

Entrepreneurship Education at Universities: Scope and Challenges.

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has received overwhelming recognition from the media, governments, and donor organisations for its potential in employment and wealth creation. In the academic arena, universities are realising an increased demand for entrepreneurship education. Traditionally, universities have adopted a theoretical approach in the teaching of entrepreneurship. A paradigm shift has become necessary for educators and institutions to move away from a theory-based approach to practical methods that serve the needs of students, particularly in an environment where formal sector employment opportunities are declining. However, entrepreneurship education as an evolving field of study, poses unique challenges for both educators and institutions. This paper, based on a review and synthesis of literature, seeks to explore the scope of entrepreneurship as an academic discipline, and to examine methodological and institutional support challenges faced by universities. From the ensuing discussion and conclusions it is hoped that university educators will come up with more effective approaches to foster entrepreneurial learning.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial learning, Methodological, Institutional.

Introduction

The entrepreneurial revolution has captured a great deal of attention from many interest groups that include governments, international organisations, financial institutions and the donor agencies world-over (Hisrich, 1986). The contribution of entrepreneurship to economic growth, through new venture formation and job creation is vital for the development of nations. In December 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution recognising 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). More recently, the 49th World Congress of the International Council for Small Business held in South Africa in the year 2004, underscored the need for the utilisation 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, Micro, and Medium Enterprises, and enhance their relevancy to the development challenges faced by the continent.

According to Locke (1998), universities have been susceptible to the idea of providing an educational service to industry and commerce and they often craft a curriculum to satisfy what they hope are industry's

requirements. Mkunde et al. (2003), further point out that universities aim to produce graduates for the job market, research to support public policy, consultancy services for the government and the private sector including non-governmental organisations and, more generally, to provide intellectual and advocacy services for groups in society and the nation. He recognised that the most difficult challenge facing universities was to change the students' mindset to fit the new socio-economic environment. Hill (2000), also, noted that challenges facing traditional universities were to do with the need to redefine their roles in society in order to maintain their relevancy by meeting all stakeholders' needs and expectations, without however, sacrificing the universal nature of these institutions. His concerns may be further heightened by a phenomenal rise in entrepreneurial activity in Zimbabwe as indicated by Mumbengegwi (1993), and hence the need for these institutions to consider the growing demand for entrepreneurship education and small business management courses. Sexton and Upton (1984) observe that most university curricula consider entrepreneurship as an integral part of business management, making its study less effective than desired.

Entrepreneurship education refers to formally structured instruction that conveys entrepreneurial knowledge and develops in students, focused awareness relating to opportunity, recognition and the creation of new ventures (Sexton and Smilor, 1997). According to Kent et al. (1982), entrepreneurial

knowledge refers to the concepts, skills and mentality that entrepreneurs use during the course of starting and developing their growth-oriented businesses. However, entrepreneurial learning- that is, the active and cognitive process employed in acquiring, retaining and using entrepreneurial knowledge, may assume the formal or informal dimensions.

At universities, formal entrepreneurial knowledge is acquired through taking entrepreneurship courses or more comprehensively by pursuing a degree program on entrepreneurship. This article, based on a review and synthesis of literature seeks to explore the scope of entrepreneurship as a field of study and, more importantly, to examine the pedagogical challenges faced in the delivery of entrepreneurship education. The discussion herein seeks to raise the awareness of those challenges among educators and provoke them to adopt effective approaches in its teaching.

Importance of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is considered as a critical exposition that harnesses productive potential of students in a variety of contexts (Saddler-Smith et al. 2000). Research evidence and the experiences of developed countries suggest that entrepreneurship education has proved to be effective in enhancing the entrepreneurial competences. Research conducted in the United States, by Green and Pryde (1990), contradicted popular mythology that successful entrepreneurs frequently had little or no formal education. The results indicated that advanced education correlated positively with entrepreneurial performance. Increased levels of academic education had a positive influence on entrepreneurial performance. The teaching of entrepreneurship also helped to destroy myths around business performance and to develop truths and understanding of the cause and effect relationship that contributes to business growth and success. Schossman, Sedlak and Wechseler cited in Locke (1998), concur with Green and Pryde, in that business education is critical to the health of the economy. However, Kourilsiky (1995), observed that, in developing countries, the teaching of entrepreneurship at universities was still in its infancy.

