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THE ROLE OF DIGITAL BUSINESS INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGING ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Abstract:

This study sought to measure the actual impact of digital business incubators and accelerators on the sustainable development of emerging entrepreneurial ventures within the digital business environment of the United Arab Emirates, with a particular focus on the Dubai Future Foundation as a case study. The study employed a multimethod approach, combining descriptive and quantitative analysis. An electronic questionnaire was distributed to a stratified random sample of 180 entrepreneurs who benefited from the foundation's services, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 programme managers of the foundation. Statistical analysis via SPSS V.28 revealed a statistically significant positive correlation at the 0.01 level ($\alpha \leq 0.01$) between the foundation's services (funding, training, mentorship, infrastructure, networking) and the growth of entrepreneurial ventures in terms of innovation, revenue generation, job creation, and sustainability. The findings further indicated that the most pressing challenges faced by entrepreneurs are the complexity of regulatory procedures for startup projects and the difficulty of accessing financing at the pre-seed stage. Finally, the study recommended strengthening strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors to establish a dedicated funding pool for early stages, simplifying regulatory procedures through a unified digital platform, and designing specialised programmes focused on the global scalability of startups.

Keywords: digital entrepreneurship, business incubators, business accelerators, Dubai Future Foundation, startups, United Arab Emirates, empirical study.

Introduction:

The United Arab Emirates is undergoing exceptional digital transformation, driven by an ambitious strategic vision aimed at building a competitive and sustainable knowledge-based economy. Within this framework, digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a fundamental pillar in realising this vision. In the context of an increasingly competitive global environment, there is an urgent need for supportive and enabling systems that allow emerging entrepreneurial ventures to overcome the critical challenges they face in their early stages, particularly those related to financing, skill acquisition, and market access. Digital business incubators and accelerators lie at the heart of these supportive systems, offering an integrated suite of services specifically designed to accelerate the growth of these ventures and to increase their chances of success (Al Marzouqi & Al Mehrezi, 2023).

Despite the notable proliferation of such centres in the UAE and the considerable public and private investments channelled into them, a clear research gap remains in the literature concerning the actual impact of these centres on startup performance, particularly through empirical methodologies based on primary data. Most prior studies have concentrated on descriptive aspects or individual case studies without providing quantitative analyses capable of producing generalizable findings (Gonzalez-Uribe & Hmaddi, 2022). Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address this gap by conducting an in-depth empirical analysis that evaluates the impact of the Dubai Future Foundation, as one of the most prominent models supporting digital entrepreneurship in the region, on the development of emerging entrepreneurial ventures in the UAE.

Research Problem:

The main research problem of the study can be formulated through the following question:

What is the tangible impact of the services provided by digital business incubators and accelerators, represented by the Dubai Future Foundation, on the development of emerging entrepreneurial ventures in the United Arab Emirates in terms of key growth indicators: innovation, financial growth, job creation, and sustainability?

Research Questions:

1. What are the nature and characteristics of the integrated services (financial, training, mentoring, infrastructure, and networking) offered by the Dubai Future Foundation to emerging entrepreneurial ventures?
2. What are the primary challenges faced by digital entrepreneurs in the UAE, according to the perceptions of the study sample?
3. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the level of utilisation of the Dubai Future Foundation's services and the degree to which startups achieve growth indicators (increased revenues, innovation level, number of jobs created, and sustainability)?

4. Are there statistically significant differences in the evaluation of the impact of services attributable to demographic and organisational variables (type of project, sector of activity, years of experience, growth stage)?

Hypotheses:

Central Hypothesis (H1):

There is a statistically significant positive correlation at the 0.01 level between the utilisation of the Dubai Future Foundation's services and the growth level of emerging entrepreneurial ventures.

Sub hypotheses:

- H1-1: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between projects receiving funding through the foundation and increases in their annual revenues.
- H1-2: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between entrepreneurs' participation in the training and mentoring programs offered by the foundation and a higher level of innovation in their products or services.
- H1-3: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between projects' use of networking and partnerships provided by the foundation and their increased capacity to create new jobs.
- H1-4: There is a statistically significant positive correlation between comprehensive support from the foundation and an increased likelihood of achieving operational sustainability for the project.

Theoretical Framework and Previous Empirical Studies:

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that integrates two main theories: the resource-based view (RBV), which posits that organisational success depends on its ability to acquire and utilise key resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991), and network theory, which emphasises the importance of relationships and networks in accessing resources and knowledge and reducing uncertainty (Granovetter, 1985). Within this context, incubators and accelerators serve as intermediaries that provide startups with access to essential resources (financial, human, intellectual, and technological) and relational networks (investors, customers, and partners) that might otherwise be inaccessible (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005).

