

Developing Entrepreneurial Competences in University Lecturers: Obafemi Awolowo University Experience

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Abstract

Recent global development demands a pool of creative and innovative human capital with an entrepreneurial mindset that is capable of turning ideas into actions that can provide solutions for sustainable development. Developing such human capital requires education that can foster entrepreneurial self-efficacy as well as lecturers who are innovative in providing the education. This paper presents the experience of Obafemi Awolowo University at developing entrepreneurial competences of its lecturers in a workshop which utilized interactive lectures and hands-on exercises. The assessment of the workshop showed improvement in their knowledge and perception about entrepreneurship, and on how to develop enthusiasm for entrepreneurship among students.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Competences; Pedagogy; Entrepreneurship education; enterprising mindset

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation, largely driven by information and communication technology, has led to intense competition requiring firms to constantly innovate to survive. For any country to handle the challenges as well as to take advantage of the opportunities associated with globalisation there is need for it to possess a pool of creative and innovative individuals. The economic downturn and high rate of unemployment currently being experienced in some developing countries makes it imperative for such nations to strategically develop people who are able to think and act entrepreneurially.

The experiences of developed countries have shown the important contributions of entrepreneurship as a driver of innovations that can propel and sustain economic growth. A growing trend in many countries of the world is putting effort in developing educational programmes that can foster entrepreneurial competencies of the people, especially the youths. This is because entrepreneurial training is believed to encourage an entrepreneurial mindset in the society, the creation of new businesses, and the efficient use of creative potential as well as of existing knowledge and skills available in such a country (Heder, Ljubić and Nola, 2011).

Therefore, developing an enterprising culture and mindset in the youth requires education and training that will ensure that learners are active and that learning activities involve the use of hands-on exercises. As noted by European Commission (2011), entrepreneurship education and training requires active, learner-centred pedagogies and learning activities that use practical learning opportunities from the real world. This is to

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ensure that ‘learning for entrepreneurship’ will enable students to take responsibility for learning to experiment, push boundaries and learn about themselves (Nab and Lans, 2012).

Consequent on the above, the essential role that lecturers need to play in enhancing students’ entrepreneurial learning cannot be over-emphasised. Indeed, there is a great concern in the literature about how lecturers understand entrepreneurship education, how they value it and their willingness to adopt to new pedagogical methods (Backstöm-Widjesog, 2008; Kyrö and Carrier, 2005 cited by Peltonen, 2008). This underscores the importance of developing the entrepreneurial competence of lecturers to provide the necessary understanding about and develop enthusiasm for entrepreneurship among students. Ultimately, this implies that lecturers should also become entrepreneurial by possessing requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes to assist the students acquire entrepreneurial competences.

The effort of the Nigerian Government at incorporating entrepreneurship into formal education at all levels of education is commendable. However, in Nigeria, entrepreneurship is still taught as a business related discipline only - without assisting the students to develop an enterprising attitude. Entrepreneurship education is limited to teaching students how to start and run a business, which makes it inadequate in responding to the growing competitiveness in today’s new knowledge societies. The practice in developed countries is to utilize entrepreneurship education in developing people who are more creative, innovative and risk-taking (Kao, 1992). Hence, entrepreneurship education should be considered within the wider concept of ‘enterprise culture’ where entrepreneurship is taught as a key competence and a set of transversal skills and attitudes are developed in the students. By this method, entrepreneurship education uses active learning methods that place the learner at the centre of the educational process and enable them to take responsibility for their own learning (European Commission, 2011).

