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# Evaluation Study on the Barriers to Success of Technology Business Incubation Programme in Nigeria – The Moderating Role of Government Policy

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## Abstract

The business incubation model has been embraced by numerous countries of the world since the concept was first conceived and developed in the USA. It has now received much attention among policymakers and academics particularly within the field of entrepreneurship and small business research. Even though the popularity of the programme, so many tenant firms are still closing shops before and after their exit from the incubator. The aim of this study was to explore how government policy moderates the relationship between the individual critical success factors (CSF) and incubator performance. The study adopted the evaluative qualitative case study design. The population of the study consisted of ten surveying stakeholders who were purposively chosen between the stakeholders. The study found the evidence of the moderating role of government policy on the relationship between barriers to success and incubator performance. The study recommended that government should develop a user friendly framework that will ease the difficulties incubators usually encounter in the course of providing resources to the incubatees.

**Keywords:** Technology Business Incubation, Government Policy, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

In the entrepreneurship space, the part played by small businesses has been highlighted in several entrepreneurship studies (e.g., Higgs & Hill 2019; Agwu & Emeti 2013; Alese 2017). In line with this, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) form the driving force of industrial growth and development in the country. The prominence of SMEs in any country is such that it cannot be ignored by the government of that country, particularly in Nigeria. As a result, it has been established that the growth of SMEs presents as one of the bases of economic development in the country. The positive part of SMEs have been discussed in several SMEs studies, however, the challenges confronting SMEs are numerous. Some of the challenges include funding, business support, infrastructure, and government policy.

Business incubation initiative comes in handy to ameliorate the hitches threatening the small businesses. Entrepreneurial speaking, business incubation assists in the establishment of early-stage enterprises as a strategy to also promote systems of economic development (Al-Mubarak, Al-Karaghoul, & Busler, 2010). Business Incubation is defined by the NBIA as "a business support process that accelerates the successful development of start-up and fledgling companies by providing entrepreneurs with an array of targeted resources and services. These services are usually developed or orchestrated by incubator management and offered both in the business incubator and through its network of contacts". The primary aim of business incubator is to assist new businesses succeed and thereby generate wealth and employment opportunities (NBIA; Pena, 2002).

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

The popularity of business incubation initiative is on the increase now especially as most nations globally have seen it as an instrument for economic development. Despite, the rising interest, misperception about the exact attributes of incubator performance still exists. That is, whether business incubators are indeed attaining their purposes and the precise impact it has on enterprises living in incubator facilities. Despite the popularity of the programme, so many tenant firms are still closing shops before and after their exit from the incubator. Therefore, the intention of this study is to qualitatively evaluate and explore how government policy moderates the relationship between the individual critical success factors and incubator performance.

### *1.2 Objective of the Study*

To explore how government policy moderates the relationship between the individual critical success factors (CSF) and incubator performance

## **2. Literature Review**

The business incubation programme is intended to foster nascent enterprises within one to three years in some sort of secluded place. While in this moderated setting, all the much needed sustenance (e.g., training and mentoring) that are needed for the fledgling enterprises to stay alive are given to them so as to make them to thrive. Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, and McGowan (2014) remarked that the tangible components of business incubators' assets had been employed to measure performance, conversely, over time, the focus has been geared towards intangible elements and social aspects of business incubation. Similarly, resources can be tangible as well as intangible (Pergelova & Angulo-Ruiz 2014). The strategic emphasis is positioned on the intangible skills and resources of the firm as they are considered to be non-tradable, more difficult to imitate and take time to build internally (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993). The argument for intangible resources such as business support as part of the CSFs may perhaps be that business incubator being service programmes rather than buildings can assist in growing firms, offer mentoring as well as handholding and support to a fledgling business in meeting its objectives; rather than the idea of approaching the business incubator because of physical building.

Secondly, Financial Resources is the next in line for this study. Entrepreneurially speaking, the part played by financial resources cannot be overemphasised. Levitsky (1996) stated that inadequate access to finance or loan had been one of the most prevalent impediments faced by SMEs in both advanced and evolving countries. In view of this, Abdullahi, Tahir, Aliyu, and Abubakar (2015) noted that inadequate funding indicates the key challenges which can considerably exhibit a direct influence on the capability of a business to grow, upgrade its technology, expand its market, promote its management skills, increase productivity. In the Nigerian context, Olutunla (2005) opined that poor financial resources had been found as the principal inhibitors to SMEs development in Nigeria. In the context of business incubation attainment, several authors have mentioned the role of finance in business incubator performance (Pergelova & Angulo-Ruiz, 2014; Somsuk & Laosirihongthong, 2014).

