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The Effectiveness of Training Interventions in the Enhancement of Youth Entrepreneurial Skills and Knowledge

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is an ongoing issue that affects individuals domestically and globally, such a problem has been an issue for several years, which indicates that youth entrepreneurship as an initiative is imperative. Schumpeter's theory of innovation serves as a theoretical foundation for the study. To investigate the effectiveness of training interventions in the enhancement of King Cetshwayo District youth entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, the study adopted a survey interview. 18 participants from the Zululand Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ZCCI), Youth Business Advisory Centre (YBAC), and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) were interviewed. To analyse the collected data, NVIVO version 12 and Microsoft Excel were used. The findings revealed that the entrepreneurial capacity development programmes were effective in enhancing youth skills and knowledge. The study also uncovered that the effectiveness of the programmes enhanced business skills and acumen and improved youth business outcomes and success. The study recommends, among other things, the establishment of a tracking tool or system, since agencies reported that they do not have a tool used to track progress on business ventures of previously engaged young entrepreneurs. The practical implication of this study is that it can serve as a guideline for local government on the allocation of resources for youth capacity-building initiatives.

Keywords: Training Interventions, Entrepreneurial Skills, Capacity-Building, Youth, Schumpeter Theory of Innovation.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is an ongoing issue that affects individuals domestically and globally, and such a problem has been an issue for several years, which indicates that youth entrepreneurship as an initiative is imperative (Xaba et al., 2025; Adanlawo and Nkomo, 2023). Shepherd, Parida, and Wincent (2020) supported the empowerment of entrepreneurship as a means of alleviating poverty. Ashraf et al. (2019) make a strong argument that an important aspect of reducing poverty is part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal Plan [SDG], which aims to target unemployment and poverty. According to the National Development Plan (2022), the youth deserve economic opportunities that aim to eliminate poverty; hence, the training interventions are the focal point.

Owolabi et al. (2024) aver that societies encounter problems, such as inadequate access to social and financial resources, a lack of essential skills, a lack of support systems, and a lack of job experience, which result in social problems such as crime and insecurity due to youth unemployment (Musara and Nieuwenhuizen, 2020). To solve these problems, Adanlawo and Nkomo (2023) argue that there is a need to enforce youth entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Burger

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and Fourie (2019) argue that to combat poverty and inequality, social entrepreneurship can help create jobs by starting new businesses and growing existing ones. This can boost economic growth in local communities and regions and give unemployed people the opportunity to get training as well as find work.

Research conducted by Shepherd, Parida, and Wincent (2020) support the notion of empowerment of entrepreneurship as a means of alleviating poverty. Other scholars focused on the importance of understanding how entrepreneurship functions to fight against poverty and have better development in the economy (Lee and Rodríguez-Pose, 2021). However, obstacles such as unfair government laws, a shortage of capital, and inadequate infrastructure make it difficult for the implementation of entrepreneurship (Mokwena, 2021). Youth unemployment is a massive issue; it poses a challenge to the social, economic, and political stability of many growing nations. (Corney et al., 2024). Hence, the study aims to investigate the effectiveness of training interventions in the enhancement of youth entrepreneurial skills and knowledge.

The Concept of Youth Empowerment

The term "youth empowerment" refers to the attitudes, structures, and common practices that enable young people to develop critical political and economic awareness (Chaka and Adanlawo, 2024). This includes the authority to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others. Empowerment is a political concept that opposes exclusionary or divisive practices and views. At the same time, it promotes individual well-being and connects people with their immediate and broader sociopolitical environment. (Corney et al., 2022; Kayumova, McGuire, and Cardello, 2019). The concept of empowerment involves enabling individuals to take control of their lives and decision-making. This is done through creative and critical thinking, leading to active participation in the community (Jhangiani and Tarry, 2022). When people are isolated and not integrated into society, it can negatively impact their self-confidence and level of functioning, reducing their independence.