Despite the directive by the National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria requiring Nigerian universities to establish stand-alone Entrepreneurship Departments and Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs), very little has been done in most universities. In effect, formal education in Nigeria has not imbibed the culture of entrepreneurship (Essia, 2012). This paper therefore presents one of the strategies being used at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in developing the entrepreneurial competences of university lecturers for them to properly assume this new role of ‘entrepreneurial learning facilitators’ in addition to their traditional roles. The paper also reports the perception of the university lecturers to several aspects of entrepreneurship education before and after they were exposed to the training.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education has been variously defined within narrower and broader contexts. At a narrower level, entrepreneurship education is seen as a process of preparing learners for the world of business. The broader definition however sees it as a process that goes beyond just teaching people on how to run a business but also about encouraging creative thinking and promoting a strong sense of self-worth and empowerment. Within the context of the second definition, entrepreneurship education refers to all activities aimed at nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets, attitudes and skills. It also covers a range of other aspects such as idea generation, start-up, growth and innovation (Fayolle, 2009). In addition to knowledge and skills in business, entrepreneurship education should also develop in learners certain beliefs, values and attitudes so that they can see entrepreneurship as an attractive option to paid employment (Holmgren *et al.*, 2004; Sánchez, 2010).

In spite of agreement in the literature that entrepreneurship can be taught, there is still discussion on what and how it should be taught. The two approaches to the teaching of entrepreneurship noted include the traditional ‘top-down instructive approach’ and a

contemporary 'bottom-up constructive approach' (Lourenço and Jones, 2006). The traditional approach include lectures and seminars whereby the lecturers pour their wisdom into the students who are seen as 'empty containers' (Wright, Bitner, and Zeinhaml, 1994). This approach has been criticised because it is seen as a passive educational method. This is because much emphasis is placed on managerial and new business start-up skills, with no focus on learning to develop enterprising behaviour, skills and attributes of the students (Lourenço and Jones, 2006). The bottom-up constructive approach is learning by doing, which is believed to be a more dynamic, active, constructive and goal-oriented process. There are however variants of this approach (see Lourenço and Jones, 2006 for the summary). The proponents of the second approach believe that learning is enhanced as students are engaged in the construction of knowledge by acquiring, generating, analysing, manipulating and structuring information (Alavi, 1994 quoted by Lourenço and Jones, 2006).

The current model of entrepreneurship education is therefore focussed on developing an entrepreneurial society which has a wider context than business start-ups (Moylan, McGreevy, and Heagney, 2009). This, according to Gibb (2002), requires a holistic approach to knowledge, a strong emphasis on pedagogical variety and experiential learning. It also requires an understanding of how to design entrepreneurial organisations of all kinds, and emphasis is placed on developing the entrepreneurial mindset.

Based on the foregoing, enhancing entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning among students requires that lecturers should become entrepreneurial as well. Enhancing lecturers' entrepreneurial competences, as suggested by Béchard and Grégoire (2005), requires that lecturers should be able to adopt teaching methods which encourage and enhance the entrepreneurial expertise of students. That is, 'learning to understand entrepreneurship', 'learning to become entrepreneurial' and 'learning to become an entrepreneur'. Other studies also established the importance of mastery of the subject matter as well as the pedagogical knowledge related to the subject, and the attitudes of the lecturers toward the subject (Kochadai, 2012; Lilai and Norlena, 2000; Wiseman, Cooner, & Knight, 1999; Sharifah, 1983). According to these authors, while the mastery of the subject matter will have effects on the curriculum transformation process, mastery of pedagogical knowledge will help the lecturers to modify understanding regarding the subject contents that will be more suitable with students' abilities and background. Moreover, lecturers who show positive attitude to entrepreneurship education will be interested in the students and their teaching methodologies. Also, they will be highly motivated, open-minded, cheerful and will be always available to give encouragement to students (Gibb, 2002).

Developing Lecturers' Entrepreneurial Competences

Competence is defined differently within different contexts. However, common to these definitions is that competence is composed of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics which underline effective or successful job performance. Within the context of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial competences are individual characteristics that include both attitudes and behaviours, which enable entrepreneurs to achieve and maintain business success (Kochadai, 2012). Lecturers' entrepreneurial competence is therefore linked with all the three domains of knowledge, skills and attitude. This is reflected in the way in which entrepreneurial knowledge, application and skills are conveyed to students. According to Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006), entrepreneurial competences in a teaching context can be seen as abilities to adopt such teaching methods, which encourage and enhance the entrepreneurial learning in students so as to help them become entrepreneurs. Using the concept of readiness, Kyrö, Mylläri and Seikkula-Leino (2008) stated that lecturers' entrepreneurial competences can be seen as a readiness to initiate, guide and sustain students' entrepreneurial learning process.

