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Overcoming the Security Challenges in North-eastern Nigeria: Entrepreneurial Orientation among University Students

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Abstract

The north-east part of Nigeria is confronted with many serious issues ranging from poverty, illiteracy and economic disparity, leading to insecurity in the region and the country as a whole, which government alone cannot adequately handle. This irritating insecurity situation requires an alternative solution through a societal-based intervention mechanism to complement the government's effort in tackling these sustained societal issues. Therefore, entrepreneurship activities among youths including university graduates are seen as very essential to accomplishing socioeconomic goals globally. This paper examines the effect of entrepreneurship orientation (innovation, risk-taking, autonomy, and pro-activeness) among university undergraduate students in north-eastern, Nigeria. The study adopts survey design with a sample of 341 final-year undergraduate students from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi, Modibbo Adama University Yola and University of Maiduguri North-eastern Nigeria. Multiple Regression and Pearson Correlations were used to analyse the data collected. The findings revealed that all the dimensions of entrepreneurship orientation (innovation, risk-taking, autonomy, and pro-activeness) have a significant effect on security challenges. The study recommends for nurturing and sustaining entrepreneurship among graduates. This study concludes that no meaningful development would be achieved without first dealing with the unemployment situation. Therefore, government should provide a conducive environment where entrepreneurial activities can thrive.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial orientation, university, students, security challenges, northeast, Nigeria

Introduction

Many countries of the world especially the developing ones are confronted with rising social vices such as poverty, hunger, economic disparity, poor health care, illiteracy, poor infrastructural facilities, and unemployment. Many safety and security issues arose because of these numerous vices; many of which are outside the purview of the government to address. An insurgency that has severely affected Northern Nigeria, especially the North-east, is being linked to some of the socioeconomic problems that have plagued the area for a long time (Salaudeen & Gombi, 2019). The activities of Boko-haram which is rooted from Northeast has caused destruction to lives and properties in many places in Nigeria. Ironically, violent groups and other elements were able to attract young people, who make up a large section of the population, in order to further their own self-serving political or economic agendas.

This trend can hardly be addressed without concerted efforts to re-orient and economically engage the youth and other vulnerable members of society.

Therefore, entrepreneurial orientation includes all procedures, methods, and decision-making processes that support individuals or groups in seeking out and seizing business possibilities. Proactivity, innovativeness, competitive aggression, autonomy, and risk-taking tendencies are the cornerstones of an entrepreneurial mindset. Entrepreneurial orientation is crucial for youths, especially university graduates, since it facilitates risk-taking and encourages individuals to venture into creative firms, instead of escalating tensions and increasing national insecurity.

Because of their willingness to take risks, innovativeness, and pro-activeness, Mutiso (2018) claims that entrepreneurial orientation is a significant factor in determining entrepreneurial intention, and that sets entrepreneurs apart from non-entrepreneurs. Additionally, entrepreneurs change the market and give the economy new job opportunities. According to Dabo (2018), without entrepreneurs, there wouldn't be any fresh innovations or inventive imitations in the marketplace. This makes youths including university graduates get involved in different economic activities through creative thinking. Thereby making the society secured as individual's thinking of new ideas of enterprises leads to national progress.

The pervasive twin evils of violence and criminality have exacerbated Nigeria's political and economic environment. A few people and groups have turned to violence against the Nigerian state as a result of the appalling inability of successive administrations in the country to deal with and resolve issues of poverty, unemployment, and unequal income distribution among ethnic nations. According to Fems, et al (2018), criminal activities in Nigeria have led to low oil revenue for the government and minimal participation from both domestic and foreign investors to promote economic development. Citizens' lives and property are now less secure, and the GDP is growing at a slower rate because of the prevailing circumstances.

Government has been doing all it can to overcome the security challenges in this part of the country through the military, reconciliation, amnesty, and so on, yet there are still persistent security challenges in the region. If the insecurity in the northeast is not adequately addressed it will continue threatening the security situation in the region. Thereby causing instability, crime, poverty and unemployment among others to region and country as a whole which will undermine the socioeconomic development of the region and Nigeria in particular. In light of this, this study aims to determine how entrepreneurial orientation specifically, innovativeness, risk-taking, autonomy, and pro-activeness can affect the security challenges in north-eastern Nigeria. Hence, to the best of my knowledge there is no literature on the effect of entrepreneurial orientation among university students on security challenges in north-eastern Nigeria. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of entrepreneurial orientation among university students on security challenges in north-eastern Nigeria to fill in the existing gap.

