

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP ORIENTATION: PATHWAYS TO
EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN 21ST CENTURY AMONG
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY, LOKOJA**

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on employment generation among undergraduate students in Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State. The effect of entrepreneurial orientation on employment generation remains underexplored. Given the country's high unemployment rates, particularly among university graduates, there is a pressing need to investigate how entrepreneurial orientation can serve as a tool for alleviating this issue. The specific objectives are to: determine the effect of innovativeness on youth employment among undergraduate students in Federal University, Lokoja; evaluate the effect of proactiveness on youth unemployment among undergraduate students in Federal University, Lokoja; and

investigate the level of risk taking on youth unemployment among undergraduate students in Federal University, Lokoja. Survey research design was adopted for this study. The study used all the undergraduate students of Federal University, Lokoja. As of June 2024, the Federal University Lokoja (FUL) has over 17,000 students (FUL Official Website). For this study, a cluster sampling and simple random sampling were adopted. The Krejcie and Morgan formula is used for the study to determine the sample size of 220. The findings of the study showed that there is a strong relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking) and youth employment. The R value (0.9609) suggests a very high correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable. The R-squared value ($0.921 < 0.005$) implies that 92.1% of the variation in youth employment can be explained by the combined effect of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. The study concluded that youth unemployment in Nigeria is endemic and one way to get over it is through entrepreneurial orientation. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered: the government through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should create a supportive and enabling environment that will improve SMEs participation in entrepreneurship development in Kogi State. To improve the relationship between perceived desirability and youth self-employment, there is need for the government and community leaders to improve the perception of youths and their desire. This is because, perceived desirability can impact how young individuals perceive the risks associated with entrepreneurship.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship orientation, proactiveness, innovativeness, risk-taking, employment generation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Youth unemployment is a critical issue in Nigeria, posing significant socio-economic and political challenges. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the unemployment rate among individuals aged 15 to 34 years stood at an alarming 42.5% in 2021 (NBS, 2021). The increasing number of unemployed graduates has heightened concerns about the nation's capacity to harness its youthful population for economic development. Entrepreneurship has been identified as a viable solution to tackle youth unemployment, as it fosters self-reliance, innovation, and job creation (Adejumo, 2017). Entrepreneurial orientation, a critical component of entrepreneurship, is particularly relevant in this context.

The link between entrepreneurial orientation and youth employment is well-established in academic literature. For instance, researchers have demonstrated that individuals with high entrepreneurial orientation are more likely to identify and exploit business opportunities, thereby contributing to economic growth and employment creation (Covin & Slevin, 1989; Rauch et al., 2009). In Nigeria, however, the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on youth employment remains underexplored. Given the country's high unemployment rates, particularly among university graduates, there is a pressing need to investigate how entrepreneurial orientation can serve as a tool for alleviating this issue.

The Nigerian government has implemented several initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and reduce youth unemployment. Programs such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) and the Youth Entrepreneurship Support (YES) program aim to equip young people with entrepreneurial skills and provide access to funding opportunities.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of such programs in cultivating entrepreneurial orientation and improving youth employment outcomes has been mixed (Akanbi, 2013). This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how entrepreneurial orientation influences employment outcomes among undergraduates.

Despite the claims made about their contributions to the Nigerian economy, youth employments have not had the expected vital and dynamic impact on the country's economic growth and development because the environment in which they operate in Nigeria is changing, and technological advancements, the scarcity of resources, and a lack of an entrepreneurial mindset have threatened the stability and predictability that have long characterised its market and performance (Wassim, 2018). EO has thus been recognised as a solution to the problems faced by businesses that want to achieve performance, and this has gained widespread acceptance. It is one of the instruments to improve the performance of SMEs and EO. Companies with an entrepreneurial mindset may react to problems in a competitive and dynamic environment efficiently and appropriately (Neneh, 2020). Additionally, one of the most frequently employed concepts in strategy literature for improving firms is EO.