Empowerment requires fair power relations, which means that youth powerlessness is often a result of discriminatory social values and policies. To empower young people, it is important to provide support mechanisms and impartial opportunities that foster critical and creative abilities, leading to positive change in the community (Rahindra and Wisnujati, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Youth development is closely linked to youth empowerment. It involves providing young people with access to programmes and opportunities that can help them advance in their lives and communities. This includes access to funding and progressive services, as exclusion from these resources can be disempowering. By ensuring that young people have equal opportunities, we can create a more empowered and just society.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Pathak, Sharma, and Patnaik (2022) point out that entrepreneurship and innovation have been popular research topics for decades, and there is a positive relationship between them. They complement each other and help organizations flourish in the long run. The synergy between entrepreneurship and innovation is crucial for organizational success and survival in the dynamic and ever-changing business environment. Entrepreneurship promotes innovation, and innovation promotes entrepreneurship. These processes are not limited to new ventures' initial stages, but they are holistic and dynamic processes in various entrepreneurial and innovative organizations (Chaka and Adanlawo, 2023; Caputo and Ayoko, 2021). In the past 20 years, researchers have shown interest in various entrepreneurship and innovation-related topics.

However, there is hardly any publications that are referred to as bibliometric or review of existing literature on entrepreneurship and innovation (Zhang, Zhu, and Guan, 2016). Several studies have provided bibliometric analysis of various topics related to entrepreneurship and innovation, such as social entrepreneurship, international entrepreneurship, rural entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, small business and entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship and family firm research (Maphela, 2023; Kakouris and Georgiadis, 2016). Other studies have provided bibliometric analysis of innovation-related topics such as innovation forecasting, product innovation research, open innovation, national system of innovation, service innovation research, the evolution of innovation systems research, inter-organizational network and innovation (Pato and Teixeira, 2016). A systematic literature review of social innovation and social entrepreneurship was also provided.

The European Commission's 2003 Green Paper on Entrepreneurship in Europe emphasized the need of cultivating skills like creativity and innovation in order to support job creation and economic expansion. Competencies including self-study, adaptability, motivation to ensure quality, understanding of various cultures and traditions, environmental knowledge, the capacity to put information into practice, and project management are also included in the white paper (Adanlawo and Chaka, 2025; Ripollés, 2016). A thorough analysis of educational methods and policies targeted at fostering entrepreneurial abilities was released in 2010 by the Spanish Directorate-General for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (Gherghina et al., 2020). Despite this, there aren't any high-profile publications regarding the community's efforts to support entrepreneurship education. According to academics, institutions ought to be at the forefront of knowledge transfer to society as well as the growth of students' initiative and entrepreneurial abilities (Mncwango et al., 2024).

The Relationship Between Entrepreneurial Interventions and Youth Unemployment

There is high correlation between entrepreneurship culture and economic growth (Nyeleti and Maphela, 2024). Though, some research does not view entrepreneurship's contribution to economic growth as significant. Xaba et al. (2025) aver that interventions could offer the education needed for the nation to develop more entrepreneurs. Although future entrepreneurs are fostered by EE and training, little is known about the mechanism by which this intervention affects the desired results (Mncwango et al., 2024; Ndofirepi, 2020). Through the Youth Enterprise Development Strategy, the South African government sought to develop a strategy aimed at promoting and accelerating the development and growth of entrepreneurship and youth-owned and youth-managed enterprises. Furthermore, the strategy for youth enterprise development promotes the integration of youth enterprise development into already-existing core programmes. To achieve significant impact, it also suggests creating innovative support programmes to encourage the growth of young entrepreneurship and youth-owned businesses.. Even though young people make up 41.2% of South Africa's population, the percentage of young people who engage in entrepreneurship is still incredibly low, at 6%.

Theoretical Foundation

Schumpeter Theory of Innovation

Like the early Schumpeterian tradition, it is difficult to distinguish between innovation and entrepreneurial conduct; both are forms of behaviour. Being inventive is a must for being entrepreneurial. A substantial body of research has already been done on the behaviour of firms at the level of developing nations, focusing on their capacities, business strategies, economic

and inventive performance, and other aspects of their character (Owolabi et al., 2024). According to Schumpeterian tradition, an entrepreneur combines new elements to produce new goods, markets, materials, and organizational structures (Schumpeter, 1934). According to (), innovations are now essential to corporate success and competition. In addition to more conventional elements like expenses, technology products, and procedures. The Schumpeter theory of innovation leads business owners, families, and individuals to discover new business ventures as they undergo the journey of entrepreneurial discovery.

In his theory, Schumpeter emphasises the significance of the financial system. A system that permits large profits and has a financial structure capable of funding ideas is required for economic development and growth. Adanlawo (2017) avers that it is not a must for someone with innovative ideas to be wealthy. It requires a structure that gives innovators in the field of finance and capital access. According to Schumpeter, the main issue facing developing nations is not a lack of ideas but rather a lack of resources and funding.

