Have I had any changes in my responsibilities that make any of my development areas irrelevant?
    d. Have new strengths or development opportunities come to light that would serve as better areas of focus for our efforts?
    e. Can I provide the facilitator with concrete examples as I make the case for amending my development plan?

3) Send the Facilitator Any Major Changes in Advance
Don't surprise the facilitator with major changes during the PAM. Give him or her opportunity to review your proposals. It could be that he is in complete agreement, or it could be that the facilitator perceives your progress differently. Either way, advance warning provides for a more constructive discussion about your development.

4) Leave the Meeting with a Balanced Plan
Make sure you leave all PAMs with a firm belief that your action plans, amended or not, balances current performance expectations with future career aspirations and challenges you to build on your strengths and development areas.

5) Review Where the Facilitator Can Provide the Most Help
Take the time to review the facilitator's coaching efforts to date, and see if they have aligned with your development areas. If you wish to make changes to your action plans, you should be prepared to discuss how the facilitator can best help you achieve any new goals.