



Elusive Search on the influence of Entrepreneurship Education in the Private Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa: A paradigm for developing students into innovative thinkers

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Abstract: *This paper examines the perception of Academic Managers in the private Higher Education Institutions of South Africa (SA) on the significance of entrepreneurship education. It identifies factors influencing the implementation of such an education. There were 78 private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in SA that were identified for participation in this study. These institutions are registered in terms section 54 (1) (c) of the South African Act (SAQA, 2012). Hence, the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) provided a sample frame of all the private HEIs in SA. From the 78 HEIs identified, 22 offered the pastoral courses and were excluded from the study. As a result, a target population of 56 HEIs participated in the study. This research has two objectives. That is, examining the perception of Academic Managers on entrepreneurship education, and the reasons for offering such education in the private HEIs in SA. The paper uncovers the need for entrepreneurship education in private HEIs of SA. The results present the value of entrepreneurship education as a practice that develops students into cross functional innovative thinkers. It provides valuable data relating to the significance of entrepreneurship education for developing students into business minded individuals. It also provides initial baseline data upon which to base future studies.*

Keywords - *Entrepreneurship Education, private Higher Education Institutions, South Africa, students as innovative thinkers*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of entrepreneurship as an academic field, a significant number of entrepreneurship courses have been introduced worldwide. There has also been growing diversity in the courses offered in terms of content and depth (Matlay, 2008). An assessment of the trend reveals that most entrepreneurship courses were offered in business schools but now there is a growing trend of offering them in non-business schools (Gerba, 2012) and such courses are included in the curriculum for teachers (European Commission (EU), 2011). This study aims to determine the perception of Academic Managers on the need for entrepreneurship education in the private HEIs of SA.

Generally, entrepreneurship education is needed to address a growing range of contemporary socio-economic and political challenges (Henry, Hill and Litch, 2005) and is therefore relevant for students in all disciplines. Studies on entrepreneurship education have focused on progress in entrepreneurship education (Vesper and Gartner, 1998), the status of entrepreneurship being taught to business students in the UK and USA, respectively (McKeown, Mullman and Sursani, 2006; Solomon, 2007), indicating the diversity of courses in terms of content and methods. Cheng, Chan and Mahmood (2009) assessed the state and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in Malaysia in terms of business and non-business studies. The study findings indicated a low level of understanding of entrepreneurship among students. Studies in the African context, including those by

Co and Mitchell (2006), Kabongo and Okpara (2010) and Gerba (2012) show that entrepreneurship education in Africa is at the development stage and is offered in business schools, with a few initiatives in non-business courses. The studies suggest the need to incorporate entrepreneurship education in all disciplines, to improve teaching and assessment methods and to enhance the capacity of academic staff involved in teaching entrepreneurship. Studies assessing the extent to which entrepreneurship courses are taught in non-business courses and particularly in schools of education, are lacking (Seikkula-Leino, Ruskovaara, Ikayalko, Mahila and Rytkola, 2010). Hence, this paper aims to evaluate the significance of entrepreneurship education in the private HEIs of SA. It seeks to determine if entrepreneurship education can positively motivate students towards an entrepreneurial career choice. Furthermore, it establishes the reasons for offering entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA.

According to the European Commission EU (2008), entrepreneurship education programmes have different objectives, such as, developing entrepreneurial awareness and motivation among students, training students in what is needed to set up a business and managing its growth and developing the entrepreneurial abilities needed to identify and exploit business opportunities. In reviewing entrepreneurship education objectives Mwasalwiba (2010) reached similar conclusions and that the courses train students in what is needed for job creation and contributes to society. The types of entrepreneurship education courses most offered in business schools are entrepreneurship (Co and Mitchell, 2006; McKeown et al., 2006), introduction to entrepreneurship and/or small business management (Kabongo and Okpara, 2010) and business planning (Sabokwigina, 2008). Other courses, as identified by Gerba (2012) includes

entrepreneurship development, entrepreneurship and agribusiness, rural entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship for engineers, microfinance and entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial economies, some of which are discipline specific. However, entrepreneurship education is defined quite narrowly as a rare breed of innovative system whose characteristics and activities leads to transformation of the education system (Smith and Petersen, 2006).