A significant prior empirical study by Bruneel et al. (2012) examined the impact of incubator services on the performance of 150 startups in Europe. Multiple regression analysis revealed that training and mentoring services had the most significant effect on the long-term survival and growth of firms. In contrast, funding had a substantial effect on short-term growth. The study also highlighted that the effectiveness of incubators varies depending on the stage of project development. This research provides a practical comparative framework for the current study.

Regionally, Khalil and Romanowski (2021) conducted an exploratory qualitative study on a sample of entrepreneurs in Qatar, suggesting the necessity of quantitative studies to measure the relationship between types of support provided and project success. Locally, within the context of the UAE, Al Shehhi et al. (2022) focused on government policies supporting entrepreneurship in general but did not delve into the detailed impact of specific centers such as the Dubai Future Foundation. Therefore, the current study fills a critical gap by applying a quantitative empirical methodology to one of the most prominent active centres in the UAE's entrepreneurial landscape.

Methodology:

The study relied on a descriptive–analytical approach and a quantitative (empirical) method for data collection and analysis. The study population comprised all entrepreneurs registered in the Dubai Future Foundation's programmes from January 2022 to December 2023.

- Data collection instrument: An electronic questionnaire with five main sections was designed:
    1. Demographic and organisational data of the respondent and the project;
    2. A scale to assess the level of utilisation of the foundation's services, consisting of 25 items;
    3. A scale to measure project growth indicators, consisting of 20 items.
    4. An open section for challenges and suggestions. All the items were measured via a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly dissatisfied) to 5 (strongly satisfied). Additionally, ten semistructured interviews were conducted with program managers at the foundation to gain qualitative insights.
- **Validity and Reliability of the Instrument:** Content validity was confirmed by presenting the instrument to a panel of specialised reviewers. Reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.91 for the services scale and 0.88 for the project growth scale, indicating high reliability and suitability for use.
- **Sample and Sampling Technique:** A stratified random sampling method was adopted to ensure representation across various sectors and growth stages. The sample size comprised 180 entrepreneurs, with a response rate of 75%.
- **Statistical methods**: Data were analysed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. Analyses included descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies), Pearson correlation tests to examine hypotheses, t tests and one-way ANOVA to assess differences between means, and multiple regression analysis to determine the relative contribution of each independent variable in explaining variance in the dependent variable.

1. Overview of Digital Entrepreneurship

Rapid technological acceleration and technical developments have transformed the business world today, leading to new business models and ventures that rely on technology and digital means in delivering products and services. This phenomenon is known as digital entrepreneurship. What exactly is digital entrepreneurship, and how does it differ from traditional entrepreneurship?

1.1. Concept of Digital Entrepreneurship:

The European Commission defines digital entrepreneurship as "involving the creation or exploitation of digital business opportunities and the development of innovative digital business models that deliver value to customers and stakeholders. It includes applying digitisation and innovation in products, services, processes, and new business models, as well as leveraging digital platforms and ecosystems to access and interact with customers, suppliers, and partners".

Digital entrepreneurship is also viewed as "the use of modern digital technologies. It refers to entrepreneurship, which involves managing existing businesses and transforming them into new ventures in the field of information technology, thereby increasing the economic and social value of digital technology. This form of entrepreneurship heavily utilises information technology, primarily cloud computing, data, mobile phones, and others, to communicate with stakeholders to improve business, innovate business models, and generate future growth opportunities and employment" (Gujrati, Uygun & Guge, 2020, p. 09).

Furthermore, digital entrepreneurship is described as "entrepreneurial opportunities created and realised using technological platforms and other information transfer tools. It is multifaceted, spanning various business categories, and can be considered a combination of entrepreneurship, knowledge, and institutions that operate symbiotically" (Ziane Kolee, 2022, p. 87).

Digital entrepreneurship emerges when assets owned by a company, services it provides, or key business components are digitised, with digital entrepreneurs relying on digital media tools and information technology in their pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities (Antonizzi & Smuts, 2020, p. 239).

From the foregoing, digital entrepreneurship can be understood as a new trend in entrepreneurship, which is based on integrating digital technology into business; innovating new business models; and utilising digital media, information technology, platforms, and digital environments to deliver digital products and services; reaching a broader target customer base; and achieving distinction and success.