Entrepreneurship education enables universities to be depended upon for the supply of entrepreneurial resources, which include people with entrepreneurial and technological know-how that will enable the country to excel in the development of new products and services. In the US, a study by the Kauffman Foundation in 2002 (Bygrave and Zacharakis, 2004), found that 61% of US colleges and universities had at least one course in entrepreneurship. It was also possible to study entrepreneurship at certificate, diploma, undergraduate, masters and doctorate

levels. The United States' economy realised an economic upturn and creation of 27 million jobs between 1980 and 1995, through small firms after introducing entrepreneurship classes at universities (Sexton et al., 1997). By the turn of the 20th century entrepreneurship education had made significant inroads in university colleges in the United States of America and Europe. Their curriculum focused on imparting basic entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes that enabled graduates to initiate their own ventures. In support of this development, Vesper (1985), identifies three benefits of entrepreneurship to society. Firstly, it fosters economic growth by providing new jobs in an economy. Secondly, it increases productivity as more goods and services are produced with less labour and other inputs through improved production techniques and research and development and finally, it creates new technologies, products and services through new inventions and innovation. Solomon et al., (2002), suggest that entrepreneurship is one of the new frontiers in science and technology-based economies of today that deserves attention at universities across all faculties.

Sadler-Smith et al., (2003), concluded that the growing complexity of industrial technology makes formal entrepreneurship education imperative for the success of any business, making its study more desirable than just to satisfy intellectual appetite of students. In their research on managerial behaviour, the entrepreneurial style and not managerial behaviour, was associated positively with the probability that a firm would be a high-growth type. It is against this background that universities will need a paradigm shift, from just serving the demands of commerce and industry to serving the needs of students themselves as potential entrepreneurs within and outside organisations. Entrepreneurship education empowers students for self-employment as a viable alternative, especially in the face of dwindling formal employment opportunities.

The teaching of entrepreneurship poses unique challenges as it embraces practical issues involving psychological, sociological and economic perspectives of the dynamic business world (Kent et al., 1982). It is in the light of these challenges that educators ought to craft entrepreneurship courses and pedagogies that meet the rigors of academia while preserving the reality-based focus on entrepreneurial experience in learning. Stevenson and Gumpert (1985), indicate that the essence of entrepreneurship education is the ability to put knowledge to work. The emphasis on personal and practical orientation makes it necessary for educators to distinguish between entrepreneurship and general business management education.

Entrepreneurship Distinguished from Management Education

Entrepreneurship and small business management are often thought to be synonymous and many universities tend to cover entrepreneurship as an appendage of business management courses (Kent, 1990). An appreciation of the difference between entrepreneurship and management should enable educators to shift from traditional theoretical approaches to those that facilitate practical entrepreneurial learning. Insight into the differences may be drawn from the definitions of an entrepreneur and of a manager.

The term entrepreneur is derived from the French term *entrepredre* meaning 'go between' or 'between taker' and has been in use since the 17th century when Richard Cantillon used the term to mean a self-employed person with a high tolerance for risk inherent in providing for one's economic well-being (Lambing and Kuehl, 1997). Drucker (1995), a contemporary management writer, describes an entrepreneur as one who takes the risk by shifting resources out of an area of lower into an area of higher productivity and greater yield. Bygrave and Zacharakis (2004), further define an entrepreneur as someone who perceives an opportunity and creates an organisation to pursue it. Apparently there is no consensus concerning the definition of an entrepreneur as some authors focus on the economic perspective while others focus on the behavioural perspective. However, Hisrich (1986), shifting from a person perspective, defines entrepreneurship as the process of creating something different with value by devoting the necessary time, effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychic, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction. Management, on the other hand, is defined as the art of getting things done through other people (Drucker, 1985). Management theories assume the pre-existence of an organisation in which the managerial tasks of planning, decision-making, organising, and controlling are applied with a view to achieve organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

Entrepreneurship is fundamentally different from, but not independent of, management (Kent et al., 1982). Kourilsky (1995), postulates that the learning of economics and attempts to use techniques derived from business management are not substitutes of entrepreneurship education. In her analysis, the study of economics helps to make students understand the relation between entrepreneurship and the market, while business management studies help them to make existing business ventures successful through enhanced leadership skills to optimise the use of time, money and people. Vesper (1985), highlights three important conceptual differences between

management and entrepreneurship. He indicated that entrepreneurs face the same constraints as managers of corporate organisations, but in different ways: -

1. Entrepreneurs optimise the personal use of time, which is governed by one's life span, while professional managers are guided by the time value of money and are less constrained by the life span of owners since it does not coincide with the lifespan of companies.
2. Entrepreneurs are constrained by personal resources and frequently attempt to minimise the amount of capital necessary to establish a profitable venture, whereas managers attempt to maximise the amount of capital gainfully employed.
3. On people constraints, entrepreneurs are individuals who must take decisions without the aid of internal specialists, and as generalists, entrepreneurs avoid over specialisation. However, professional managers are either functional specialists themselves or specialists in the use of other specialists.