Furthermore, infrastructure is another factor that authors seem to pick as one of the elements related to the incubation process that spur entrepreneurs to come to the business incubator. It perhaps may be one of the key reasons for a number of entrepreneurs to relocate to the incubator. In entrepreneurship development generally, inadequate infrastructural facilities have posed a challenging difficulty to SMEs processes (Ojo, 2006). Abdullahi et al. (2015) mention the hindrance to infrastructure to include inadequate transportation systems, water supply shortage, poor telecommunication systems, and lack of electricity and solid waste management. Similarly,

Osamwonyi and Tafamel (2010) noted that the obstacles to the SMEs performance in Nigeria businesses have made business owners look for an alternative source of infrastructure; which increases the cost of running the fledgling business. In the business incubation study, Chan and Lau (2005) indicated that infrastructure is in essence a very significant element to the firms residing in the incubator. Kumar and Ravindran (2012) also score a high point to infrastructure as an element of effective incubation programme.

Finally, the distinctiveness of government role in virtually all aspects of a national economy is consequent on the fact that government is always a pacesetter in any national activities. Government policy is a well-established element that wields a substantial sway on a range of activities. (e.g. Ashford, 1993; Asiedu, 2006; Guan, Xie, & Zhou, 2015; Ha & Kang, 2015; Yang, 2014). However, Ojo (2006) noted that Government policies and programmes regarding SMEs had been recognised to be inappropriate, inadequate or inconsistent, and this has since prevented the SMEs growth and development. Furthermore, (Onugu, 2005) also expressed that the SMEs sector in Nigeria has not generally been flourishing for the reason of poor execution of some government policies and policy inconsistencies.

In developing countries, evidence abounds that business incubation programme funding basically depends on government (Akcomak, 2009). Therefore, the effect of government policies still overrules its inconsistencies as well as lack of implementation for the reason that, it still sponsor and fund the scheme. On the contrary, a study has shown that government policy inconsistency does not have significant influence on the performance of small and medium manufacturing firms (Bagshaw, 2014). However, there is considerable evidence in incubator performance literature that opine that lack of government policy makes business incubation practice to be ineffective. The reason being that without government effort through policies, the other resources may not be in place.

In sum, CSF associated with government policy may impact on incubator performance in the course of gaining competitive advantage. Business incubation has helped in no small measure in fostering fledgling businesses through the offering of resources. In this study, an evaluation will be made of the role of government policy in the performance of an incubator initiative programme in Nigeria. This will be done in relation to a related inquiry into the critical success factors of the incubation programme in the particular Nigerian context.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### *3.1 Case Study*

Case study research has become more popular in scholarly works related to management. Dul and Hak (2008) defined a case study as "a study in which one case (single case study) or a small number of cases (comparative case study) are selected in their real-world context, and scores obtained from these cases are analysed in a qualitative manner." It is a technique prevalently applied in clinical research where every patient represents a unique case study. Its key goal is to collect all-encompassing, organised, and in-depth information about each case of interest (Patton, 2002). Case studies combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaire and observation (Eisenhardt, 1989). Accordingly, the evidence may be qualitative, quantitative or both. As this research strived to find out the challenges concerning SME development through the incubator, the case study method was appropriate.

Furthermore, Yin (2012) suggested that the case study approach be adopted in this kind of research because it is recognised as among the many ways of conducting social science investigation. Dana and Dana (2005) opined that some other methods are historical analysis, surveys, experiments, observation, and the analysis of archival documents. Yin (2009), postulate that each of this technique has its unique advantages, bearing in mind three conditions: (a) the kind of research question, (b) the control the researcher has over real behavioural activity, (c) the focus on present instead of historical event.

#### *3.2 Sample Composition*

The ten participants met the selection criteria and willingly agreed to participate in the study. The interviews were all conducted at a time and place convenient to the respondents. The longest interview lasted for 55 minutes while

the shortest interview lasted for 38 minutes. The average time for the interviews was one hour and three minutes. Table 4.1 below gives a depiction of the respondents' details. The youngest respondent was 38 years old, and the oldest was 53 years old. The average age of the respondents was 44.7.

