

Full Length Research Paper

Entrepreneurship education lessons: a case of Zimbabwean tertiary education institutions

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The paper aims to determine the extent to which entrepreneurship education has spread in Zimbabwean tertiary institutions, examine the most common teaching and assessment methods currently in use in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe and to come up with suggestions for improving entrepreneurship education to ensure creativeness and innovation in graduates. Descriptive survey design was used to come up with nine institutions drawn from higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Academics involved in entrepreneurship teaching and research were targeted as respondents of this investigation. Research findings revealed that the traditional lecturing is the most basic tool of teaching used and examination is the main assessment method used by tertiary institutions. Entrepreneurship education is restricted to some students especially from business departments. Entrepreneurship lecturers, have little or no practical experience in running their own businesses. There is lack of support from higher education institutions administration and government as there is no budget for entrepreneurship education hence, no resources to train students effectively. From the findings, it was concluded that entrepreneurship education is limited in scope and is still in the early stages of development. Zimbabwean tertiary institutions still predominantly adhere to traditional teacher- centered methods of delivery and assessment.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, higher education, economic growth, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

The current state of the Zimbabwean economy is a cause for concern for young people as they are confronted with the major problem of unemployment. According to Nyoni (2004) investment levels are not sufficient to generate employment for the 300 000 school leavers on an annual basis. Gone are the days, when in Zimbabwe, education used to be a guarantee for any type of job. This calls for intervention techniques in order to alleviate the problem and encourage school leavers to become job creators

instead of job seekers.

There has been renewed interest in Zimbabwe in encouraging a culture of entrepreneurship and tertiary education institutions are involved in the process. Interest and concerns on the subject of entrepreneurship heightened to address the issue of graduate unemployment, economic growth and dependence on government for grants due to alleviation of poverty. The Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Small to Medium enterprises introduced a range of policies to encourage educational institutions to develop entrepreneurial education and training programmes (Small and Medium Enterprise Development Policy

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document, 2004). Most institutions of higher education such as colleges, vocational training institutions and universities have introduced a course on entrepreneurship. This was aimed at ensuring that higher education students become entrepreneurial by starting their own businesses and contribute towards employment and economic growth. However, very little is known about the most effective teaching and assessment methods that ensure more graduates start their own businesses upon completion of an entrepreneurship course.

Research questions

The paper sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

- To what extent has entrepreneurship education spread in Zimbabwe tertiary institutions?
- What are the teaching and assessment methods currently in use in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe?
- How can entrepreneurship education be effective in ensuring creativity and innovation among graduates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Entrepreneurship Education

Jones and English (2004) define entrepreneurship education as the process of providing individuals with the ability to recognize commercial opportunities and the knowledge, skills and attitudes to act on them. According to Sexton and Smilor, (1997), entrepreneurship education refers to formal structured instruction that conveys entrepreneurial knowledge and develops in students, focused awareness relating to opportunity, recognition and the creation of new ventures. Kent (1990) states that entrepreneurial knowledge is the concepts, skills and mentality that entrepreneurs use during the course of starting and developing their growth-oriented businesses. Therefore, entrepreneurship education is the transfer and facilitation of knowledge about how, by whom and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated and exploited.

Developments in entrepreneurship education

Katz (2003) states that, American universities were the pioneers in the field of academic entrepreneurship education. A fundamental milestone was laid for Entrepreneurship Education in 1947, by the introduction of the first Masters in Business Administration courses at

Harvard Business School. Peter Drucker offered a course on "Entrepreneurship and Innovation" in 1953, at New York University. Babson College introduced its first course in entrepreneurship in 1967. An entrepreneurial explosion occurred in the United States, starting in the early 1970s and continuing up to the present. According to Sexton and Smilor (1997) the United State's economy realized an economic upturn and creation of 27 million jobs between 1980 and 1995, through small firms after introducing entrepreneurship classes at universities.

According to Clark (1998) the Entrepreneurial Pathways of University Transformation came into being between 1980 and 1995 in Europe, In Germany, Entrepreneurship education only came into being in 1998, and the discipline has developed dynamically since then. The efforts in Germany to catch up in academic Entrepreneurship education have so far been successful (Clark, 1998). Since the early 1990's there has been growth in the number of entrepreneurship courses and subjects offered in Australia (Bergin and Breen, 1999).