This theory is relevant in the sense that the youth have been trained, and such training intervention has been completed; individuals become entrepreneurs, which automatically makes them innovators. In line with this theory, youth entrepreneurs are trained and equipped with the skills to innovate new products and ventures that can curb and address unemployment. The youth, through training interventions, become inventors of products and services that make life easier while contributing to the economic growth of their communities and ultimately their regions and the nation.

Methodology

Using a qualitative methodology, this study sought to identify the types of entrepreneurship capacity development interventions available to unemployed youth in the King Cetshwayo district. To better comprehend human experience, qualitative research enables the researcher to pose questions that are difficult to answer using statistics (Nkomo and Adanlawo, 2025). The population of this study is King Cetshwayo District youth between the ages of 18 and 35 that engaged in an entrepreneurial intervention (EI) as part of their training programme between the years 2019 and 2023. The researcher interviewed a total number of 18 participants from three different institutions across the district.

These institutions are the Youth Business Advisory Centre (NYDA) located in Eshowe, the Zululand Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ZCCI) located in Richard's Bay, and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) located in Richard's Bay. These institutions are a few of the many institutions that provide entrepreneurial interventions to the youth in the district. In these institutions, the researcher specifically targets the manager of each institution. Secondly, interviews targeted youth officers/officials from these institutions, as they are responsible for the strategic establishment of unemployed youth in communities at which the intervention was aimed. The third batch of participants were young entrepreneurs who have established themselves as entrepreneurs and seized available opportunities in different business industries in South Africa. The content analysis method was used to analyse the data gathered. According to Mncwango et al. (2024), content analysis is a technique for analysing qualitative data that looks for trends in research findings. NVIVO version 12 and Microsoft Excel were used to analyse the collected data.

Findings

To successfully achieve this objective, the following questions were posed to participants, and

their responses are as follows:

How many entrepreneurs visit the agency for assistance with business in a year?

Participant 1	<i>around about 90-500 per year</i>
Participant 2	<i>60</i>
Participant 3	<i>Between the range of 60 to 300</i>

It is noted that the agencies that provide capacity interventions aimed at youth entrepreneurship are indeed approached by the youth needing assistance and as a result, they are able to assist between 60 and 300 young entrepreneurs per year per agency.

How many have been able to start businesses after completion of building their business profile?

Participant 1	<i>well, the organization doesn't have a tool to track thatthe honours lie with that individual to come back and share their success. The organization only conduct Improvement Assessments on clients that were already operational for instance a business which was assisted with a business plan, signage, facilitation of access to finance, marketing etc would be followed a up after 6 to 12 months to check progress or impact made by the intervention</i>
Participant 2	<i>30 operating business which are small enterprises</i>
Participant 3	<i>It difficult to give the exact estimation on everyone however roughly close to 500</i>

The findings indicate that the agencies find it difficult to give the exact estimation or number of people who were successful in running and managing their business after they have received the necessary intervention aimed at assisting them with their business ventures. The only figure that was determined by one of the agencies is 30 SMMEs operating, which gives an idea that in the individuals that trained or received an intervention, only 30 managed to successfully open and operate their businesses.

Do you think the opportunities that are provided within the organisation are adequate for the people to embark on entrepreneurship?

Participant 1	Yes
Participant 2	<i>Yes, there is a system that is created within the agency that is designed to assist youth with starting their own business and create business profile</i>
Participant 3	Yes

All the three agencies indicated that all the interventions they provide are adequate and sufficient for assisting an individual to run and operate their own businesses after they have been trained or engaged in a certain intervention or programmes. These programmes further provide the individuals with the opportunity to create a sound and cemented business profile, which greatly assists in securing additional business deals for their businesses.

Do you think that by attending the training programme have assist you with the entrepreneurship venture?