Research on entrepreneurship education among public university students were carried out by various authors (Menzies and Tatroff, 2006; Chenube, Saidu, Omumu and Omomoyesan, 2011). Little research has been carried out as to the entrepreneurship education as a paradigm for developing private HEI students into innovative thinkers in SA. In an attempt to redress this overlooked area, this paper is designed to seek the perception of Academic Managers in private HEIs of SA around the following objectives.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the perception of Academic Managers on the significance of entrepreneurship education as a paradigm for developing students into innovative thinkers.
- To explore the reasons for offering entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation of this paper presents a review on the concept of entrepreneurship; the attitude towards entrepreneurship education and the higher education discourse on entrepreneurship.

3.1 A Review on the concept of entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has become an everyday buzzword. Policymakers, economists, academics and even university students are talking about it. Seminars, conferences and workshops are organised every year across the world which emphasised on the importance of entrepreneurship to a country, society, as well as the individual development (Schaper and Volery 2004). For most people, the popularity of entrepreneurship is largely due to the positive effects it has on many countries as a catalyst that creates wealth and the generation of job opportunities (Gurol and Atsan, 2006).

Entrepreneurship contributes to economic growth and development in general, especially in higher income countries. Hence, the role of entrepreneurship seems to be growing, and some authors talk about the “entrepreneurial economy” (Nabi and Liñán, 2011:325) in Thurik, 2009. Entrepreneurship is a vital source for economic growth, economic competitiveness, job creation and the advancement of societal interests (European Commission, 2003; Nabi and Liñán, 2011). As a result, the important role and positive contribution of entrepreneurship and the promotion of a vigorous entrepreneurial culture in economic and particularly, social development in SA cannot be overstated. At the national level, SA is estimated to have approximately 2 million of small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs), representing 98% of the total number of businesses (Nicolaidis, 2011). Approximately 55% of the country’s labour force is employed by SMMEs and they contribute almost 42% to the country’s wage bill. A major problem for SA is that 87% of these SMMEs are survivalist in nature and the majority of these are black owned, while 41% are owned by women (the study on entrepreneurship, 2006) in Nicolaidis

(2011). In SA, the ratio of entrepreneurs to other workers is roughly 1 to 52. When compared to the ratio in developed countries, which is of 1 to 10 (Friedrich & Visser, 2005), this is indeed a poor ratio. Hence, this paper intends to establish if the lack of skills is the barrier to entrepreneurial success in SA. It determines if entrepreneurship education will inspire individual students to become entrepreneurs.

3.2 Attitude towards Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship is a process that happens over a period of time, and its first phase is an entrepreneurial attitude (Asenjo and Barberá, 2013). This attitude is the result of a way of thinking and behaving (personality), together with external variables (situational and social) and these form the basis of models to predict entrepreneurial behaviour (Krueger, Reilly and Carsrud, 2000). In recent years, curiosity on the subject has given rise to a rapid growth in research on the introduction of business creation as a specific area of studies, as well as the concern that entrepreneurial competence be taught systematically on degree courses, influencing the entrepreneurial attitude of university students (Sánchez, 2011; Fenton and Barry, 2014; Hattab, 2014). Hence, this study examines the attitude of Academic Managers in private HEIs on the influence of entrepreneurship education in SA.

Different models have been put forward to study entrepreneurial attitude, all of which identify the competences which move someone to set up a business: initiative, creativity, independence, amount of risk accepted, etc. (Urban, 2012). However, certain personality traits better equip someone to become an entrepreneur, and there is also an acknowledgement of the direct influence of

learning and developing other characteristics necessary to set up and develop a business, such as negotiation, communication skills, leadership, the ability to work in a team, etc. These are precisely the characteristics which have given rise to university-level programmes or subjects seeking to prepare the student both for work in a company and self-employment.