1.2. Differences between Digital Entrepreneurship and Traditional Entrepreneurship:

Digital entrepreneurship shares many characteristics with traditional entrepreneurship, including innovation, renewal, risk-taking, and an entrepreneurial spirit. However, the most significant difference lies in digital entrepreneurship's reliance on the internet, technology, and artificial intelligence to deliver products and services, unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which does not depend on these technologies. This has endowed digital entrepreneurship with several advantages and distinctions, which can be outlined as follows (Gujrati, Uygun & Guge, 2020, pp. 11-13).

a. Ease of entry: Compared with traditional entrepreneurship, it is easier to establish a new digital business and enter the market. For example, setting up a website to sell goods and services takes less time than opening a physical store. However, some digital ventures face technological

challenges requiring greater effort due to a lack of resources, which can lead to failure, as they demand high digital skills.

b. Ease of Production and Storage: Digital entrepreneurship offers significant benefits, such as reduced storage space and lower production costs than traditional entrepreneurship does. The production and manufacturing of digital products do not require expensive equipment or storage spaces, unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which demands these spaces.

c. Ease of distribution in the digital market: A significant advantage of digital entrepreneurship is the quick and low-cost ability to reach goods and services domestically and globally via the internet. Digitisation enables digital entrepreneurs to conduct local and international business effortlessly, meeting demands worldwide—a capability previously unavailable to traditional entrepreneurs.

d. Digital Work Environment: Today's world is interconnected by the internet, allowing entrepreneurs to harness this opportunity and build competent teams globally. Through virtual teams, entrepreneurs can hire talented, efficient employees and optimise resource utilisation while maintaining company culture. However, managers of virtual teams may face many challenges due to their limited experience compared with traditional managers; therefore, entrepreneurs should understand these challenges before entering the digital business realm.

e. Digital Product: Digital products offer additional advantages to digital entrepreneurs regarding production, storage, and shipping. With innovative changes, digital products can be easily modified without affecting manufacturing or marketing processes, unlike traditional nondigital products.

f. Digital Services: In the digital world, the importance of services continues to grow, and entrepreneurs can attract more customers by offering digital services tailored to their target audience, by monitoring their needs and focusing on them, and by observing competitors' behaviours.

1.3. Challenges Facing Digital Entrepreneurship:

Digital entrepreneurship faces several key challenges at launch and during expansion, many of which can lead to the failure of ventures in this field. The most significant challenges can be summarised as follows (Sharma & Yadav, 2020, pp. 28--29):

a. Accounting and financing: The primary challenge for digital entrepreneurs is bookkeeping and securing financing. Entrepreneurs are therefore required to acquire training in this area, as financial aspects, including money management, taxation, investment, and debt management, are among the leading causes of startup failure.

b. Managing Social Media Accounts: Another challenge is the failure to effectively manage social media accounts, which currently serve as the most popular and effective marketing platforms. Through their presence on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, businesses can

pave the way to growth. These accounts enable individuals to reach targeted audiences worldwide, expand their businesses, and communicate with customers through widely used services. Consequently, every organisation needs to maintain a prominent presence on social media, as this significantly contributes to its growth and success.

c. Employee screening: The employee screening process is lengthy, tedious, and highly complex. Initially, digital entrepreneurs may rely on temporary staff and consultants to develop their projects correctly and achieve success. However, later, they need to recruit qualified, permanent employees to ensure project stability and growth. One notable challenge is conducting the proper screening of suitable and qualified candidates and determining the criteria on which to base this process.

d. Website development: Digital projects that fail to establish an electronic presence will not endure long in the business world. Therefore, creating a website has become essential for any project, and it is necessary to keep the website dynamic, active, and effective on a continuous basis.

e. Business scaling: Scaling the business represents another challenge for digital entrepreneurs in startup environments. They often struggle to determine the right timing for expansion or to find the necessary resources, such as funding, to support growth. The approach to scaling depends on the capabilities of the enterprise and the products or services it offers. Moreover, the decision to expand is an information-based process requiring thorough reflection and planning before implementation.

