

Abstract

The importance of enterprise growth around the globe has been well recognized and documented by many scholars. For instance, studies have reported that the potential contribution of enterprise growth to employment and income has been generally recognized. Entrepreneurs are widely recognized as the prime movers of economic development; the people who translate ideas into action. However the start- up failure rates are still very high and the desired growth levels are yet to be achieved and consequently some scholars and policy makers have turned to business incubators and particularly university based business incubators as a possible boost to enterprise growth through nurturing start-ups. This study sought to investigate the role of university based business incubators on enterprise growth in Kenya. It was conducted using a descriptive research design. The six active university based business incubators in Kenya were investigated with a specific focus on all the fifty nine graduated incubatees from the said incubators. Census technique was used given that the total number of all graduated incubatees (59) could be adequately studied. The study used a semi structured questionnaire as its main data collection tool. A combination of tools was used to analyze the data because whereas some aspects of the study are qualitative others are of a quantitative nature. Quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 software through descriptive statistics; measures of central tendency (mean and mode), measures of dispersion (standard deviation and variance) and inferential statistics (correlation and multiple regression analysis). Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. Data was presented primarily in frequency tables, charts and graphs. The study established that the selection criteria strategy used by an incubator, the managerial skills impartation strategy, entrepreneur skills impartation strategy and social networks skills impartation strategy have a significant positive correlation to enterprise growth. Incubator environment was however found not to have a significant effect on enterprise growth. It was established that all the five variables while combined had a significant positive effect on enterprise growth. The study recommends among others, that the government through the Ministry of Education and management of individual universities set up more university based business incubators given the positive potential effect they have on enterprise growth. University based business incubators should continuously enrich their selection criteria strategy in order to attract and incubate only the very potential incubatees. Government policy makers need to re-look into the education curricula to ensure it structured in such a way that it actually impacts entrepreneurial skills into the learners.

University based business incubators need to organize more platforms such as seminars, forums and workshops so as to create more networking opportunities for their incubatees and industry players. Further studies could be conducted on business incubators based in other non- university learning and research institutions such as technical and vocational training institutes.