Literature Review

Concept Insecurity

It is important to first examine security in order to fully understand the concept of insecurity. Achumba, et al (2013) define security as follows: protection from crime (feeling safe), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), safety and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance or knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved, and protected in one's community or backyard and by people around). Canci and Odukoya (2016) define insecurity as a condition of worry or anxiety resulting from a perceived or actual lack of protection. It alludes to little or non-existent safety from harm.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship, as defined by Drucker (1998) is the process of creating new organisations, especially enterprises, taking chances and making money by using innovative ideas. It also entails the development of brand-new, non-existent values. Drucker (1998) asserts that an entrepreneur's commitment to invention, rather than their personalities, is what unites them. An entrepreneur needs expertise, imagination, and knowledge, but also hard work, attention and purpose for innovation to occur. According to Vieira et al (2019) entrepreneurship is the act of creating a business or businesses while building and scaling it to generate a profit.

Entrepreneurship is defined as investing in small- to medium-sized businesses that are operated by a small number of people and carry a profit-making risk (Osewa, 2020). Additionally, according to Adeiza, et al (2017), entrepreneurship can be seen as a self-sufficiency and employment programme that can elevate the country's economy to greater heights and lift it out of poverty. According to the definitions provided above, this study defines entrepreneurship as an individual's capacity or group to generate novel ideas and convert them into profitable undertaking, with all the risks involved.

Entrepreneurship orientation

Fatoki and Chidoga (2011) state that Miller's writings from 1983, which defined entrepreneurial orientation as a firm's propensity to innovate in the product and market, take on daring ventures and to be the first to come up with proactive innovations while outpacing competitors.

Three characteristics comprised Miller's construct: risk-taking, pro-activeness and innovativeness. Kusa et al (2021) contributed by proposing that an entrepreneur's motivations for making entrepreneurial decisions are related to their entrepreneurial orientation. It is a method of making decisions based on a person's propensity for risk.

Larsen (2022) made a similar statement, arguing that the term "entrepreneurial orientation" refers to a strategic mind-set that includes the procedures, methods, and activities related to decision-making that support the search and utilisation of

opportunities. The tendency to innovate, the readiness to take chances, the proactive search of opportunities, and the aggressiveness with which one will confront rivals in order to gain independence are all considered characteristics of an entrepreneurial orientation.

Dimension of Entrepreneurship orientation

Innovation

Innovation is thought to be the primary force behind the growth and financial success of firms (Rajapathirana, & Hui, 2018). SMEs, in contrast to large corporations, are more likely to engage in innovative behaviours in order to create new business opportunities and new corporate procedures and arrangements in order to formulate new business resolutions (Del Vecchio, 2018).

Risk taking

The propensity to take bold risks, such as venturing into uncharted territory, investing large sums of money in unstable businesses, or taking on significant debt, is known as risk-taking (Jaiyeola, 2021). The literature indicates that, despite the lack of confirmation in the results, studies on entrepreneurship have led to interpretations such as the predisposition of entrepreneurs to take risks relative to others.

Autonomy

The ability of an individual or group of individuals to form and carry out a profitable business enterprise is referred to as autonomy (Al-Mamary and Alshallaqi, 2022). If a person or group of people inside an organisation is free to create and carry out an entrepreneurial initiative, that person or group is said to be autonomous. Autonomy is a situation when people are given the freedom necessary to realise a novel idea in an organisation with high autonomy, free from the constraints of corporate bureaucracy (Sapiro, 2024).

According to Lee and Peterson (2000) the independent spirit and flexibility required to launch new businesses drives entrepreneurial activity. Autonomy is the trigger. For the autonomy component of EO to be effective, entrepreneurs need to work in environments that support their independence, self-governance, and opportunity-seeking in the face of social restrictions (Lee and Peterson, 2000). Autonomy, according to Lumpkin and Dess (1996) is the freedom given to individuals or groups of people to use their creativity in coming up with ideas and being able to see them through to completion.