Other equally important challenges include the following (Shahada, 2022, pp. 52--53):

f. Infrastructure: Digital entrepreneurship fundamentally relies on information and communication technology (ICT). Without it, digital entrepreneurs cannot deliver products or services. In many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, access to affordable, reliable, and high-speed infrastructure remains a significant challenge.

g. Cultural and Social Issues: Even with an appropriate business environment and proper infrastructure, there is often a lack of societal or cultural readiness for this type of business. This is due to various reasons, including distrust of electronic commerce, lack of awareness, and fear of new technologies.

h. Intellectual Property Issues: Many digital entrepreneurs operate globally through the internet or cloud computing and have the potential to grow and expand rapidly across borders. Therefore, their capital is often intellectual capital, raising concerns regarding the protection of their intellectual property rights.

i. Skills Issues: These issues start from the ability to identify and hire the required skills to possess the capabilities needed to identify new technologies aligned with entrepreneurial opportunities and apply them in new projects or existing business models. There is also a need for e-leadership skills and individuals who combine an entrepreneurial mindset with business,

communication, and technical skills. Accessing these skills in the knowledge and digital economy represents a significant challenge for entrepreneurs.

j. Cyberattacks and cybercrime: Despite the advantages provided by digital transformation for business organisations, this process is not without risks and challenges related to cybersecurity, including the threat of cyberattacks and cybercrime.

2. Relationship between Digital Business Centres and Digital Entrepreneurship

To overcome the aforementioned challenges facing digital entrepreneurship, which may lead to failure, digital entrepreneurship requires support and guidance from specialised entities. The most important of these entities are what are known as digital business centres. What are they, and what is their relationship to digital entrepreneurship?

2.1. Concept of Digital Business Centres

Despite extensive research and comprehensive reading of various topics related to digital entrepreneurship, no specific definition from a formal authority for digital business centers has been found. Accordingly, a definition is proposed on the basis of prior knowledge and observations of practical field models. Digital business centres can be defined as "organisations, entities, or offices established and supported by a certain body, which may be public/state-affiliated or private. These centres aim to support and encourage project owners and entrepreneurs in founding, realising, expanding, and contributing to the growth of their digital ventures through a range of programmes and activities provided by the centres. These programmes enable the transformation of creative and innovative technology ideas into successful and distinguished startups by providing an enabling environment that nurtures, develops, and guides these ideas towards the right path, while connecting them with investors and stakeholders interested in financially and morally supporting such ideas."

2.2. Objectives of Digital Business Centres

Building on the previous definition, the key objectives that digital business centres seek to achieve can be inferred as follows:

a. Support for Digital Entrepreneurship: Digital business centres aim to support digital entrepreneurs by providing a suitable environment that incubates digital projects and assists their growth and development through numerous services, programmes, and activities.

b. Promotion of the culture of digital entrepreneurship: These centers aim to reach a broad target group of entrepreneurs and individuals interested in digital entrepreneurship by disseminating the culture of digital entrepreneurship among youth and university students of both genders through introductory sessions, workshops conducted by specialists and activists in digital entrepreneurship, competitions, and other activities.

c. Developing Digital Capacities and Skills: A significant challenge faced by digital entrepreneurs is their ability to acquire the digital skills necessary for success. Therefore, one of the primary objectives of digital business centres is to develop, build, and enhance these capacities through training, education, and awareness programmes.

d. Contributing to the development of digital business prototypes: Transforming creative ideas into digital technological prototypes is a significant challenge for digital entrepreneurs, as they often lack interactive spaces equipped with the latest technologies and expert support to materialise and test these ideas. Digital business centres aim to provide such spaces and laboratories to facilitate entrepreneurs' work.

e. Enabling Digital Entrepreneurs to Access Necessary Resources, particularly financial resources, by linking digital entrepreneurs with investors interested in funding digital and innovative projects.

f. Providing Advisory Services and Guidance: The centres also aim to offer essential consultancy and guidance to digital entrepreneurs at various stages of their projects. These services may be delivered virtually or in person by experts specialising in technology and entrepreneurship.

g. Contributing to the growth of the digital economy: Through their support of digital entrepreneurs, digital business centres seek to contribute to the growth of the digital economy, increase its revenues, and increase GDP by directing investments towards technology, fostering technological development and localisation, and creating new job opportunities for youth.

2.3. Departments of Digital Business Centres

A digital business centre is divided into a set of subcentres, each concerned with specific aspects of digital ventures at every stage of their establishment and according to the nature of their activity. Among the most important departments of a digital business centre are the following:

a. Business Incubators: According to the Institute of Research and Consultancy, business incubators are defined as "socioeconomic entities specifically aimed at providing consultancy to newly established organisations characterised by a higher degree of risk compared with other enterprises, especially in new fields such as innovating and marketing new technologies or opening markets for novel products. Incubators serve as supportive mechanisms that help analyse the growth of startups" (Hawaj & Al-Othmani, 2022, p. 319). Business incubators can also be digital, representing a new form of incubator beyond the traditional model and responding to the shift towards digitisation and digital transformation in work, business, and all other sectors. It is illogical for entrepreneurs, who are the primary beneficiaries of these incubators, to be left behind in technological and digital progress and continue working in traditional ways (Arqoub & Jamal, 2020, p. 233).