The concept of entrepreneurship in education is not solely established in the academia partially because of the variety of research paradigms applied to it that resisted a clear definition (Davidsson, 2004). The interest of this paper lies in entrepreneurship as a mindset and is understood to be a fundamental human feature. It is an aptitude that can be developed by anyone (Senges, 2007). Thus, the paper explores if entrepreneurship education can positively motivate students towards an entrepreneurial career choice. Whilst entrepreneurship is an intrinsically motivated practice (Senges, 2007), and entrepreneurship education is a breed of innovative system whose characteristics and activities leads to transformation of the education system; this study examine the significance of such education.

3.3 Higher education discourse in entrepreneurship – The SA perspective

It is apparent that the apartheid economic dispensation in SA provided higher education offerings which served the then needs of industry well, in that they made available a workforce that would be trapped, in a comfort zone, working for a 'boss' (Nicolaidis, 2011). The offshoot of such education was to instill within future university students the notion that one should graduate and then seek employment in large corporations or other such formal sector settings rather than opt for something innovative and creative as a work

option. Today, SMMEs in SA are accounting for a sizeable chunk of economic activity (Nicolaidis, 2011). However, education is seen as one of the most significant barriers to entrepreneurial activity (Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen, 2014). The result is that, HEIs are increasingly obliged to redefine their role in the SA economy. The primary function of HEIs should thus seek to instill a greater entrepreneurial character among students. HEIs should strive to carefully consider local development needs and support the promotion of entrepreneurial education initiatives, and this should not only be at the tertiary level but as early as the primary school level. Hence, this paper attempts to establish the perception of Academic Managers in private HEIs if entrepreneurship education should be taught at both school and Higher Education levels. The role of Higher Education is clearly to meet the socio-economic needs of the country whilst safeguarding social justice and democratic values. In addition, HEIs have an important role to play in regional innovation systems and, in what are termed as, the learning areas (Morgan, 1997). They also serve as knowledge producers, teach and are agents of change in a society (Etzkowitz, Gerhardt, Webster, Cantisano Terra, 2000). Training and development programmes should include views on and encourage entrepreneurship (Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen, 2014). Consequently, more faculties are required to offer entrepreneurship as a course or at least make it a greater part of existing courses where it does indeed exist (Nicolaidis, 2011).

There are a number of studies finding a positive attitude of university students towards enterprise and small business (Birdthistle, 2008). Dickson, Solomon and Weaver (2008) find that entrepreneurship education is related to individual aspiring to become an entrepreneur and closely

related to entrepreneurial success. Interestingly, Nabi and Liñán (2011) have investigated the moderating effect of higher education between personality and entrepreneurial intentions. Two of their key findings suggest that the students with a higher level of education tend to have higher entrepreneurial intentions, and that student's risk-taking propensity interacts with education, so that for higher risk-taking students, university education tends to increase entrepreneurial intentions even more. These two findings were amongst the variables for investigation on this paper, particularly on the context of private HEIs in SA.

The relationship between university education in general and entrepreneurship in specific, is not so strong and contested (Pittaway and Cope, 2007). However, most of these studies have been carried out in developed countries (Nabi and Liñán, 2011). Comparatively, few studies have been done on developing countries and these include studies by Jones, Jones, Packham and Miller (2008); Schwalb, Grosse and Simpson (1988), and Wu and Wu (2008). These papers have a common focus on analysing the role of higher education in helping develop new entrepreneurs. However, attempts to promote and implement entrepreneurship education in universities and other HEIs in developing countries have been considerably delayed, in comparison to developed countries. Consequently, SA needs to revamp its human capital strategies if it is to begin to meet the challenges of the global marketplace (Nicolaidis, 2011). An effective investment in national higher education initiatives concerning entrepreneurship which will meet the needs of the population, will underpin the international standing of SA's higher education institutions. Only by recognizing the great value and importance of entrepreneurship, and by expanding education about it, can SA hope to obtain a pre-eminent position in the world of