Pro-activeness

Being proactive can be defined as acting with the expectation of advantages and being ready for eventualities rather than waiting to act following an incident.

Therefore, passiveness, as opposed to pro-activeness, characterises the lack of responsiveness shown by the inability to seize opportunities, or, to put it another way, the inability to lead the market without being reactive. Pro-activeness is defined as

forcing necessary changes to be made to the surroundings, whereas reactivity is defined as the propensity to adjust by reacting to a rival's activities (Abadi, et al., 2024).

Entrepreneurship Orientation and Security Challenges

Human security includes the preservation of life and property, which is necessary for improving people's quality of life, as well as the defence of human rights and the provision of necessities for survival, which is the path to self-actualization. However, the fierce competition for jobs in Nigeria's workplace due to a dearth of chances necessitates ongoing unrest among the Nigerian youths. Studies have revealed for more than 20 years that the nation's unemployment crisis has become the norm (Bello, & Fagbemi, 2023; Osuji, 2021). In order for youths to operate autonomously and successfully as entrepreneurs in their varied professions, they should/will be exposed to the numerous entrepreneurial development programmes that are available.

The state of unemployment is a sign of a persistent national security issue. Uchechukwu, et al (2023) states that there is a need to re-evaluate the perception that unemployment poses the biggest threat to national security, if not the most significant one. It is necessary to go elsewhere and take advantage of business opportunities in the connection between the threat to national security and unemployment. If anything, unemployed citizens pose a threat to national security since they can either commit violent crimes or be used as tools to do them. As a result, entrepreneurship development has been seen as a means of creating jobs, and the fundamental component of entrepreneurship is the capacity to imagine and steer a new economic endeavour (Dodd, 2023).

He continued by arguing that in order to foster an entrepreneurial culture and empower young people in all societies, it is necessary to encourage them to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This is because the development of entrepreneurship is acknowledged as a catalyst for economic growth, creating jobs that allow people to take control of their destinies (Ebong, 2022). In their study, Eze-Michael (2020) investigated how a business education programme could reduce youth restiveness and promote sustainable development in the Niger Delta. They discovered that empowering young people with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills with business opportunities could effectively reduce crime and youth restiveness.

Theoretical underpinning of the study

The theoretical basis of the study is the empowerment theory. This theory was originally utilised by Zimmerman (1995) and it gained popularity in 2000. Later, the empowerment theory was refined by Sazama and Young (2006) and Reischl et al (2011) in an attempt to make it more anchored in reality. According to Zimmerman (2000), the theory basically holds that the growth of youth empowerment and entrepreneurship is primarily dependent on a series of actions that support young people in pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours, assist them in improving their decision-

making abilities, and establish the conditions and opportunities necessary for them to acquire and improve on their skills.

According to the theory, getting young people involved in meaningful, pro-social, self-managed community-based activities fosters the critical skills and self-assurance that will support their increased independence, productivity, and well-being (Reischl et al., 2011). The empowerment theory is the theoretical foundation for this study because it has important consequences for the study. According to Ledford, et al (2013), the theory suggests that the design and execution of empowerment programmes related to entrepreneurship development can improve youth development, boost their entrepreneurial abilities and assets, and motivate them to use the knowledge and skills they have gained to become constructive change agents in their communities and the country at large. The theory is related to the framework of this study because, if youth including university graduates are empowered through entrepreneurship will reduce the level of unemployment invariably poverty will decrease and eventually improves on the security situation in the north-eastern Nigeria.