Despite the growing emphasis on entrepreneurship as a solution to youth unemployment in Nigeria, the rate of joblessness among graduates continues to rise. At the Federal University, Lokoja, many undergraduate students face significant challenges in securing employment after graduation, largely due to a lack of practical entrepreneurial skills and exposure. While entrepreneurship education has been introduced in the institution, its impact on fostering entrepreneurial orientation and subsequently reducing unemployment remains unclear.

Several factors contribute to this problem. First, the curriculum often focuses more on theoretical knowledge than practical entrepreneurial activities, leaving students ill-prepared to establish or manage their ventures. Second, socio-cultural attitudes, such as the fear of business failure and a preference for white-collar jobs, hinder students from pursuing entrepreneurial careers. Third, limited access to funding and business support services further discourages students from translating their entrepreneurial intentions into actionable ventures.

These issues raise important questions: To what extent does entrepreneurial orientation influence the employability of undergraduate students at the Federal University, Lokoja? How effective are the existing entrepreneurship education programs in equipping students with the necessary skills and mindset? This study therefore is set out to answer these questions by examining the effect of Entrepreneurial Orientation on youth employment among undergraduate students in Federal University, Lokoja

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.3 Entrepreneurial Orientation

The concept of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) has emerged as an important concept in the survival of SME's over the past two decades (Hung & Chiange, 2018). According to Pett & Wolff (2019) "entrepreneurial orientation is a set of decision-making styles, processes, practices, rules, and norms according to which a firm makes decisions to enhance its innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking propensity". It has also been argued that "entrepreneurial orientation is the willingness of SME's to innovate, search for risks, take self-directed actions, and be more proactive and aggressive than competitors towards new market place opportunities (Ilani, 2019). Therefore, SME's are adequately guided to reposition for greater productivity and drive the process of survival. That explains why Idah & Mahmood (2021) concluded that EO is a management strategy used by SME's to engage in creativity, technological leadership, taking bold actions and acting in anticipation of surviving in the market.

Alarape (2018) viewed EO as a behavioural construct at the firm level that is closely linked to strategic management and explains the processes, practises, and decision activities that lead to new entry in the quest of utilising opportunities in the market or modifying its environment is a three-dimensional construct of

- (1) innovativeness,
- (2) risk-taking, and
- (3) proactiveness.

2. Entrepreneurial Innovation

Entrepreneurial innovation has become a cornerstone of economic development and competitiveness in the 21st century. It refers to the process by which entrepreneurs employ novel ideas, methods, or products to create value and gain competitive advantage in the marketplace. At its core, entrepreneurial innovation involves identifying unmet needs, leveraging creativity and technology, and transforming ideas into viable business ventures that disrupt traditional practices. In today's fast-paced global economy, innovation is not merely an option but a necessity for survival, sustainability, and growth (Audretsch & Link, 2019).

3. Entrepreneurial Proactiveness

Entrepreneurial proactiveness is a vital component of entrepreneurial orientation that encapsulates the forward-looking, opportunity-seeking behavior of entrepreneurs who take initiative to anticipate and act on future market needs. It reflects an entrepreneur's readiness to exploit emerging trends, innovate ahead of competitors, and shape the external environment rather than merely responding to it. In a rapidly changing business landscape marked by technological