According to McMullan and Long (1987), the development of entrepreneurial skills in the education system was seen as an avenue to increase the supply of future entrepreneur in the country. A venture support system based on entrepreneurship education designed to stimulate and facilitate entrepreneurial activities, resulted in a lower unemployment rate increased establishment of new companies, and fewer failures of existing businesses. Moreover, given the unemployment problems in most developing countries as well as rising unemployment levels in developed countries in the face of globalization, the development of entrepreneurial skills as well as knowledge and skills in venture creation process prepare students for the realities of life when they graduate (McMullan and Long, 1987).

In December 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution recognizing entrepreneurship as a major social and economic force in the growth and development of nations. Member countries were urged to create programmes and implement policies that would encourage and support entrepreneurship among their populations (Sexton and Smilor, 1997). The 49th World congress of the International council for Small Business held in South Africa in the year 2004, underscored the need for the utilization of academic institutions to develop entrepreneurial skills (Nkomo, 2005). African universities were challenged to develop entrepreneurship education programmes to support entrepreneurial activities, particularly among small and medium enterprises and enhance their relevancy to the development challenges faced by the continent. The goals of entrepreneurship education are mainly to foster entrepreneurial mindsets, skills and behaviors. The embedding of entrepreneurship in the tertiary education's strategy is more and more perceived as an important aspect.

Entrepreneurship education teaching methods

According to Collins and Robertson (2003), the challenge for educators is to provide graduates with content focus, while ensuring that the breadth of the subject does not cause the depth to be eroded. This is ensured by adopting multiple flexible delivery methods in their teaching. The issue of the most effective approach to teaching entrepreneurship has raised regular discussion and debate especially on how to produce capable, skilled and enterprising individuals. Collins and Robertson (2003) claimed that an understanding of the process of learning underpins any approach to a teaching program.

Traditional teaching methods such as lectures, literature reviews, using reading materials, discussions, tutorials, examinations and so on do not activate entrepreneurship (Gibb, 2006). Education is often focused on supporting the development of knowledge and the intellect, whereas entrepreneurship education concentrates on the human being as a whole including his or her feelings, values and interests, even in terms of taking irrational decisions and as part of society at large (Kyro, 2003). The budding entrepreneur needs not only knowledge, but also new ways of thinking, new kinds of skills and new modes of behavior. Kirby (2004) argues that the traditional lecture format with all its predictability may not be the most effective method as it ignores the essence of the entrepreneurial process. Traditional lecture-driven teaching methodologies are not relevant to entrepreneurship courses, as they may inhibit the development of the requisite entrepreneurial skills and characteristics (Kirby, 2002).

Traditional teaching methods have to be complemented with entrepreneurial approaches which essentially includes learning by doing and providing opportunities for students to actively participate in as well as control and mould the learning situation (Gibb, 2006). The role of the educationalist moves from the traditional "sage on the stage" to becoming a "guide on the side". The educationalist needs to adopt the role of coach, mentor, and challenger and have the ability to provide feedback in a constructive and relevant manner (Gorman et al; 1997). The teaching process should focus on active learning, problem-based learning and discovery teaching. Gorman et al., (1997) postulates that active learning places greater emphasis on the student exploring their own skill, competencies and general self-awareness. In a problem-based learning environment, either on their own or in teams, students assume responsibility for solving problems. Hannon, (2005) points out that discovery teaching provides students with a learning environment which will equip them with the ability to continue educating themselves throughout their career. Essentially the combination of these approaches provides students with personal and career development.

Robertson et al., (2003) states that assessment and examination form the basis of how well the student has

utilized time and resources available to them to accomplish the objectives of the course studied. Conventionally a final examination, which is generally theory based, forms the primary component of assessment. Gibb (2006) suggest that entrepreneurship education does not fit neatly into these models of assessment of the traditional examination. Assessment methods need to mirror the objectives of the entrepreneurship courses and also accommodate the different non-traditional teaching and delivery methods discussed above.

However for generations there has been a debate whether successful entrepreneurs are born or made, whether some ventures are naturals and others only self-made strugglers who will never have what it takes. The extent, to which entrepreneurship is teachable, or even worth teaching, is a matter of debate among scholars. There are many disagreements among academics on whether entrepreneurship can be taught or not. Lambing and Kuel (1997) believe that the nuts and bolts of entrepreneurship could be taught while the soul of an entrepreneur was something else. Drucker (1995) believe that entrepreneurship can be taught. There is a positive relationship between education and business creation, as acknowledged by Robinson and Sexton (1994). They also indicated that entrepreneurship can be taught and that education can enhance entrepreneurial skills, competencies and attitudes. Saddler –Smith et al (2000) point out that the essential characteristics of entrepreneurship can be learnt from 2 major dimensions, firstly learning from experience and secondly classroom based learning.