1.1 Conceptual framework

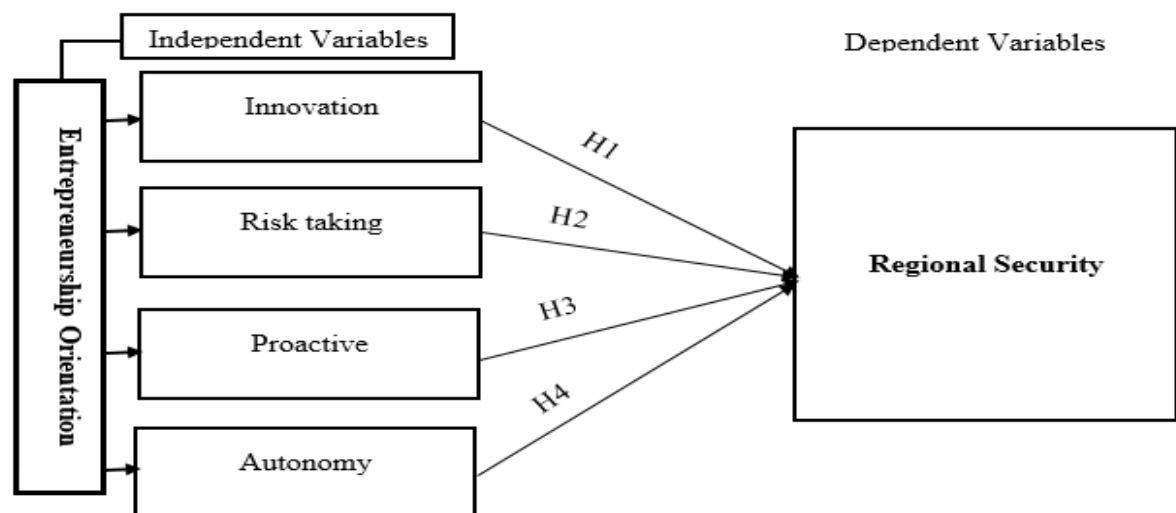


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework for the study

Hypotheses:

- H1:** There is a significant relationship between innovation and regional security
- H2:** There is a significant relationship between risk taking and regional security
- H3:** There is a significant relationship between pro-activeness and regional security
- H4:** There is a significant relationship between autonomy and regional security

Empirical Studies on the Effect of Entrepreneurship Orientation on Security Challenges

Many studies have been conducted on the effects of entrepreneurship orientation on security challenges due to the role entrepreneurship orientation plays on security challenges. For instance, Dabo (2018) conducted a study on entrepreneurship orientation: a panacea for ethno-religious conflicts, insecurity and national

development in Nigeria focusing on Jos metropolitan and its environment. The study adopted an empirical research design with a questionnaire as an instrument for sourcing the data, also chi-square was used in analysing the data. The findings revealed a significant relationship between entrepreneurship orientation and ethno-religious conflicts, insecurity and national development.

Also, Ogunleye et al (2015) researched the effect of entrepreneurship development on the level of insecurity in Nigeria adopting a structured questionnaire to collect data from one hundred and twenty-five respondents through purposive sampling. Also, regression and correlation were used to analyse the data collected. The findings from the study revealed that entrepreneurship development has a significant effect on the level of insecurity, it further revealed entrepreneurship development programmes and provision of model on how entrepreneurship development programmes and entrepreneurship opportunities could be effectively and efficiently utilised can produce better security.

In a study conducted by Okechukwu and Nwekwo (2020) on youths' entrepreneurship development as a panacea for overcoming security challenges and unemployment in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to analyse the data collected. The findings revealed that youth entrepreneurial development has a significant effect on security challenges.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study was survey research. The reason for choosing this research design was because the sampled elements and the variables that are under study are simply observed as they are without controlling or manipulating them.

Population

The population for the study was 3,024 final-year undergraduate students from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Modibbo Adama University, Yola and University of Maiduguri all in North-eastern Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling

The sample for the study was 341 final year undergraduate students. The sample size was determined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample size. The sampling technique adopted for the study was stratified random sampling.

Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) formula for sample size
$$\frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{e^2 (N-1) + X^2 P (1-P)}$$

Where N = 3024

$X^2 = 3.841$

P = 0.5

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{3.841 \times 3024 \times 0.5 (1 - 0.5)}{(3024 - 1) + 3.841 \times 0.5 (1 - 0.5)}$$

$$n = \frac{5705.170}{7.653525}$$

$$n = 341$$

Research instrument

The instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire which was adopted from previous study. The questionnaire was designed based on five points Likert scale 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. It consists of two sections. Section one on the demographic profile of the respondents and section two on the variables of the study which was also sub-divided into two parts. Part A, on the dependent variable regional security with 5 items e.g. ‘those involved in criminal activities were due to joblessness’, ‘failure of government to create jobs and to curb poverty among youth can cause unrest’ adapted from Krause and Williams (2002).