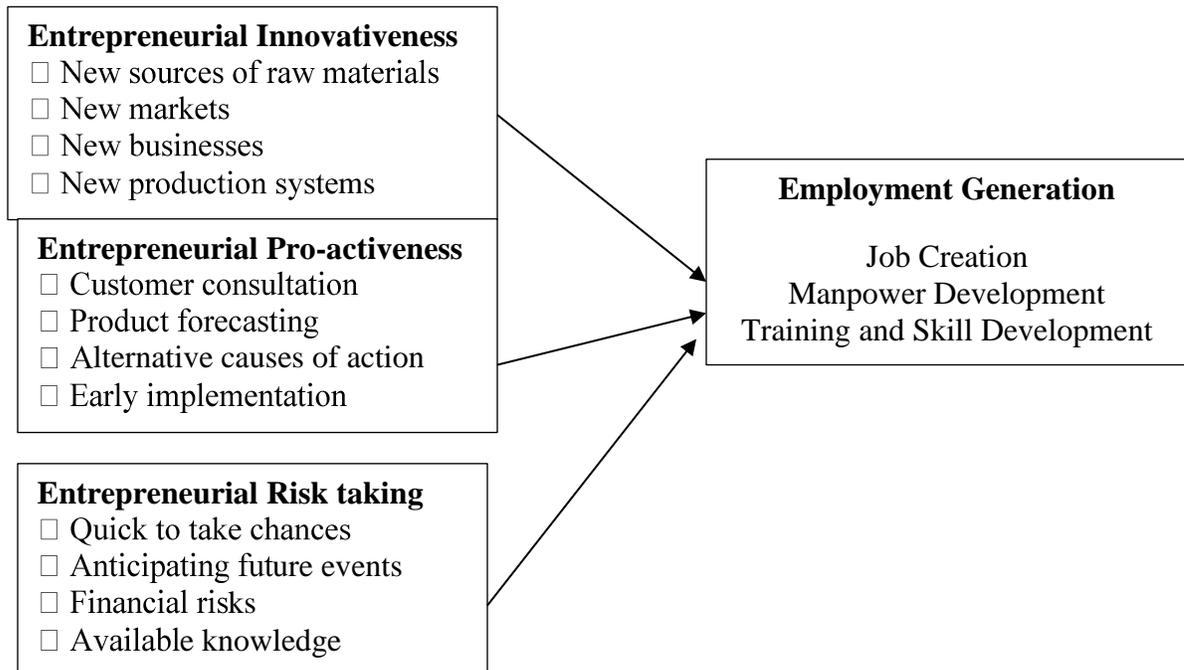
disruptions and consumer unpredictability, proactiveness is a key differentiator between thriving ventures and those that stagnate (Wales et al., 2020).

4. Entrepreneurial Risk taking

Entrepreneurial risk-taking is one of the fundamental dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation, representing an entrepreneur's willingness to commit resources to opportunities with uncertain outcomes. It reflects the degree to which individuals or organizations are prepared to take bold actions that involve significant chances of failure, all in the pursuit of innovation, growth, and competitive advantage. In today's volatile business environment, risk-taking is not only inherent to entrepreneurship but is also a driving force behind breakthrough innovations and economic transformation (Zhao, Teng, & Wu, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1:



Author's Conceptualization, (2025)

Theoretical Review

The Theory of Entrepreneurship Innovation

The theory of Entrepreneurship Innovation was developed by Joseph Schumpeter in 1949. According to Schumpeter, entrepreneurs are the innovative, imaginative, and forward-thinking members of a community who contribute to the growth of an economy. According to Schumpeter, innovation happens when a businessperson establishes a new market, creates a new product or

manufacturing system, finds a fresh supply of raw materials, or establishes a new organisation within the sector. According to the innovation theory, entrepreneurship is the process of combining resources in a novel way, such as by introducing new goods, new processes for manufacturing them, finding new sources for inputs and raw materials, and establishing new standards in the market or an industry that upsets the equilibrium of the economic system.

Entrepreneurship is the fusing of resources in novel ways (such as the introduction of new products with higher quality, with new methods of production, breakthroughs in new markets, conquest of new sources of supply of raw materials, and reorganisation of a new sector) that disturb the market equilibrium in economic systems. Despite the topic's enormous popularity since its inception, it is challenging to define entrepreneurship due to the various definitions that have been employed by numerous authors. Despite the numerous definitions of entrepreneurship used by other authors, this researcher concurs that entrepreneurship is fundamentally about creating money.