Business incubators contribute by providing a workspace for digital entrepreneurs to establish and guide them through the early stages of their projects. Owing to the consultations, guidance, and training these incubators provide across various administrative, financial, and marketing

aspects under the supervision of specialists and experts, entrepreneurs can steer their projects in the right direction and ensure a successful launch.

b. Business Accelerators: In 2005, a new factor emerged in the world of entrepreneurship, adding significant value to the rapid creation of new ventures. This factor was termed business accelerators, with the first digital startup accelerator established under the name Y Combinator in Mountain View, California, USA, by Paul Graham. The working method involved gathering bright individuals and providing them with initial capital to cover startup costs, necessary legal paperwork, a wide business contact network, and office space. The accelerator offered periodic three-month programmes twice a year in the San Francisco Bay Area, near Silicon Valley, and funded more than 630 digital startups (Nakara & Jaquen, 2017, pp. 3-4).

Following this, other accelerators emerged and began spreading globally, adopting new business models and evolving into what they are today. Business accelerators are defined as "entrepreneurial school organisations that provide intensive, time-limited programmes designed to help entrepreneurs build their ventures. These schools periodically admit cohorts of companies, usually through highly competitive selection processes. Their goal is to help entrepreneurs develop capabilities and support them through business training, mentorship, and networking; some also provide coworking spaces. Additionally, some accelerators provide funding to participating companies, often taking equity stakes in companies within their investment portfolios. Participants conclude the programme with a public event to showcase their ideas, commonly known as a demo day" (Gonzalez-Uribe & Hmaddi, 2022, p. 12).

Although all accelerators are characterised as entrepreneurial schools, they differ in three fundamental dimensions: their strategic objectives, their sponsors, and the type of support offered to participants. Each dimension comprises various elements, and their combination defines the type of accelerator.

The three dimensions mentioned—objectives, sponsorship, and support—define three types of accelerators (Gonzalez-Uribe & Hmaddi, 2022, p. 15).

- **Accelerator A:** This type of accelerator is growth- and impact-oriented, sponsored by for-profit entities, and provides participants with digital capacity building. Its goal is to strengthen local entrepreneurial ecosystems by leveraging the positive externalities (i.e., benefits to third parties) generated by high-growth participants for other local companies.
- **Accelerator B:** This accelerator focuses on growth and is sponsored by nonprofit and governmental organisations. It provides participants with funding and supports companies with greater expansion potential. It offers resources to carefully selected participants, often in exchange for equity stakes in their ventures or, in some cases, for fixed fees. Y Combinator is a prominent example of a growth-oriented accelerator.
- **Accelerator C**: This is an impact-oriented accelerator sponsored by for-profit entities, providing participants with funding and capacity building. It addresses broader social and environmental challenges and varies significantly in design and support offerings. It works with participants who tend to be marginalised groups (such as women

and minorities) or projects in high-impact sectors such as agriculture and education. Some target projects in marginalised communities, regardless of company growth potential, provide resources without taking equity.

Business accelerators are centres that accelerate the growth of existing startups through targeted, intensive training programmes and by connecting these ventures with investors and financiers interested in investing in them.

c. Innovation Hubs: Innovation hubs are collaborative, adaptable spaces where industry, community, government, researchers, end-users, and other stakeholders interact to develop new solutions. These hubs serve as collective environments that enable the innovative recombination of products and services for development, testing, and market delivery (Ford, 2017, p. 01).

On the one hand, innovation hubs represent a strategic opportunity to meet various fundamental needs. They enhance companies' competitiveness by providing advanced infrastructure, shared resources, and collaborative platforms. By integrating these elements within a structured framework, companies can accelerate their development and marketing cycles while reducing costs.

On the other hand, from a broader perspective, these hubs play a key role in strengthening regional strengths by attracting foreign direct investment, providing high-skill jobs, and integrating into global value chains. They enable regions to reposition themselves in emerging sectors, such as through the use of clean technologies or sustainable mobility, thereby increasing economic resilience. The first two points create a particularly favourable environment for the growth of local startups; in addition to access to costly resources such as laboratories or prototyping equipment, these companies benefit from direct access to investors, mentors, and strategic networks (Innovitech, 2025, p. 04).