While, part B, on the independent variables, innovation with 5 items e.g. ‘I want to be successful’. ‘I like to improve my status and prestige’. Which was adopted from Koh (1996). Risk-taking with 5 items e.g. ‘I like to take a venture which is risky’. ‘Risk does not affect my choice of becoming an entrepreneur’ adopted from Kolvereid and Isaksen, (2006), autonomy with 5 items e.g. ‘I feel that I am my own boss and do not have to double-check all of my decisions with someone else’, ‘I have the freedom to decide what I do in my business’, adapted from Kuratko et al (2014), and finally, pro-activeness with 5 items e.g. ‘I always try to take the initiative in every situation’, ‘I stand out among my competitors for the detection of opportunities adapted from (Hughes and Morgan , 2007).

Data analysis techniques

Data collected for the study was analysed using multiple linear regression and Pearson correlation with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Table 4.1 highlights the respondent’s demography. It informs the user of research findings about the respondent’s characteristics based on gender, age, marital status, university, faculty, parents involved in business and siblings involved in business.

Table 4.1 Respondent's Demography

Demography	Frequency	Percentage
Gender: Male	256	72.9
Female	95	27.1
Total	351	100.0
Age: Less than 22 years	159	45.3
22 - 26 years	163	46.4
27 and above	29	8.3
years		
Total	351	100.0
Marital Status: Single	252	71.8
Married	80	22.8
Others	19	5.4
Total	351	100.0
University: ATBU	88	39.3
MAU	125	25.1
UNIMAID	138	35.6
Total	351	100.0
Faculty: Agriculture	54	15.4
Engineering	109	31.1
Mgt. Science	188	53.6
Parent in Business: Only one	50	14.2
Both of them	99	28.2
None of them	202	57.5
Total	351	100.0
Sibling Business: Brother(s)	63	17.9
Sister(s)	89	25.4
None in business	199	56.7
Total	351	100.0

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, (2025) via SPSS

Correlation Analysis

Table 4.2 indicates the relationship between the variables of the study. The results indicate that variables correlate with each other strongly.

Table 4.2 Pearson Correlations

	INN	RT	AUT	ProAc	SEC
	1	.669**	-.741**	.551**	.668*
INN		1	-.633**	.758**	.664*
RT			1	.551**	.735*
AUT				1	.641*
ProA					1
c					
SEC					

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, (2025) via SPSS

Table 4.2 shows entrepreneurship orientation dimension variable with the highest correlation of 0.735 is Autonomy. This signifies that there is correlation between autonomy and all the variables in the study. Also, the entrepreneurship dimension variables of Innovation, Risk taking, and Pro-activeness showed a correlation with values of 0.668, 0.664, and 0.641 respectively. This means that all the dimension of entrepreneurship orientation considered in the study has a significant correlation with each other.

Model of the Study

The multiple linear regression model used in this study showed mathematically thus:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{INN} + \beta_2 \text{RT} + \beta_3 \text{AUT} + \beta_4 \text{ProAc} + \mu_i \dots \dots \dots \text{Eq (1)}$$

Where: Y = Security is the state of security challenges (DV), INN = Innovation (IV), RT = Risk taking (IV), AUT = Autonomy (IV), and ProAc = Pro-activeness (IV)

Coefficient of Determination

Table 3 shows the results of the coefficient of determination which highlighted the contributions of the independent variable (innovation, risk taking, autonomy, and pro-activeness) on the dependent variable security challenges.

Table3 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.799 ^a	.638	.634	.75338

a. Predictors: (Constant), ProAc, AUT, INN, RT

b. Dependent Variable: SEC

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2025) via SPSS

Table 4.3 shows the variables score an Adj. R² of 0.634 indicating 63%. However, this 63% stand as the contribution of independent variables on the dependent variable. This indicates that there is other 37% unexplained variables which were not considered in this study yet they also contributed to the dependent variable.