Developing the lecturers' entrepreneurial competences therefore recognises the importance of affective and social characteristics of entrepreneurial learning, which underscores the importance of collaborative and entrepreneurial learning as core elements in obtaining entrepreneurial competencies (Cope, 2005 as quoted in Peltonen, 2008). This notion implies that lecturers can become more entrepreneurial when they learn in teams. Team learning suggests that goals can be achieved together when each person involved in the team is able to walk along the learning path with others. Entrepreneurial team learning is a dynamic, discursive and reciprocal development process, which is based on a learning partnership and is experiential in nature (Peltonen, 2008). The author however cautions that making lecturers entrepreneurial requires more than learning together; the collaborative learning should be entrepreneurial in nature. This means that learning should be action-oriented and it should entail problem-solving through hands-on exercises. Enhancing lecturers' willingness to promote entrepreneurship education and to adopt entrepreneurial teaching methods also requires team learning and learning partnership. This will not only increase collegial interaction and dialogue among lecturers but it will also assist them to overcome the barriers of professional autonomy and isolation (Peltonen, 2008).

Entrepreneurship Development at Obafemi Awolowo University

Within the entrepreneurship education literature, it is argued that a unique learning environment is required to support the study of entrepreneurship within a university setting, for example, see Gibb (2002). It is suggested that a teaching style that is action-oriented and which encourages experiential learning, problem-solving, project-based learning, creativity, and is supportive of peer evaluation will be appropriate (Jones and English, 2004). This therefore, requires teaching methodologies which are not passive like those used in traditional business disciplines.

Part of the strategy aimed at promoting entrepreneurial culture among the students at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) is the recognition of the importance of working with all academics within the university. Previous empirical studies indicate that higher education has been a poor contributor to graduates' entrepreneurial skills (Allen and Van Der Velden, 2009). This is because lecturers are considered a weak link in introducing real changes to the experience of students, especially in entrepreneurship education (McCoshan, Witte and Westerheijden, 2010). Other scholars have also noted that students' entrepreneurial motivation and competences can be highly influenced by lecturers' attitude toward and self-efficacy in entrepreneurship (Pihie and Bagheri, 2011; Bayraktar, 2011). Any effort at developing students' entrepreneurial competence should therefore take into consideration the competence and attitude of the lecturers in entrepreneurship. OAU's strategy is therefore geared towards developing capacities of the lecturers so as to embed the delivery of entrepreneurship competence contextually within the curriculum and pedagogy of all departments throughout the university. This strategy is believed to make entrepreneurship an institution-wide model and to stimulate lecturers from all disciplines to develop and incorporate entrepreneurial and innovation approaches to their curriculum and programme development. Moreover, the university is committed to building a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem within the institution.

METHODS

The pedagogical approaches used by OAU in developing the entrepreneurial competences of university lecturers is presented first. The training workshop, which was a one-day programme, was held twice for selected lecturers from the thirteen Faculties in the university. These are Faculties of Administration, Agriculture, Arts, Education, Environmental Design and Management, Basic Medical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Dentistry, Law, Pharmacy,

Science, Social Sciences, and Technology. There were 15 and 18 participants during the first and second training period respectively.

The workshop adopted both traditional and enterprise approaches. The traditional approach involved the use of conventional lectures on topics like ‘Developing Entrepreneurial Competences in University Lecturers’; ‘Towards Understanding Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development’; and ‘Gender Sensitivity in Developing Entrepreneurial Skills’. The lectures conveyed basic concepts and knowledge about entrepreneurship to the participants.