From Vesper's analysis, entrepreneurship might be viewed more as a personal trait than an economic activity, leading to the notion that entrepreneurship cannot be bought with the tools and techniques of professional management. Storey and Westhead (1997), also considers the same dimension and suggests that, for entrepreneurship to gain meaning, dignity and excitement as an academic discipline, it must address the following three major questions at the heart of this discipline which are: What do entrepreneurs do? What defines entrepreneurial behaviour? What makes entrepreneurs entrepreneurial? Bygrave and Zacharakis (2004), appreciate the multifaceted role of the entrepreneur and contend that entrepreneurship cannot be achieved within the confines of traditional management discipline. The key question is whether universities can equip students with the business management and technical knowledge and the drive to create self-employment, spur innovation, create employment for themselves and others.

Can Entrepreneurship Be Taught?

Although entrepreneurship is still in its infancy and marginalized at most universities even in the developed world, it has become a significant area for academic research and study (Kourilsky, 1995). On whether entrepreneurship can be taught, Lambing and Kuel (1997), lamented about disagreements among academics and practitioners alike, but believe that the nuts and bolts of entrepreneurship could be taught while the soul of an entrepreneur was something else. Peter Drucker (1985), believes that entrepreneurship can be taught while others believe that entrepreneurs have a special personality or

mindset that cannot be taught. Kieruff and Roscoe cited in Locke (1998) indicated that lack of systematic attention and lack of consistent evaluation criteria raised questions about whether entrepreneurship could be taught at all. However, a survey in the United States by Vesper showed that 95% of respondents disagreed with the notion that entrepreneurship was an art that could not be taught (Kent et al., 1982). Those who thought it could not be taught cited that it was a combination of personality, skill and opportunity but there was no adequate theoretical base and that there was a problem in defining specific teaching objectives.

Kent et al. (1982), argue that entrepreneurship is an event (whether it is, part-time, full-time, one-time or repetitive), that cannot be tied to a particular kind of individual. Entrepreneurship may be considered as an independent event while the individual or the group that generates the event becomes the independent variable as do the social, economic, political and cultural contexts. Saddler-Smith et al. (2000), also support the notion that the essential characteristics of entrepreneurship can be learnt and two major dimensions exist, firstly learning from experience i.e. on-the-job training and secondly academic classroom-based learning. Drawing upon the contributions of Saddler-Smith et al.(2003), authors believe that entrepreneurial skills can be taught.

Challenges in Teaching Entrepreneurship

The teaching of entrepreneurship tends to lie on the course content or concepts (Vesper) and the efficacy of pedagogical approaches and the learning environment (Sexton 1984). Authors believe that entrepreneurship education poses unique challenges in respect of both methodology and institutional support framework. An exploration of these challenges will help to raise awareness among university teachers and institutions themselves. Effective approaches are needed in teaching the discipline to make graduates from universities recognise and take advantage of opportunities in the market during or upon completion of their courses. Institutional support challenges relate to how universities can foster entrepreneurship education through logistical support. The provision of institutional support will help both educators and students to realise potential gains in entrepreneurship education.

Methodological challenges.

Earlier on, academics bemoaned the lack of articulate theory in understanding entrepreneurial motivation and behaviour, but that phase has since passed as many authors have contributed immensely to entrepreneurship and small business management

(Hisrich, 1986). However, as observed by Kourilsky (1995), much of the impressive literature has a significant limitation in that it does not relate to pedagogical issues of entrepreneurship education. A key methodological difficulty in teaching entrepreneurship is the heavy dominance of opinion-based literature and small-sample generalisations. This type of literature often fails to accumulate knowledge beyond the experiences of individuals within specific contexts. Hisrich (1986), also argues that the biographical and autobiographical literature focused on the feelings and perceptions of both writers and entrepreneurs have been allowed to reign, thus bringing subjectivity that undermines the discipline. The overarching personal experiences captured in some of the literature have made entrepreneurship more of the person than an economic activity. Hills, cited in Welsch (2004) advances the notion that entrepreneurship as a new discipline has already evolved from its earliest focus on an 'entrepreneur personality characteristics school of thought' to a more holistic resources view of entrepreneurship, modelled as a process. The challenge for educators is to develop a knowledge body that rises beyond personal experiences. The subject content should embrace well-grounded skills and behaviour and mentalities that promote creative thinking (Locke,1998). Entrepreneurial learning should be distinguished from managerial learning to ensure a practical and problem-centred approach. Real business problems should be captured from practising entrepreneurs and students' projects to allow for experiential learning.