The Resource based theory

Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991) are RBV proponents in their work on company resources and sustainable competitive advantage. According to the notion, in order to maintain a competitive advantage over other companies, a corporate organisation must possess valuable, uncommon, unique, and non-substitutable resources. The resource-based view, developed under the theory of the firm, defines a business as the accumulation of strategically significant resources in which everything is taken into account. It is possible to determine the advantages of long-term competitive strength by looking at choices, the leader, culture, values, random events, and other factors.

The study is anchored on the resource-based theory since the analysis of an entrepreneur's values in terms of initiative, risk-taking, and autonomy has emerged as one of the most significant estimation tools in the past ten years for enterprise performance, competitive strength, and innovation, resource-based views are frequently linked to entrepreneurial orientation performance and growth.

Empirical Review

Adiele (2023) examined how SME corporate entrepreneurship affected the ability of SMEs to complete tasks. The study used the sample size determination table created by Krejcie and Morgan to select 169 out of a possible 300 SMEs in Rivers State to participate in our survey. In total, 169 surveys were sent out to SMEs, but only 147 were returned. The hypotheses were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient in SPSS 25.0, and the characteristics of the respondents were analyzed using a frequency distribution. Corporate entrepreneurship was found to be a significant contributor to productivity gains. The report's authors argue that corporate entrepreneurship is beneficial to SMEs in Rivers State. The findings of this investigation suggest that SMEs can benefit from increasing their innovativeness by developing unique processes and products and by entering new markets or developing their presence in existing ones. At this phase, effective strategic transformation comes from reengineering the company as a whole and from exploiting business opportunities through corporate venture.

Anish (2022) examined the impact of cognitive flexibility in creating entrepreneurship intention. The study focused on entrepreneurial alertness, attitude towards risk-taking, attitude towards autonomy and entrepreneurial self-efficacy are impacted by cognitive flexibility. b) To find out the mediating variable that link cognitive flexibility and entrepreneurship intention. Based on previous research we summarize the variables that mediate the connection between cognitive flexibility and entrepreneurship intention and established that the relationship between cognitive flexibility and entrepreneurship intention is mediated via entrepreneurial alertness, attitude towards risk-taking, attitude towards autonomy, entrepreneurial self-efficacy This study provides a strong platform for expanding the current understanding of entrepreneurship intention-related literature of why few people are more predisposed to an entrepreneurial career based on the cognitive flexibility viewpoint.

Oghenewegba (2022) examined the impact of Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) in the Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (PSME) in Nigeria: A study of SME's in Asaba, Delta State. The study is carried out within Asaba metropolis, Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria.

The Entrepreneurial Orientation was measured with Proactiveness (PRO), Innovations (INVT), Risk Taking Propensity (RTP) and Competitive Aggressiveness (CA) in relation to the PSME in Nigeria. A total of 100 respondents, and total 100 questionnaires administered but 87 were returned and properly filled while 13 were not returned and analyzed with descriptive statistics, correlation matrix and multiple regression analysis with the aid of SPSS version 23 and it was discovered that PRO, INVT, RTP and CA has significant relationship with PSME in Nigeria. Findings obtained from the analysis, revealed that show that PRO, INVT, RTP and CA has significant relationship with PSME in Nigeria. The study also concluded that there is significant relationship between EO and PSME in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommended that small and medium scale enterprises should embrace the EO dimensions of PRO, INVT, RTP and CA to increase business performance and SMEs operators should adopt autonomy by encouraging employees to be autonomous and be free to take initiative for the best interest of the organization and use periodic appraisal to monitor them based on the result which will increase firm performance.

Ifeanyi (2021) examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on performance of selected small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Southeast Nigeria. The problems that led to this study include, inadequate access to finance, poor infrastructure, inconsistency with government policy, poor support (business development work), inadequate sales, too many taxes and obsolete technologies leading to massive failures. It has not been found that the epileptic growth of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria is not only due to the problems but also from the entrepreneurial orientation. The survey research method was employed in this study and the study relied on secondary and primary data. The population of this study was drawn from SMEs in the five states in the Southeast

Nigeria. The study was done using three hundred and sixty-six small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Complete enumeration was adopted.