Innovation hubs advance digital entrepreneurship by offering technical support to entrepreneurs and enabling the exchange of ideas within an inspiring work environment that fosters interaction with experts and investors.

Presentation and Discussion of Results:

This empirical study concluded that digital business incubators and accelerators, exemplified by the Dubai Future Foundation, play a pivotal, effective, and statistically significant role in developing emerging entrepreneurial ventures in the UAE. This impact was quantitatively measured through strong and statistically significant correlation relationships. The study made a substantial scientific contribution to assessing the performance of digital entrepreneurship support systems by applying a rigorous, quantitative empirical methodology to the Dubai Future Foundation, a leading model within the dynamic UAE business environment.

The results definitively confirmed a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between the quality and quantity of services provided by digital incubators and accelerators and the comprehensive growth indicators of emerging entrepreneurial ventures. The significance of

these findings extends beyond confirming hypotheses; they provide a practical analytical framework that supports entities relying on measuring the return on investment in their programmes and strategically allocating resources towards the most effective services, such as specialised mentoring programmes and strategic network building, as demonstrated by the following results:

1. **Demographic characteristics:** The results revealed that 55% of the sample works in the fintech and artificial intelligence sectors and that 60% of their ventures are in the early growth stage.
2. **Hypothesis Results:**

- **Central Hypothesis (H1):** Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong, positive, and highly statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level between the overall degree of utilisation of the foundation's services and the overall degree of venture growth (r=0.78, p<0.01) (r = 0.78, p < 0.01) (r=0.78, p<0.01), confirming the central hypothesis.
- Subhypotheses: All subhypotheses were also confirmed, with the strongest correlation found between mentoring and training services and the level of innovation (r=0.82, p<0.01) (r = 0.82, p < 0.01) (r=0.82, p<0.01), followed by the correlation between networking services and job creation (r=0.75, p<0.01) (r = 0.75, p < 0.01) (r=0.75, p<0.01).

3. Regression Analysis Results: Multiple regression analysis indicated that the independent variables (services) explained 67% of the variance in venture growth (R2=0.67) (R^2 = 0.67) (R2=0.67). Mentoring services contributed most significantly to explaining this variance (β=0.41) (\beta = 0.41) (β=0.41), followed by funding services (β=0.35) (\beta = 0.35) (β=0.35).
4. **Interview Findings:** Interviews with programme managers emphasised the importance of customisation, noting that cohort-based programmes tailored to the specifics of each sector and growth stage are the most effective. They also pointed to the challenge of measuring long-term impact after ventures graduate from the programmes.
5. **Discussion of Results:** The findings of this study align with those of Bruneel et al. (2012) regarding the significant impact of mentoring and training services. They also provide a deeper explanation for the UAE context, characterised by strong government support, which enhances the effectiveness of these services. The high coefficient of determination (R2)(R^2)(R2) suggests that the study's model is robust and capable of explaining a substantial portion of the variance in startup performance within the UAE business environment.

On the basis of these results, this study offers the following practical recommendations:

1. **For Policy Makers and Support Providers:**

- Develop a "Unified Regulatory Platform" in partnership with various government entities to simplify startup establishment procedures and licensing.

- A "National Pre-Seed Fund" with flexible and rapid investment mechanisms should be established.

2. For Dubai Future Foundation and Similar Support Centres:

- Enhance mentorship programmes by attracting global experts specialising in targeted sectors such as health technology and clean energy.
- "Post-Graduation Programmes" are designed to monitor venture performance after incubation/acceleration and provide ongoing advisory support.
- To develop more advanced key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the long-term social and economic impact of supported ventures.

3. For Future Research:

- A longitudinal study was conducted to track the development of the same ventures over 3–5 years.
- The study was replicated across samples from other support centres within Gulf Cooperation Council countries for regional comparisons.

Conclusion

This study confirms that digital business incubators and accelerators, notably the Dubai Future Foundation, are not merely coworking spaces or transient funding sources but rather integrated ecosystem systems that create real added value by providing a strategic blend of financial, knowledge, network, and smart infrastructure resources. They form a fundamental pillar for achieving the objectives of UAE Vision 2021 and Centennial 2071, which aim to build a resilient and sustainable knowledge-based economy. The recommendations made by this study, particularly regarding the establishment of a national preseed financing fund and the simplification of regulatory procedures, represent a practical roadmap to enhance the effectiveness of these centers and ensure the sustainability of their impact on shaping the future of entrepreneurship in the region.

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