The conventional lectures were followed by an intensive hands-on training titled: ‘Generating and Screening of Business Ideas from Core Courses Taught to Students’. During the hands-on experience, the participants were guided on how to generate and screen business ideas from the core courses in their departments. This was meant to provide guidelines for teaching that will help students to understand concepts, appreciate the relevance of the knowledge gained to the needs of the society, understand how the knowledge can add value, and generate need-based business ideas (Figure 1).

The participants were then organized in discussion groups of four, based on their disciplines (that is, humanities, medical science, physical and life science, as well as technology and engineering). Using the framework (shown in Figure 1), each member of the group was given a worksheet (see Table 1 in Appendix) containing the activities to be done.

The second part of the training workshop was the evaluation of the training from the perspective of the participants. The participants were presented with an open-ended self-administered questionnaire to state their perception and understanding about issues relating to entrepreneurship. They were required to write what they understand by:

- (i) What graduate unemployment is.
- (ii) The policy that government should adopt at addressing the problem of graduate unemployment.
- (iii) What entrepreneurship is, who is an entrepreneur, and what is entrepreneurship education and its goals.
- (iv) What is an enterprise.
- (v) What is an entrepreneurial mindset.
- (vi) What they think should be the role of university in creating an entrepreneurial mindset, and
- (vii) What should be the attitude of any student (whether self-employed or in paid employment) with an entrepreneurial mindset.

This questionnaire was administered to the participants before and after the training sessions to know whether there was any significant difference in their understanding on these issues.