ANOVA

The model was also tested via Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and the findings showed in Table 4.4

Table 4.4 ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	346.837	4	86.709	152.771	.000 ^b
Residual	196.381	346	.568		
Total	543.218	350			

a. Dependent Variable: SEC

b. Predictors: (Constant), ProAc, AUT, INN, RT

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, (2025) via SPSS

Table 4.4 indicates the goodness-of-fit, fit the model well using ANOVA, as the F- value of the predictor was observed to be 152.771 and was significant at 0.000 making the model fit.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was done to determine the significant relationship between the independent variables (innovation, risk taking, autonomy, and pro-activeness) on the dependent variable (security challenges). As indicated in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Regression Co-efficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	2.725	.339		8.039	.000	2.058	3.392
INN	.160	.058	.143	2.750	.006	.045	.274
1 RT	.139	.064	.122	2.156	.032	.012	.265
AUT	-.390	.047	.421	8.363	.000	-.482	-.298
ProAc	.275	.058	.237	4.743	.000	.161	.389

a. Dependent Variable: SEC

Source: Authors Field Survey (2025) via SPSS

Table 4.5 showed the results of hypotheses tested in the study where stated. The findings indicate that there is significant relationship between innovation and security challenges in the north-eastern, Nigeria with a T-value 2.750 and sig. value 0.006. Risk taking indicates a significant relationship with security as contained in the result with T-value 2.156 and sig. value 0.032 at 0.05 significance level. Furthermore, Autonomy showed a significant relationship with security challenges in the study area with T-value 8.363 and sig. value 0.000 at 0.05 significance level.

Finally, Pro-activeness has a significant relationship with security challenges with T-value 4.743 and T-value 0.000 at 0.05 significance level. This indicates that entrepreneurship orientation has positive and significant relationship with security challenges in the north-eastern, Nigeria. Therefore, the insecurity in the north-east were as a results of poverty due to unemployment among youth including the university graduates, if the youth will embrace entrepreneurship will result to decrease

in unemployment rate in the region which will eventually lead to poverty reduction and resulting to improvement in security challenges in the north-eastern, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that entrepreneurship orientation has serious effect on security situation in the north eastern part of Nigeria and the country as a whole. Hence, the variables of innovation with $t = 2.750$ and $p = 0.006$, risk taking with $t = 2.156$ and $p = 0.032$, autonomy with $t = 8.363$ and $p = 0.000$ and pro-activeness with $t = 4.743$ and $p = 0.000$ indicating all has effect on the security situation in the region.

The variables were selected to measure their effect on the security situation in the region sustained for decade to serve as an alternative or complements the military action which alone cannot provide a lasting solution to the security situation in the region. Interestingly, all the variables in the study which include; innovation, risk-taking, autonomy and pro-activeness have positive and a significant effect on the security situation in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Therefore, the findings of the study agree with the findings of Dabo(2018),Bello et al (2024), Ogunleye et al (2015), Osewa (2020) and Okechukwu and Nwekwo (2020) which their studies found entrepreneurship orientation have positive and a significant effect on security challenges in their study area.

Conclusion

The findings of this empirical study revealed that entrepreneurship orientation has a significant effect on security challenges in north-eastern Nigeria. Entrepreneurship orientation encourages youth and university graduates to explore entrepreneurial opportunities. The youth through entrepreneurship orientation seek to be innovative, and pro-active in business adopting aggressive competitiveness and always willing to take calculated risk. This behaviour of youth and university graduates will lead to the introduction of new unique products in market. Through this youth and the university graduates will actively participate in economic activities. Such will reduce the menace of insecurity and promoting peace and security in the northeast sub region.

Recommendations

Therefore, based on the findings of this study the following suggestions were recommended for entrepreneurship orientation to serve as a tool in ameliorating insecurity in the north-east and Nigeria as a whole:

1. This study recommended that government, youths and university graduates should embrace establishing micro, small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurial activities as a means to reduce unemployment and insecurity in the region and Nigeria.

2. Adequate funding should be given to youths and university graduates who wish to venture into business through a credit guarantee scheme with minimal collateral. Hence, proper monitoring to ensure the funds has used judiciously.
3. Youth and the university graduates should be encouraged to be proactive and be involved actively in some of the innovative business ideas whether employed or not. Thus, this will help increase the rate of entrepreneurs in the northeast and Nigeria as a whole.
4. There is the need to build more entrepreneurship skills acquisition and training centres where various skills will be taught and youth including university graduates should be encouraged to learn a particular trade, this will help change the mind-set of the youth to become self-employed as a source of employment.
5. The Nigerian government should provide an enabling environment such as the provision of infrastructure, ease of doing business, and tax-free for nascent entrepreneurs to make the business climate conducive and friendly for doing business.

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