Vesper (1985) carried out a survey in USA and 95% of respondents disagreed with the notion that entrepreneurship was an art and could not be taught, 5% thought it could not be taught as it was a combination of personality, skill and opportunity. There's a lot of scientific evidence that points to the role of genes in entrepreneurial success. Researches into things like gender, birth order and physical stature have produced some meaningful correlations between heredity and success in entrepreneurial ventures. Based on these and similar findings, it is reasonable to conclude that some people naturally have the innovative bent, work habits, risk-taking tolerance and problem-solving talents that contribute to success in business. Being born to rich parents also helps when it comes to fueling and sustaining entrepreneurial urges.

Based on the different views above it is quite justified to conclude that the most significant conditioner of entrepreneurial desires and perhaps even success is the experience a person has between the time of birth and his or her adulthood. The biographies of most successful entrepreneurs reflect early exposure to people or events that conveyed strong entrepreneurial messages. Contact with established entrepreneurs can plant the seeds and generate the excitement needed to steer youngsters to

future entrepreneurial pursuits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A nationwide survey was conducted among 30 academics from nine higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Academics involved in entrepreneurship teaching and research were targeted as respondents of this investigation. Descriptive survey design was used to come up with nine institutions drawn from higher education institutions in Zimbabwe which comprise of universities, colleges and vocational training institutions. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. A pilot study was done to increase reliability of the study. The researcher used stratified random sampling to select institutions for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Information

The results indicate that the respondents were relatively young, with more than half (83%) aged below 50. Most of the respondents were male (77%) and this is a true reflection of the gender distribution of academics in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. All the respondents were lecturing staff and they were full-time and permanent staff. The respondents indicated that their institutions have started involvement in entrepreneurship education from as early as 2000.

Importance of Entrepreneurship Education in Zimbabwe

Most respondents acknowledge the importance of entrepreneurship as a subject in their respective tertiary institutions. From the findings 57% of the respondents perceived it as very important, while 30% indicated that it was important and 13% said that it was not important. Respondents acknowledged the importance of developing an enterprising culture in Zimbabwe through entrepreneurship education in order to address the challenge of unemployment.

Scope of Entrepreneurship Education

Research findings indicate that entrepreneurship education is offered at all levels of education i.e. bachelor, master and PhD. Results show that 83% of respondents indicated that their institutions offer entrepreneurship education to all students whilst 17% of respondents stated that their institutions offered

entrepreneurship education to all students. Therefore, entrepreneurship education remains primarily an elective and is not offered institution wide but restricted to certain areas of study especially business faculties. This means that not all students have the option of completing an entrepreneurship module at some point in their studies. This view is supported by Kent (1990) who advocates that the spreading of entrepreneurship across institutions is still a major challenge.

From the study, 67% of respondents indicated that entrepreneurship was a stand alone subject whilst 33% of respondents said that entrepreneurship was integrated into other subjects and appeared as just a topic. Therefore some institutions integrate entrepreneurship into management subjects. Bygrave and Zacharakis (2004) argued that entrepreneurship cannot be achieved within the confines of traditional management discipline therefore integrating entrepreneurship into another subject makes it ineffective. However to a greater extent entrepreneurship education is being offered as a stand alone subject.

Teaching Methods

The most commonly used teaching method is the lecture (100%), followed by preparation of business plans (73%), case studies (50%) and use of guest speakers (33%). The results show that Zimbabwean tertiary institutions still predominantly adhere to traditional teacher-centered methods of delivery even though the learning outcome is to teach students on how to start and run a business. There seems to be some gap between methods applied and those that are viewed as the most effective and appropriate. There is lack of desire to change the way in which teaching has always been delivered. Kirby (2002) state that traditional lecture-driven teaching methodologies are not relevant to entrepreneurship courses, as they may inhibit the development of the requisite entrepreneurial skills and characteristics. Therefore use of lectures in entrepreneurship education is ineffective in ensuring graduates start their own businesses upon completion of an entrepreneurship course.

Assessment Methods

All respondents (100%) indicated that their institutions make use of examinations as the main assessment method. However, as part of course work 83% of respondents pointed out that their institutions required their students to write a test, prepare a business plan and to run a business but this is subsequently followed by an examination whilst 17% of respondents indicated that their institutions did not require students to write up business plans or to run a business. Therefore students

taking entrepreneurship courses tend to be assessed using more traditional methods. Gibb (2006) suggests that entrepreneurship education does not fit neatly into these models of assessment of the traditional examination. Therefore use of examinations is ineffective in entrepreneurship education.