FIGURE 1
Framework for Generating Business Ideas from Core Courses

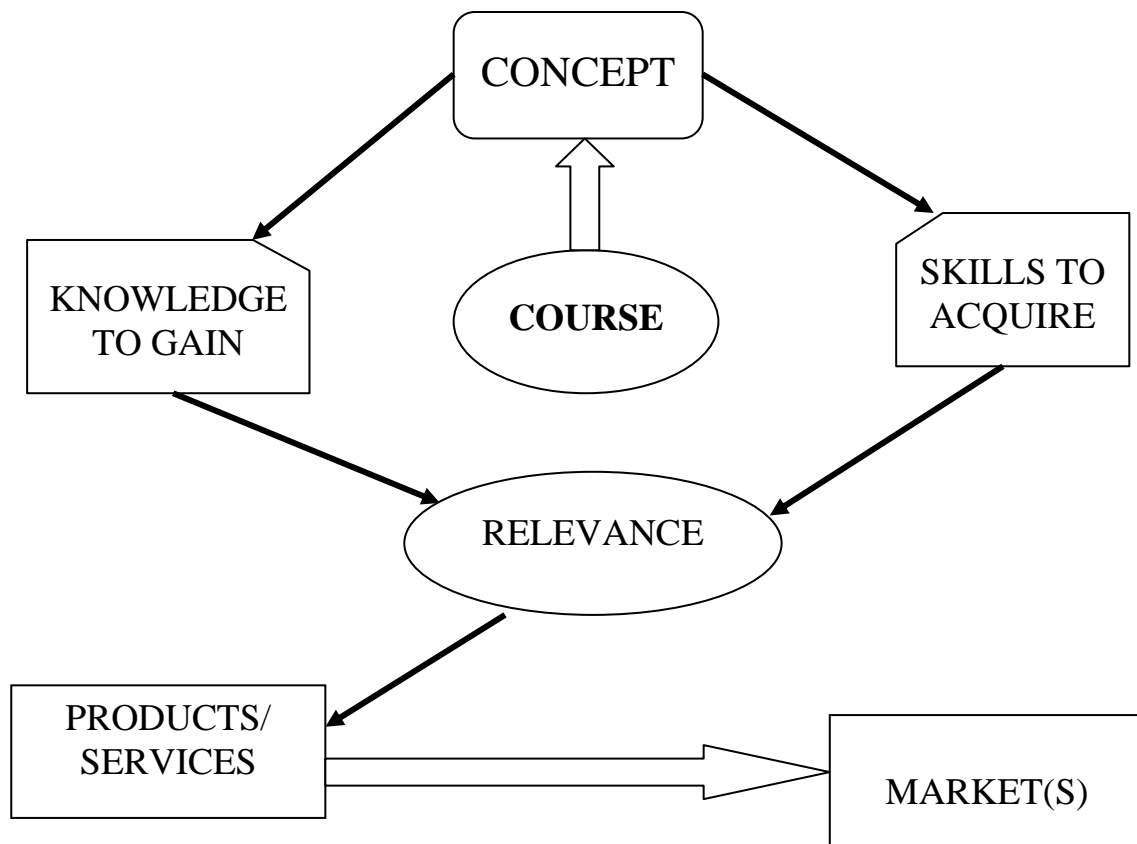


TABLE 2
Percentage Response of the Participants based on their Level of Perception and Understanding about Entrepreneurship before and after the Workshop

Items about Entrepreneurship	Pre-Workshop Evaluation				Post-Workshop Evaluation			
	Percent (%)				Percent (%)			
	No idea	Low idea	Fair idea	Good idea	No idea	Low idea	Fair idea	Good idea
How government should address the problem of graduate unemployment	5.6	27.8	50.0	16.7	--	40.0	20.0	40.0
Reasons for graduate unemployment	--	55.6	16.7	27.8	--	20.0	6.7	73.3
What is entrepreneurship	22.2	50.0	27.8	0.0	13.3	20.0	26.7	40.0
Who is an entrepreneur	11.1	27.8	33.3	27.8	--	6.7	26.7	66.7
What is an entrepreneurship education	16.7	22.2	44.4	16.7	--	20.0	26.7	53.3
What is the main goal of entrepreneurship education	0.0	38.9	27.8	33.3	--	6.7	53.3	40.0
What is an enterprise	16.7	16.7	22.2	44.4	--	0.0	26.7	73.3
What is an entrepreneurial mindset	11.1	38.9	33.3	16.7	--	13.3	26.7	60.0
Role of university in creating entrepreneurial mindset	5.6	44.4	22.2	27.8	--	26.7	20.0	53.3
Attitude of student with entrepreneurial mindset	11.1	50.0	27.8	11.1	--	20.0	20.0	60.0

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents a new model on how the entrepreneurial competence of university lecturers can be developed so that, irrespective of their discipline, they can assume the role of entrepreneurial learning facilitators in addition to their professional roles. While the paper does not claim that the model has a unique answer for effective ways of developing the entrepreneurial competence of university lecturers, the results of the analysis of the questionnaire showed that the strategy adopted improved the understanding of the participants about entrepreneurship. For example, using the scales of ‘no idea’, ‘low idea’, ‘fair idea’ and ‘good idea’ on ten issues about entrepreneurship, majority (40.0 – 73.3%) of the participants had ‘good idea’ on nine of these issues during post-workshop evaluation (Table 2). This was an improvement over the pre-workshop evaluation where only one of the issues was where majority (44.4%) of the participants had ‘good idea’.

The pre-workshop evaluation showed that out of the ten issues about entrepreneurship on which the understanding of the participants was tested, majority of the participants had ‘low idea’ about six of them (Table 2). Also, its only on three issues that majority of participants had ‘fair idea’. That is, 50% of them had fair idea on ‘how government should address the problem of graduate unemployment’; 33.3% on ‘who an entrepreneur is; and 44.4% on ‘what an entrepreneurship education is’ . The only issue on which 44.4% of the participants had ‘good idea’ was ‘what an enterprise is’.

Moreover, when the same questionnaire was administered after the training, majority of them had 'good idea' in nine out of the ten issues on entrepreneurship. The only issue on which 53.3% of the participants had fair idea was 'what the goal of entrepreneurship education should be'.