Table 3.1: Participants demographics

No	Code	Gender	Position	Year of Experience	Qualification	Age
1.	IM1	Female	Incubator Manager	13	Ph.D.	48
2.	IM2	Male	Incubator Manager	8	Masters	43
3.	IM3	Male	Incubator Manager	10	Masters	44
4.	IM4	Female	Incubator Manager	7	Masters	43
5.	IM5	Male	Incubator Manager	5	Masters	37
6.	IT1	Male	Incubator Tenant	2	Vocational Training	42
7.	IT2	Male	Incubator Tenant	2	Diploma	49
8.	IT3	Female	Incubator Tenant	1	Vocational Training	38
9.	IT4	Male	Incubator Tenant	3	Vocational Training	39
10.	IT5	Male	Incubator Tenant	2	Diploma	36

### 3.2 Interview Analysis

This study's qualitative data was analysed employing inductive analysis as well as a particular method from the constant comparison technique were also utilised in performing the analysis (Yin, 2009) of the involvement of technology incubation managers and tenant business owners. Krathwohl (1998) posits that the constant comparative method encompasses the researcher in carrying out data analysis from the interview commencement. Yin (2012) added that initial data is coded to show the concept or dimension it represents, and the researcher connects concepts together into a theory, or explanation of the phenomenon studied. Qualitative data analyses entail comprehending the extent of making text and images meaningful in order to allow researcher to form responses to his research questions.

Creswell (2012) mentioned the six steps used in analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data. These steps are not always taken in sequence, but they represent preparing and organising the data for analysis; engaging in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it; using the codes to develop a more general picture of the data - descriptions and themes; representing the findings through narratives and visuals, making an interpretative meanings of the results and connecting the findings to the literature with the aim of validating the research findings. However, qualitative research is an iterative phase-like, meaning that you cycle back and forth between data collection and analysis by going back to your respondents to collect more information to fill in gaps in their stories as your analysis proceeds. Also it involves reading through the data several times and conducting an analysis each time. Each time you read your database you develop a deeper understanding about the information supplied by your respondents. Creswell (2012) indicated that several approaches are available to analysing qualitative data, although several guidelines exist for this process (see Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

### 3.3 Manual Analysis

Despite the fact that the utilization of computer software for different goals is in recent past exceptionally well known, scholars still have an alternative to make about whether to do data analysis manually or employ software (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990). The employment of manual qualitative data analysis implies that researchers read the data, mark it by hand, and partition into parts. Generally, text data analysis includes utilizing colour coding to check parts of the text or cutting and pasting text sentences onto cards (Creswell, 2012). Evidence has shown that many researchers are comfortable with the manual approach to qualitative data analysis (Ajagbe, 2014; Ajagbe & Ismail, 2014). After the researcher has arranged and transcribed the data and made a decision on whether to analyse the data manually. This study finally settled for manual data analysis in view of the reasons expressed by past authors which were relied upon as a justification for manual analysis (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990).

### 3.4 The Interview

For the reason that the data collected take the form of recorded interviews, hence it was only possible to analyse them in its transcribed form. Thus all recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. After data collection, the researcher was faced with a huge amount of data. For the sake of organising the data, the literature was further reviewed and the data was summarised as suggested by Yang (2008). The transcribed interviews data, were coded. The coding which loosely adopted the Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommendation, detached segments of data on the basis of responses to related questions. As the open ended questions probed during the interview procedure were generally alike for all respondents, answers were similar enough in many cases to draw comparisons based on the responses generated by the respondents. The research did not take a look at word level analysis, as one of the predominant assumptions of the study has been the acceptance of answers. The study assumed that participants answered in an honest and realistic fashion. Through the process of constantly comparing data as well as categorization, during and after the data collection period; themes of major concern emerged from the data. Themes build upon each other to create a better understanding of the challenges faced by technology incubation programme in Nigeria from the perspective of incubation managers and tenants.

Table 4.1 shows the taxonomy of the barriers of technology incubation programme in Nigeria as grounded in the interview transcript.