Simple regression analysis was used to analysis the hypotheses. The study revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between proactiveness, innovativeness and risk taking on performance of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. The study concluded that entrepreneurial-oriented firms tend to lead the industry with innovations, performing things in a better approach to satisfy customers and give the firm a better leverage. The study recommends that SMEs owners and managers should be committed to process and radical innovation in their dealings so as to increase and expand their customer base.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, Survey research design was adopted to examine the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on youth employment among undergraduate students in Federal university,

Lokoja. A survey simply consists of collection of data or information about a large number of the people by interviewing or contracting a representative sample.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will engage all the undergraduate students of Federal University, Lokoja. As of June 2024, the Federal University Lokoja (FUL) has over 17,000 students (FUL Official Website). For this study, a cluster sampling and simple random sampling will be adopted. The Krejcie and Morgan formula is used for the study:

$$s = \frac{X^2NP(1-P)}{[d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)]}$$

Where:

s = required sample size

X² = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841 for 95% confidence level)

N = the population size

P = the population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05)

The responses from the questionnaire was also subjected to test to prove the hypotheses formulated.

The sample size for the study therefore is 220

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.3 Test of Hypotheses

In testing the hypotheses for the study, the statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) tool was used.

- Ho1: There is no significant effect of innovativeness on youth employment
- Ho2: There is no significant effect of proactiveness on youth employment
- Ho3: There is no significant level of risk taking on youth employment
- Ho1: There is no significant effect of innovativeness on youth employment

Table 4.2.17: MODEL SUMMARY

| Model | R | R square | Adjusted square | Standardized error of the estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | .960 ⁹ | .921 | .919 | .307 |

a. Predictor: (Constant), Innovativeness, Proactiveness, Risk taking

Source: SPSS Result, 2025

Interpretation

The model summary in Table 4.2.17 indicates a strong relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking) and youth employment. The R value (0.9609) suggests a very high correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable. The R-squared value (0.921) implies that 92.1% of the variation in youth employment can be explained by the combined effect of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. The adjusted R-squared (0.919), which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, remains high, confirming the model's robustness. The standardized error of the estimate (0.307) is relatively low, indicating that the model's predictions are precise. This suggests that entrepreneurial orientation significantly influences youth employment among undergraduate students at Federal University, Lokoja.

R square – which denotes co-efficient of determination and measure the goodness of model $y = 0.601 + 0.466 y_1 + 0.101 y_2 + 0.417 y_3$ is 0.921 which shows that the model is fit for future prediction with known level of adoption of the dependent variables.

$$Y = 0.601 + 0.466 y_1 + 0.101 y_2 + 0.417 y_3$$

ANOVA TABLE

| Model | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Significance |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|--------------|
| Regression | 127.776 | 3 | 42.592 | 452.973 | .0006 |
| Residence | 11.001 | 217 | .094 | | |
| Total | 138.777 | 220 | | | |

1. Dependent Variable: Youth Employment
2. Predictors: Predictor: (Constant), Innovativeness, Proactiveness, Risk taking

Source: SPSS Result, 2025

The f. statistics value of 452.973 and the significant level of 000 in Anova table is less than the alpha level of 0.05% this means that the result is good and the model is fit for the entrepreneurship orientation and youth employment generation

THE COEFFICIENT TABLE

| Model | Unstandardized co-efficient | Standardized co-efficient error | Standardized co-efficient beta | t | Sig. |
|----------------|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Constant | .601 | .131 | | 4.595 | .000 |
| Innovativeness | .466 | .066 | .560 | 7.086 | .000 |
| Proactiveness | .101 | .079 | .113 | 1.261 | .203 |
| Risk taking | .417 | .094 | .310 | 4.411 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Youth Employment

Source: SPSS Result, 2025.