It is important to note that apart from the issue on the definition of entrepreneurship where 13.3% of the participants had no idea, all participants demonstrated some level of understanding on other issues. This is an indication that both the lectures and hands-on training used during the workshop improved their knowledge and provided the necessary skills for assuming the role of facilitating entrepreneurial learning. Infact, there were lot of enthusiasm during the hands-on experience, and many participants expressed their readiness to motivate and inspire students to start generating business ideas from their core courses using the training framework.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a modest contribution towards entrepreneurship education, especially on how to develop the entrepreneurial competence of university lecturers, who are seen as partners-in-progress in promoting the entrepreneurial resourcefulness of the students. The framework for the delivery of the entrepreneurship education and the results of the evaluation of the training workshop are presented. The training workshop was able to connect the core courses in each field of study in the university to the needs of the society. The university lecturers were also taken through the process of generating need-based business ideas from the knowledge and skills embedded in the courses that they teach students. The training also provided the skills for screening generated business ideas to ascertain whether they can be commercialised. By this, it is expected that university lecturers should be able to engage their students to have entrepreneurial thinking rregardless of their field of study.

The results of the evaluation of the training indicated that there was significant improvement in the lecturers' understanding of entrepreneurship. They also showed readiness and enthusiasm to guide their students through the learning process on how to relate the knowledge and skills acquired in their core courses to the needs of the society.

One of the limitations of this paper, however, is that the number of the participants (18) was quite small and thus it might be difficult to generalise the results. However, it is the opinion of the paper that any attempt at developing entrepreneurial resourcefulness of students in higher institutions, especially in developing countries, must recognise the important contribution of lecturers. Hence, lecturers must be equipped with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes about entrepreneurship. Therefore, efforts must be made to ensure that all lecturers are properly oriented, trained and well-motivated as the success of entrepreneurship training programmes largely depends on their input. Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial intention of students is also key to the overall success of entrepreneurship education programmes.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Group Work – Generating and Screening Business Ideas from Core Courses Taught by Participants

WORKSHEET

Activities	
Decide on a topic of interest that may be taught to your students in your own group.	
Identify at least three main concepts from the chosen topic.	
List 2 key concepts that students can gain from the topic.	
List at least two skills that can be acquired through the topic.	
What problem, gap or needs in the society can the knowledge/skill acquired address?	
GENERATION OF VENTURE IDEAS Please list three <u>products/services</u> that can be produced or rendered from the knowledge/skill from the topic to address the needs.	
List at least 2 prospective Markets	
SCREENING OF VENTURE IDEAS	Subject each ideas listed above to the following tests:
This is the time to narrow down these ideas to those that are profitable ventures	A. Capabilities required to implement the idea: Do you have it? Y/N
	B. Probable scale of operation
	i) Cottage [] ii) Micro [] iii) Small [] iv) Medium []
	C. Locational requirement
	Can the business be established anywhere? (Y / N)
	If No, why?
	D. Is there any special legal requirements?
	Does the business require any special government approval and/or requirements? (Y / N) _____
	E. Location of the product or service within the market
	Will the product/service be an/a: i) Existing product/service in an existing market [] or ii) Existing product/service in a new market [] or

Activities	
	iii) New product/service in an existing market <input type="checkbox"/> or iv) New product/service in a new market <input type="checkbox"/>
	F. Required resources in terms of personnel, raw material, technology, etc.
	<u>Raw Materials</u> i) Can it be sourced locally? (Y / N) <u>Personnel</u> i) Type of knowledge/skill required to run the business a) Specialised b) Non-specialised ii) If specialised knowledge/skill is required, are people with such knowledge/skill available locally? (Y / N) <u>Technology</u> i) Availability Locally <input type="checkbox"/> Imported <input type="checkbox"/> ii) Availability of spare parts Locally <input type="checkbox"/> Imported <input type="checkbox"/> iii) Maintenance Locally <input type="checkbox"/> -Imported <input type="checkbox"/>
	G. Source of technical/institutional supports i) List any three (3) technical/institutional supports that will be required and state whether they are available locally.