Participant 1	<i>I did not attend to any programmes that teach about entrepreneurship but instead I realised that I had to start giving out teachings based on the knowledge I have gained in the industry, this is to make it easier for anymore who comes before me and wants to venture into this world.</i>
Participant 2	<i>Yes</i>
Participant 3	<i>Attending can be transformative experience, helping develop essential soft skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, leadership and teamwork as well as adaptability and resilience. These skills cannot only improve entrepreneur abilities but also enhance the growth and well-being of an individual to overcome basic challenges. Despite the initial challenges, the training programme can equip to overcome funding constraints, market competition, regulatory hurdles and self- doubt</i>
Participant 4	<i>It has a greater potential to assist youth in developing their skills</i>
Participant 5	<i>Absolutely, training has equipped me with critical knowledge, marketing skills and the tools necessary for running a successful business.</i>
Participant 6	<i>Yes</i>
Participant 7	<i>Yes</i>
Participant 8	<i>Training programmes are designed to assist youth entrepreneurship in their business venture and by attending them they are likely to be assisted as they will be exposed to business education and training in which they are taught how businesses are ran and how best they can run them.</i>
Participant 9	<i>N/A</i>

The study's participants reported that the interventions were extremely beneficial to their business ventures. The training and interventions gave them a transformative experience that assisted them in skills development and critical thinking and taught them about leadership and teamwork. It also assisted them in overcoming self-doubt, market competition, and funding constraints through the critical knowledge and information received in these interventions.

Do you think entrepreneurship studies are important?

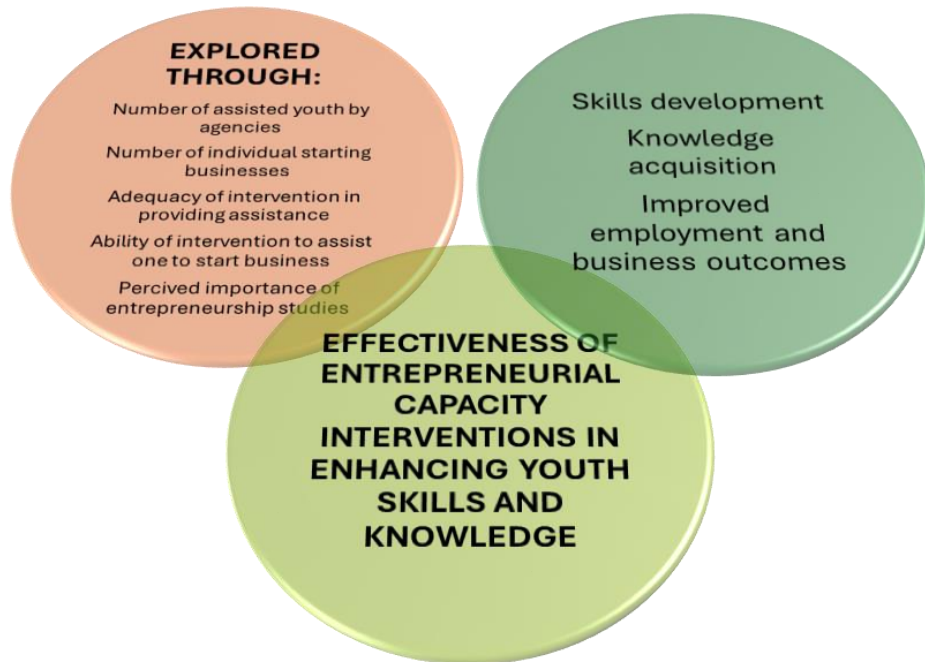
Participant 1	<i>Yes, entrepreneurship studies are very crucial as they have benefited such as: creativity, developing problem solving and critical thinking, encourage self-reliance and independence, enhances adaptability, provide real world, practical knowledge, inspires social entrepreneurship and community impact.</i>
Participant 2	<i>Yes</i>
Participant 3	<i>Entrepreneurship studies are crucial for fostering innovation, job creation and economic growth. They provide essential skills knowledge, and mindset for starting and managing successful business. Entrepreneurship education enhances problem solving skills.</i>

Participant 4	<i>Yes, as they equip you with information essential for the journey you are about to start and to mentally prepare you for the sacrifice to make towards your achievements for your goals</i>
Participant 5	<i>Yes, they're crucial and provide a foundation of knowledge, critical thinking and practical skills that prepare aspiring entrepreneurs for the real-world challenge.</i>
Participant 6	<i>Yes</i>
Participant 7	<i>Yes, Entrepreneurship studies importance cannot be overstated because they are extremely important. No entrepreneur in the world has been too successful manage a business without some form of entrepreneurship education or training. These studies are extremely important as they are a guiding tool to business success. They provide information on many different approaches that can be employed</i>
Participant 8	<i>Very much, they are very important since they result in business success and efficient distribution of economies</i>
Participant 9	<i>Yes, they are important as entrepreneurs can get a lot of information through them. They however need to be 80% practical and 20% theoretical so that entrepreneurs can get a full-on hands experience when it comes to business management</i>

It was reported by the participants that entrepreneurship trainings are extremely important and play a huge role in enhancing self-efficacy as they encourage self-reliance and enhance adaptability. They are regarded as having the ability to provide practical knowledge for dealing with problems, equipped with essential information that forms the foundational knowledge for business managers. The trainings equip aspiring entrepreneurs with skills for dealing with real-world challenges and further act as a tool for business success by giving practical information and full-on hands-on experience in dealing with businesses.