Interpretation of the co-efficient table

From the co-efficient table above, there are three (3) independent variables that is, Innovativeness, Proactiveness and Risk taking while the dependent variable here is youth employment.

Discussion of findings

The regression analysis results provide insights into the effect of entrepreneurial orientation—innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking—on youth employment among undergraduate students at Federal University, Lokoja. The interpretation of findings is based on the hypotheses tested.

Effect of Innovativeness on Youth Employment

The regression coefficient for innovativeness ($\beta = 0.560$, $t = 7.086$, $p = 0.000$) is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, indicating a strong positive effect of innovativeness on youth employment. This suggests that students who demonstrate creativity and introduce new ideas are more likely to secure employment or create job opportunities. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_01), which states that "there is no significant effect of innovativeness on youth employment," is rejected. This finding aligns with prior studies that emphasize the role of innovation in entrepreneurship as a key driver of employment opportunities.

Effect of Proactiveness on Youth Employment

The regression result for proactiveness ($\beta = 0.113$, $t = 1.261$, $p = 0.203$) is not statistically significant at $p > 0.05$, indicating that proactiveness does not have a significant effect on youth

employment. This suggests that taking early initiatives, anticipating opportunities, and acting in advance may not directly influence employment outcomes among students in the study area. Hence, the null hypothesis (Ho2), which states that "there is no significant effect of proactiveness on youth employment," is accepted. This result may imply that while proactiveness is essential in business, other external factors, such as access to capital and market conditions, might influence employment outcomes more significantly.

Effect of Risk-Taking on Youth Employment

The regression coefficient for risk-taking ($\beta = 0.310$, $t = 4.411$, $p = 0.000$) is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, indicating that risk-taking has a significant positive effect on youth employment. This implies that students who are willing to take calculated risks, such as starting a business or investing in entrepreneurial ventures, are more likely to secure employment or become self-employed. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho3), which states that "there is no significant level of risk-taking on youth employment," is rejected. This finding aligns with entrepreneurship theories that emphasize the importance of risk-taking in business success and job creation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

That youth unemployment in Nigeria is endemic and one way to get over it is through entrepreneurial orientation. Its concomitant consequences on the populace cannot be relegated to the background as well hence the waning of agricultural practices, lingering poverty, hunger, social vices and insecurity at a very alarming rate have so characterized the Nigerian society. This is considering the fact that about 70% of the entire Nigeria's 150 million populace are Youths whose about 71% are unemployed majorly graduates who are from 20 years and above, affecting adversely the workforce utility of the country. It is a pity that these youths and graduate who are qualified, willing and able to work cannot find a job and as such earns nothing. They cannot handle any family or societal responsibility which mopes at them every second. Such individuals are frustrated hence a time bond. They are vulnerable and can be used by unscrupulous elements in the society to pervert all sorts of crime and mayhem, which they would outrightly abhor should they were productively engaged or gainfully employed; A succor that entrepreneurship brings to both the individuals and the society at large.

As obvious as it is that entrepreneurship is the magic wand that can change the story overtime, yet it has not been duly explored and many scholars, commentators and observers have argued that lack of capital is what drives very many people who are unemployed and wants to be self-reliant and self-employed hence inadequate access to loan schemes couple with the issue of collateral and high interest rate on loan from financial institutions, and others arguing that the problem is lack of managerial prowess and the zeal and will to take risks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The government through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should create a supportive and enabling environment that will improve SMEs participation in entrepreneurship development in Kogi State.

2. To improve the relationship between perceived desirability and youth self-employment, there is need for the government and community leaders to improve the perception of youths and their desire. This is because, perceived desirability can impact how young individuals perceive the risks associated with entrepreneurship.
3. Since it was discovered that young individuals with a higher propensity to act are more likely to take initiative, identify opportunities, and translate their ideas into concrete actions, there is need to invest in the youths to create more opportunities.

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