Table 4.1: Taxonomy of the Barriers of TBI in Nigeria

Research Question	Main Themes	Sub-Themes
How do the barriers to success of Technology Business Incubation affect its performance in Nigeria?	Inadequate Funding	Low entrepreneurship development
	Inadequate Infrastructure	Low job creation
	Inadequate Business Support	Programme failure
		Business collapse
		Inconsistent polices
	Inconsistent Government Policy	Production reduction
		Inadequate infrastructural capability from the incubator management

## 4. Effect of the barriers to Technology Incubation Programme in Nigeria

### 4.1 Discussion of Themes

#### a) Inconsistent government Policy

The archetypal idea of the technology business incubation programme in Nigeria was to cause the transformation of research and development (R&D) results into products and services in the Nigerian economy. This has since been disrupted due to the shortage of research amenities in Nigeria and discrepancies in the way government

executes its policies. There are many laudable government policies from different regimes however, the application and uniformity towards the implementation of the initiative have been the despair of national industrialisation. Government each time puts forward one policy document or the other from time to time with different nomenclature but with the same intents and purposes as well as diverse procedures. The consequence of this is that so many initiatives that have laudable plans to be thrown away just for its successor to be doing the same thing with a different name and with different workforce. This has not indeed assisted the country in accomplishing the anticipated success in all these programmes comprising SMEs generally and technology incubation to be specific, as a result of changes and inconsistencies in the workforce as well as different objectives and perspectives of the plan.

The qualitative result shows that government policy can make or mar business incubation programme in Nigeria. Therefore, government policy has high importance attached to it. In line with this, if government want to move a particular sector of the economy forward, what it needs to do, is just to roll out policy document to that effect. Its role in business incubation is outstanding. Thus the study on government policy is consistent with (Greene, 2012; Mason & Brown, 2011; Minniti, 2008).

Furthermore, as policies make available strategic direction for any given programme of the government, unsuitable policy direction has been the weak spot for the technology incubation programme in Nigeria; it plans a course for the tactical and operational delivery of the initiative. Wrong policy direction has been a major obstacle affecting the effective provision of the technology incubation programme in Nigeria. This is deep-rooted by the absence of a national plan on the technology incubation programme. There is little or no reference of the technology incubation programme on the National Development Plan even in the existing Vision 20-20-20.

For the reason that a visible insight of the origin and crux of the programme will decide the policy direction and the modus operandi; whereas, a poor understanding will constantly cause an incongruity and misunderstanding with its associated consequence on application. However, all these can only be achieved through clear policy direction and complete manifestation of the technology business incubation programme. It is indeed high time the Technology Business Incubation in Nigeria is understood, practiced and implemented in the right fashion for the benefit of the Nigerian Economy and this can only be achieved through a sound policy direction.

Government policy is a very important aspect of entrepreneurship development and as such, can determine the success or failure of entrepreneurship development generally and business incubation programme to be specific. However, the success still depends on which side of the divides government leans

### **Funding**

For the attainment of technology business incubation scheme, there should be a funding pattern by which the initiative will be constantly funded. The programme should be funded based on the policy document establishing the TI concept. The TBI funding stream should as a matter of urgency be multifaceted in operation. The Federal government that established the scheme should define the role played by each stakeholder in the scheme.

The basis for beginning technology incubation centres is to encourage the development of new businesses and greenhorn enterprises that have sufficient technology input and output. Therefore, it is necessitated to provide financial resources to the incubator in such a way as to make funding accessible to the entrepreneurs; unfortunately, incubators cannot on their own provide funds for the tenants. The reason is that the incubators are not making money on their own; they still depend on government subvention for their sustainability and as such cannot provide any financial assistance directly to the incubator tenants. This has made activities at the technology incubation centres very challenging to the point that the incubator management cannot render the rudimentary function put on the incubator. As the incubator cannot help the tenant firms directly, the incubator management usually attracts the other sources of funding for the tenants, for instance banks, venture capitalist, angel organization.

With regards to commercial banks, the entrepreneurs are discouraged by the stiff collateral imposed by banks which makes it difficult for them to be offered a loan facility. Concerning the venture capitalists, the TI programme lacks the venture capitalists that would ordinarily come in to help out; unfortunately, they seldom exist and if they

do exist, the venture capitalists would seldom invest in the newly-formed business enterprises. Also, angel organisations that are private high net-worth individuals would be skeptical about taking up some equity investment in the newly formed businesses.

Funding is almost like the backbone of any organisation, be it social organisation or business organisation. The impact of financial in any of these organisations is overwhelming. Finance play a very big role in entrepreneurship generally and TBI in particular. The reason being that without funds, the much needed facilities would not be available.