Collation of findings

Figure: 1. Effectiveness of entrepreneurial capacity development



Effectiveness of the interventions in enhancing youth skills and knowledge is mainly concerned with studying whether the interventions yielded fruitful and intended results after implementation or not. In line with this quest, this study used five questions in the interview with the aim of strategically obtaining information with regards to the effectiveness of the intervention from the participants. The responses result to the following:

The number of youth entrepreneurs assisted solely by the agencies implementing the capacity development intervention programmes

The number of individuals who were able to start operational business after being in the intervention programme.

The adequacy of the programmes in assisting a young entrepreneur in their entrepreneurial journey

The ability of the programme to assist an individual in starting an entrepreneurship journey

The perceived importance of entrepreneurship studies

The study revealed that the entrepreneurial capacity development programmes were effective in enhancing youth skills and knowledge. This was noted in responses given by the participants as

they indicated that the different programmes every participant was shown to play a huge role in the following aspects:

Enhancement of Skills

Entrepreneurial capacity development programmes focused on practical and soft skills crucial for business success:

Technical Skills: The capacity to establish and operate sustainable businesses was improved by training in digital tools, market analysis, financial management, and business planning.

Programmes that promoted creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills helped participants recognise and seize market possibilities.

These treatments placed a strong emphasis on communication, teamwork, and leadership skills all of which are essential for managing teams and interacting with stakeholders.

Adaptability: they acquired the skills necessary to overcome obstacles, adjust to changing market conditions, and grasp new chances.

Knowledge Acquisition

Improved understanding of the business environment- incumbents are educated about markets dynamics and differences, frameworks regulating different business industries and customer behaviour which results in an improved understanding of the business environment

Development of an entrepreneurial mindset- participants in the intervention programme gain more knowledge about risk-taking, resilience and the overall journey of embarking on a business venture. This kind of knowledge fosters long-term commitment

Resource management and networking- through the interventions, entrepreneurs often get educated about strategic ways to leverage networks, resources and partnerships for the growth of their businesses.

Improved Employment and Business Outcomes

As a result of these interventions, entrepreneurs exposed to the programmes can start their ventures, creating sound employment opportunities for other in their communities

Businesses that are founded by youth entrepreneurs who have been trained have a higher of surviving through all business hurdles due to the deep foundation knowledge and skills gained in these interventions.

The entrepreneurs are trained on effective and efficient management of resources which reduces dependency on external support from government and organisation. They gained improved financial independence.

Additional Findings

Post entrepreneurial capacity development interventions actions taken by agencies providing such interventions

After delivering entrepreneurial capacity development interventions, agencies often take follow-up actions to ensure the success and sustainability of the businesses started by participants. These actions aim to provide continued support, monitor progress, and address challenges. These include:

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	Assessing Impact: Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions on entrepreneurial outcomes.
	Feedback Collection: Soliciting input from participants to identify gaps and improve future programmes.
Continuous mentorships and coaching	Follow-up Mentorship: Providing ongoing advice from mentors to help participants navigate challenges.
	Peer-to-Peer Support: Organizing networking events and forums for participants to share experiences and collaborate.
	Specialised Training: Offering advanced workshops tailored to the evolving needs of the entrepreneurs.
Financial support and facilitation	Access to Funding: Assisting participants in applying for grants, loans, or investment opportunities.
	Business Subsidies: Providing subsidies for essential resources like equipment, raw materials, or marketing.
	Financial Advisory Services: Guiding entrepreneurs on managing finances and scaling operations.
Market linkages and networking	Connecting with Buyers: Facilitating partnerships with suppliers, distributors, and clients
	Trade Fairs and Exhibitions: Sponsoring participation in industry events to showcase products and services.
	Export Assistance: Supporting entrepreneurs in accessing international markets.
Incubation and acceleration programmes	Business Incubators: Offering office space, resources, and advisory services to early-stage businesses.
	Accelerator Programs: Providing intensive support for growth-stage businesses to scale quickly.
	Technology Access: Offering tools and platforms to foster innovation
Policy advocacy and ecosystem building	Regulatory Support: Advocating policies that reduce barriers to business growth, such as simplified taxation or registration processes.
	Collaboration with Stakeholders: Partnering with governments, NGOs, and private sectors to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem.
	Creating Entrepreneurial Hubs: Establishing regional centers that provide continuous support to young entrepreneurs.
Recognition and incentives	Awards and Recognition: Highlighting successful participants to motivate others and showcase programme impact.
	Incentive Programmes: Offering rewards for innovation, sustainability, or social impact.
Knowledge sharing and best practices	Case Studies: Documenting and sharing success stories to inspire others.
	Alumni Networks: Establishing networks for past participants to stay engaged and support one another.
	Research and Development: Using participant feedback to refine interventions and develop new models.

Crisis and risk management support	Business Recovery Programs: Helping during economic downturns or unforeseen challenges. Resilience Training: Educating entrepreneurs on risk management and adapting to market changes.
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Table 2: Post Entrepreneurial Capacity Development Intervention Action Taken by Agencies

Discussions and Conclusions

The research highlights the varied effectiveness of entrepreneurship capacity development interventions in equipping unemployed youth with skills and knowledge. Participants generally appreciated the interventions, particularly training sessions and mentorship programmes, for providing practical skills in business registration, marketing, and financial management. However, as noted in the study, these interventions often encompass training programmes, mentorship, and financial assistance aimed at fostering self-efficacy and entrepreneurial capabilities. Suwandana and Saputra (2024) emphasise that self-efficacy significantly shapes individual decision-making and perseverance in entrepreneurial ventures, reinforcing the practical value of such interventions.

A participant from the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) stated, “The training gave me confidence to start my business, but finding financial support and guidance afterward was a major challenge.” In addition, younger participants aged 18–24 expressed more optimism about training outcomes compared to older participants (25–34), who reported frustration over systemic barriers such as limited funding opportunities. The study discovered that capacity development intervention programmes were successful in their endeavours, as agencies reported that they assist approximately 500+ young entrepreneurs per year through various programmes. These findings are consistent with the findings of (Onwujekwe et al., 2020; DeCorby-Watson et al., 2018).

The foundation provides funding, mentorship, business training, and advocacy support. This initiative underscores the significant impact of comprehensive support programmes for youth entrepreneurship. Although it was difficult to provide an exact number of these young people who were able to successfully start and manage their businesses following the intervention due to a lack of a tracking tool or system within the agencies. The effectiveness of the programmes was also cemented by young entrepreneurs who stated that their entry into the intervention programmes enhanced their business skills and acumen, and they acquired business knowledge and insights, leading to them having improved business outcomes and success.

This study recommends the followings:

Increase awareness campaigns and rethink outreach strategies. As mentioned in the above recommendations, that the youth in the outskirts of the cities are unaware of the existence of these programmes designed to assist them; it is therefore recommended that the agencies, both private and public, rethink and restructure their outreach strategies so that awareness campaigns can reach even the outskirts of the cities where the youth is strongly disadvantaged.

Establishment of a tracking tool or system—since agencies reported that they do not have a tool used to track progress on business ventures of previously engaged young entrepreneurs. It is recommended by the study that agencies work on establishing such a system so they can be aware of the progress of the individuals they have trained and their businesses as well. This tracking tool could include features such as regular progress updates, mentorship opportunities,

and access to resources that can further support these young entrepreneurs. By implementing such a system, agencies will not only enhance their support for these individuals but also gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their training programmes.

Regular updates on the powerful influence of social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram are recommended. Social media is a strong tool of engagement, and youth are actively using such services since they are user-friendly. Engagement through social media can foster community building among young entrepreneurs, allowing them to share experiences, seek advice, and collaborate on projects. Additionally, agencies can leverage these platforms to promote success stories and provide ongoing educational content that resonates with their audience. One of the participants shed light on this recommendation, noting that urban youth are constantly on their smartphones, and such a recommendation is both effective and cost-efficient.

The practical implication of this study is that it can serve as a guideline for local government on the allocation of resources for youth capacity-building initiatives.

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