Presence of Infrastructure/ Support Facilities for Entrepreneurship Growth and Development

From the study 17% of respondents indicated that their institutions had a centre for entrepreneurship in place whilst 83% do not have an entrepreneurship centre in place dedicated to entrepreneurial development, small business support, and microfinance research. It was discovered that the entrepreneurship centers are desirable, but funds are lacking to start them. All the respondents pointed that their institutions do not provide incubator facilities to support graduate start-ups. All respondents also pointed out that their institutions do not have a budget reserved for entrepreneurship education out of the overall budget, but to sustain entrepreneurship education there is an important need for internal and external funding (public or private). Lack of funding appears as the most important obstacle to development and continuation of entrepreneurship education. Kent (1990) points out that the success of entrepreneurship education at institutions of higher learning depends on logistical support institutions provide. Therefore despite the enormous call for finding ways to assist developing countries in their efforts toward economic development, entrepreneurship education still lacks full consideration as a discipline in academia.

According to Bager (2008), entrepreneurship centers and student business incubators have been established at numerous universities in the US and Europe with the objective to assist students and graduates with emerging ventures. These facilities typically offer student and graduate entrepreneurs access to basic business infrastructure such as desks, computers and phones etc. as well as seed money, mentoring and advisory services from faculty members or entrepreneurs and building links with entrepreneurs. (Bager, 2008). The entrepreneurship centers have paved the way for more start-up with a higher quality by students taking the entrepreneurship courses and getting the entrepreneurship skill and mindset.

Entrepreneurship Lecturers Expertise in Entrepreneurship Education

From the study it was discovered that 17% of respondents had a Diploma, 50% had Bachelors degrees and 33% had a Masters degree in business related disciplines. It can be noted that the entrepreneurship

lecturers have the basic education that is essential for them to lecture in entrepreneurship education. However, none of them had specialized in entrepreneurship education at diploma, bachelors, masters and PhD levels hence were not specialists in the area. There are currently too few experts in entrepreneurship training in Zimbabwe, and many of them have not been trained from the start in the field of entrepreneurship. Research on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education are weakly developed. There is also lack of management and development of entrepreneurship teaching staff so that they keep abreast with current trends in entrepreneurship education. As a consequence, entrepreneurship lecturers may be unaware of the right approach to entrepreneurship teaching.

The respondents also indicated that they have been involved in entrepreneurship teaching from between 2 and 10 years. Information obtained showed that 23% of entrepreneurship lecturers had practical experience as entrepreneurs with an average of 2 to 5 years experience and 77% of entrepreneurship lecturers did not have any practical experience of running a business. It was noted that in all institutions, it was not a prerequisite to have practical business experience in order to teach entrepreneurship. Therefore, entrepreneurship lecturers to some extent do not have practical experience of running a business though they have the theory. Entrepreneurship courses are taught just as academic courses by lectures that have no link with business life. Mobility of lecturers between higher education institutions and business is in general very low. Entrepreneurship lecturers lack proper entrepreneurship expertise in entrepreneurship as a subject and in running their own businesses hence, cannot effectively impact on graduates to start their own businesses as they are not perfect role models. Mayrhofer et al. (2005) point out that lack of personal experience in starting and running a business among those teaching entrepreneurship reduces the course to mere theory.

CONCLUSIONS

Many tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, have introduced an entrepreneurship course though it is generally not compulsory hence there is no guarantee that every student would do a course on entrepreneurship before graduation. There is strong evidence from the results that entrepreneurship education is still in the early stages of development. Zimbabwean tertiary institutions still predominantly adhere to traditional teacher- centered methods of delivery and assessment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the evidence gathered in this research there

are a number of recommendations to the effectiveness of entrepreneurship. The recommendations aim to help formulate more systematic approaches to entrepreneurship education and to enhance the role of education in creating a more entrepreneurial culture in Zimbabwe.

- There is a need to shift to more interactive learning approaches and theoretical studies need to be balanced by a strong component of learning by doing. Traditional exams should be complemented by an enterprise project and then assessment based on the performance of that enterprise.
- The entrepreneurship lecturers should be specialists in entrepreneurship and be to some extent entrepreneurs themselves, building their input on real-life experience. Lecturers should therefore have relevant background in academia, and recent experience in business.
- Tertiary institutions should organize entrepreneurship events; arrange meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops etc which are attended by external entrepreneurs or investors with the intention to inspire students to start their businesses.
- The government should grant public funding for the establishment of entrepreneurship centres at tertiary institutions to ensure spreading of entrepreneurship across different fields of study within institutions, fostering exploitation and commercialization of new business ideas and building links with businesses.

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