### **Business Support**

The construct BS, the management assistance services used by the incubator management to provide the needs of the incubatees were investigated. By so doing, the study participants were requested to share their view points of how the barriers to the challenges incubation programme face affect the performance of the programme in Nigeria. The question investigates the attached to business support in contributing to the overall incubation performance. All the respondents acknowledged that BS is so important to the overall performance of the programme, while its absence or lack will portend doom for the programme. Majority of the respondents in the tenant firm category affirmed that the business incubator in which they operate are not really given them the much needed management assistance.

It has been noted that the reason associated with small business failure is because of the inadequate training or mentoring. Most small businesses at the beginning of their entrepreneurial life, more often than not lack the basic knowledge of business development, and other business support. Against this backdrop, business incubators usually make available all these cited business support services. It is assumed that business support is an important element for the attainment for small firms. The bottom line of business enterprises approaching the incubator is to acquire a number of those resources that enterprises cannot come up with. Consequently the coming of new start-ups to the incubators is to have access to these resources. Prior scholarly works have admitted the rationale for business support by incubators owing to the fact that a most of fledgling businesses do not have the required resources or critical capabilities for business success (Scarborough & Zimmerer, 2000; Shepherd & Shanley, 1998)

Similarly Business support or management assistance service is deemed an essential part of the incubation programme without which the fledgling businesses will not be nurtured. Without the nurturing of greenhorn businesses, there would not be the establishment of business incubators for the reason that the small inexperienced firms are the direct beneficiary of the programme.

### **Infrastructure**

In the business incubation programme, the role of infrastructure is very significant due to the fact that most of the entrepreneurs who later came to the incubators did so for motive of the facilities which they cannot afford in their former place of work. Adequate infrastructure stemming from the sizable incubation unit, available ready-made alternative source of electric power vis-à-vis transformers as well as generators, water reticulation incubation unit, telecom facilities as well as road network within the incubation unit. On the converse, dearth of these infrastructures obviously impinges on the performance of the incubatees themselves who obviously rely on these facilities to be able to nurture their small businesses which are actually kept in incubation centre to be housed in an environment where they source infrastructure at low or no cost. When these infrastructures are not available, the incubatees will resort to the same little facilities they came to source in the first place. In a situation whereby there is inadequate or absence of infrastructures, incubation programme is often rendered redundant; thus entrepreneurship development will be affected. In view of this, a centre manager reiterated the need for adequate infrastructure across the incubation centres in the country.

## **5. Discussion on Findings**

The findings of this evaluative qualitative study gives high importance to the role of government policy in harmonizing other elements of business incubation programme. As noted in the literature review that government is always in the lead of all entrepreneurship development and support. Despite the salient role of government



policy, respondents still take a swipe at the inconsistency of government policies. But overall, the importance of government policy cannot be overemphasised. Furthermore, consistent with the view that government policy is an important intangible resource that can enhance entrepreneurship by making a favourable environment for assisting the entrepreneurs in the incubators. It also strengthens the influence of business support and incubator performance relationship. In particular, there was a stronger relationship between business support and incubator performance with high government policy as opposed to low government policy. It can be concluded that favourable government policy is an essential condition for the performance of TBI programme. An entrepreneurial focused government policy will cause the sustenance and thriving of business incubation performance. This research suggests that government policy acted as a booster between business support and incubator performance, such that where there is high government policy or favourable government policy, there is likelihood for the performance of the incubator to increase. In other words, this finding suggests that when there is entrepreneurial friendly policy, there is likelihood of entrepreneurship through business incubator to get superior performance. The results provide support for the view that government policy moderates the relationship between business support and incubator performance. These findings are not surprising because they are consistent with Mohd Shariff, Peou and Ali. (2010). In addition, the study found government policy to moderate the relationship between financial resources and infrastructure respectively and incubator performance.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study has shown that favourable government policy is an essential condition for the performance of Technology Business Incubation programme in Nigeria. Both the literature review and the empirical findings have shown how important government policy means to the development and performance of incubation programme.

On the basis of the findings of the empirical study, the researcher made several recommendations to guide business incubator managers and incubatees as well as government to enhance the creation of incubation programmes in Nigeria. The results of this study show that government policy influences the operations and practice of technology incubation programme. Government should as a matter of urgency develop a user friendly framework that will ease the difficulties incubators usually encounter in the course of providing resources to the incubatees. Government should begin to work towards developing incubation strategies that will contribute to the improvement of the programme, which will in turn will positively influence the performance of incubators.

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