The lack of consensus on the definition and boundaries of entrepreneurship as a discipline, has culminated in variations of approach to its content from the general and simplistic (i.e how to do it), to the more abstract concepts. Bird (2004), argues that ineffective approaches in the teaching of entrepreneurship mainly emanate from failure to understand the scope and purpose of the discipline. He points out that educators often adopt core management textbooks and use management techniques derived from management curricula to optimise the use of time. Locke (1998), also warned that some educators may craft the course to meet their individual and faculty objectives and not those of students. While course objectives are primarily expressed within the context of the university council, senate and faculty boards, educators should seek a better understanding of educational needs of entrepreneurs to ensure that the requisite knowledge and skills are imparted.

Sexton and Smilor (1997), consider the overall aim of entrepreneurship education as a way of promoting economic growth and development through equipping students with an entrepreneurial mindset

and skills to meet challenges in the business environment. They identified the following to constitute broad objectives of entrepreneurship education:-

To work with minimal resources.

To wear many hats among several functional areas within a business

To appreciate and develop avenues for customer responsiveness and

To develop an overall enterprise-wide perspective for strategy development and problem-solving as opposed to a narrow functional perspective.

Naturally, entrepreneurs' desire to engage in formal entrepreneurial learning is reactive and tends to focus on problem solving (Sexton and Smilor, 1997). Bird (2004), considers entrepreneurship as a proactive learning process that seeks to quench students' intellectual curiosity and to broaden their understanding of business relating to the roles of entrepreneurs. They need to appreciate how entrepreneurs function under conditions of ambiguity, adversity and personal risk. The challenge faced in this dimension is a lack of actual business experience among university students. Vesper (1985), suggests that entrepreneurship programmes should embrace, as much as possible, practical aspects to expose students to materials and situations that match authentic entrepreneurship environments. Traditional lecture settings should be minimised and be replaced by action learning processes for students to gain entrepreneurial skills. What to teach, how to teach it and how to evaluate the skills, are areas of prime concern for educators. Some of the skills they will need are; evaluating business ideas, selecting viable business options, business planning, and coping with challenges of the small business environment. Kourilsky (1995), further points out that entrepreneurship education should be experimental or experience based. She asserts that entrepreneurial individuals are typically doers who span a broad range of intellectual abilities and can tolerate ambiguity engaging in non-linear as opposed to linear thinking. They learn well in environments that promote experimental learning- i.e. when instruction is experience-based, thus constituting a variation from traditional management education.

The lack of tangible profit possibilities by lecturers presents another pedagogical challenge and a disincentive in teaching entrepreneurship (Mayrhofer et al., 2005). Lack of personal experience in starting and running a business among those teaching entrepreneurship reduces the course to mere theory. Teaching from experience can provide the much needed credibility and motivation for students. Students will need a period of broader practical orientation and personal experiences that staff may not possess. To meet this challenge, Kourilsky (1995),

suggests that lecturers should be willing to disrupt their professional lines by seeking practical experience on the ground. If lecturers had personal experiences they would make it easier for students to understand business and to provide them with convincing evidence that surpasses classroom-based learning. Some critics however, observed that learning from experience can be limited in that; if experiences are accepted uncritically it would defeat the essence of learning (Bird, 2004). Contrary to earlier thoughts that educators needed to possess some entrepreneurial experience in order to teach the subject, Vesper's survey in the United States, indicated that previous experience as an entrepreneur was not essential to the teaching role, though it helped as practical exposition (Vesper, 1985). Vesper pointed out that entrepreneurship education should emphasise on skills the entrepreneur needs to successfully identify, launch and continue operating a venture.

The understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour or characteristics of entrepreneurs should help educators to craft appropriate approaches in teaching entrepreneurship. Researchers have tried to analyse the sociological and psychological factors that characterise entrepreneurs. These need to be considered in the learning process of university students. In the 1960s, David McClelland identified need achievement as the main driving force behind entrepreneurs. Such things as wealth, power, prestige, security and self-esteem, and service to society were identified as motives of an entrepreneur (Deakins and Freel, 2004). In the mid 1980s, Begely and Boyd, cited in Vesper (1985), using psychology as a base, identified five dimensions of entrepreneurial behaviour. Entrepreneurs were found to possess a high need for achievement. They tolerated and took moderate risks. They tolerated ambiguity and could make decisions with incomplete or unclear information. Finally, they were found to be self-confident and in control of their destiny, getting things done in less time and domineering. The challenge associated with these characteristics is to tolerate ambiguity when students assume the role of entrepreneurs during their course of study. An activity-oriented approach to learning will benefit students in knowledge and practice involving entrepreneurship in a practical way. Curran and Stanworth (1989) recommend the use of more flexible methods of instruction that simulate the real entrepreneurial environment and that places emphasis on experience-based learning. This approach will develop students' attitudes and values rather than accumulation of information.

Eden and Huxham cited in Clegg et. al., (1996), suggest the adoption of the following strategies to

ensure a close engagement with practical perspectives of entrepreneurship:-

Involving students in projects and consulting jobs on small entrepreneurs.

Involving students in regular extension work and field projects to develop venture plans.

Varying methods of teaching to include role play, case studies, visiting speakers, video clips, workshops and seminars.

Exposing students to journal articles and cases.

Inviting entrepreneurs to make presentations, to deliver motivational speeches and share their life experiences.

Eden and Huxham however, noted that a conflict may arise between the rigorous onslaught on theory, and practical dimensions of entrepreneurship. Practical dimensions of entrepreneurship and the body of literature should be aligned with the cognitive learning styles. Thus the success of entrepreneurship education rests on the ability of educators to develop a curriculum that integrates theory and practice to meet the entrepreneurial learning needs of students.

Challenges Relating To Institutional Support Framework

Vesper (1985), suggests that, while course methodologies and evaluation may differ greatly, implementation of entrepreneurship programmes should consider factors such as; the academic respectability of the subject, resistance to curriculum change by faculty, costs, class size, college policy, and faculty workload. These may be considered as some of the major challenges relating to institutional support framework.

Kent (1990), indicates that the success of entrepreneurship education at universities depends on the logistical support institutions provide and the characteristics of educators. The challenge is one of developing an entrepreneurship curriculum and to support entrepreneurial initiatives by both students and lecturers. A learning organisation approach is necessary in considering the framework within which institutions provide an environment for entrepreneurship education and to address challenges that emerge. This calls for institution's ability to learn, and apply conceptual changes and to integrate them in its curriculum. Kent et al., (1982), advocates that entrepreneurship programs should go beyond the domains of business management faculty to the sciences and arts. Commitment of resources and recruitment of motivated and well-trained teaching staff will help to make entrepreneurship education meet the roles and demands of entrepreneurs. Mayrhofer et al., (2005) proposes that universities might consider further staff development particularly in post graduate entrepreneurship courses.

Universities also need to come up with relevant support interventions in teaching entrepreneurship. To meet some of the challenges outlined above Kent (1990), suggested the following strategies that institutions could adopt:-

Providing funding for university-based student/staff-initiated ventures.

Establishing business incubators at universities.

Funding research-based interventions in small firm consultancy outreach services.

Changing policies and budgets for in faculty administration.

Establishing a business support centre for the university.

Creation of mutually beneficial relationship with industry and commerce that allows students to apply entrepreneurial skills.

Conclusion

Provision of entrepreneurship education is one way by which universities may align themselves with economic development needs of the country. Lessons drawn from developed nations indicate that entrepreneurship can be taught. A poor understanding of the concept and practice of entrepreneurship will lead to adoption of inappropriate curriculum and methodologies. By adopting a practical approach to entrepreneurship education, universities will realise wide-ranging applied research efforts that will contribute not only to the body of knowledge in entrepreneurship, but also to economic strategies and policy formulation in the development of the country. Equipped with the right aptitude and skills, students are likely to excel in tough economic environments both as entrepreneurs in established organisations and as entrepreneurs to create their own employment. There is however a need for an empirical research on the effectiveness of entrepreneurial learning from graduates -whether there is a difference between those who possess a degree in entrepreneurship, those who took it as a course or as a topic in management studies. Finally, as indicated by Bygrave et al., (2004), institutions cannot guarantee to produce a Bill Gates or any more than a physics professor can guarantee to produce an Albert Einstein.

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