education and become truly competitive economically (Nicolaidis, 2011). In many societies in Africa, education has always played a very important role alongside culture in forming an individual (Micere, 1999). The cultural mindset concerning entrepreneurship in any region needs to be taken into account and the aspects which may either promote or go against entrepreneurship as a career option should be carefully analyzed. However, there are no acceptable paradigms or suitable theories as to what entrepreneurship education should encompass (Norton, Kaplan and Hofer, 1999). In many parts of the world, entrepreneurship is battling to find academic legitimacy. However, to produce students who are capable to deal with real entrepreneurial activity or to transform students' entrepreneurial competencies to practical way is closely centred on courses for entrepreneurship. While courses about entrepreneurship concerned with teaching entrepreneurship as a required subject in the syllabus via traditional methods (Gibb 2002(a)), the major challenge of entrepreneurship in relation to education is the appropriateness of curriculum and teaching methods in developing students' entrepreneurial competencies and skills (Garavan and O'Cinneide 1994). As a result, this study also explores the reasons for offering entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA.

4. METHODOLOGY

The method of this research will be discussed under the following headings, namely: the target population, data collection, findings and the implications of results.

4.1 Target population

The target population on which this study is based comprised of 78 private HEIs that were registered by the Department of Higher Education of SA. The

22 private HEIs that focus on pastoral courses were excluded from the study. As a result, only 56 private HEIs participated in the study.

4.2 Data collection method

Recruitment of respondents was undertaken with the aim of ensuring that all the 56 private HEIs participate in the study. As a result, the questionnaires were forwarded to the Academic Managers who represented their institutions in this study through the electronic mail. Similarly, the completed questionnaires were sent back to the

author via electronic mail. Forty one questionnaires were returned representing a 73.2 percent response rate, considered high compared with the norm for survey responses (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). The main reason for this high response rate was due to the invitation letter sent to all the private HEIs and consistently following up on the questionnaires through telephone calls.

4.3 Findings

- **Perception of Academic Managers on entrepreneurship education in SA:**

Table 1: Perception of Academic Managers on entrepreneurship education in SA

Perception on entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA	Percentage response accepting this perception
Lack of skills is the biggest barrier to entrepreneurial success	72.5
Entrepreneurship education inspires individual students to become entrepreneurs	65.0
Students with higher level of education tend to have higher entrepreneurial intentions	40.0
Entrepreneurship should be taught at both school and higher education levels	90.0
Risk-taking propensity on business interacts with education	45.0
Entrepreneurship education inspire students to be innovative	90.0
Entrepreneurial education can positively motivate students towards an entrepreneurial career choice	80.0
Entrepreneurship education is suitable to those individuals with high self-efficacy	75.0

The Academic Managers in private HEIs strongly believe in entrepreneurship education for SA. Critical factors as presented in Table 1 include issues relating to: entrepreneurship should be taught at both school and higher education levels; entrepreneurship education inspires students to be innovative; and entrepreneurial education can positively motivate students towards an entrepreneurial career choice. These factors have

bigger percentage ranges from 80 to 90 percent. Academic Managers have also indicated that: the lack of skills is the biggest barrier to entrepreneurial success; entrepreneurship education inspires individual students to become entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship education is suitable to those individuals with high self-efficacy.

- **Reasons for offering entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA:**

Table 2: Reasons for offering entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA

Reasons for offering entrepreneurship education in private HEIs in SA	Percentage response accepting the reasons
To promote innovative thinking	92.5
To assist students exploit business opportunities	87.5
To inspire students to become entrepreneurs	77.5
To enhance the innate entrepreneurial qualities in students	82.5
To develop entrepreneurial culture among young people	90.0
To contribute to job creation	95.0
To engage students on business start-up	87.5
To help reduce poverty	80.0

Table 2 provided high percentage response rates from Academic Managers in private HEIs on the reasons to offer entrepreneurship education in SA. The highest reasons that range from 80 to 95.5 percent include: to help reduce poverty; to enhance innate entrepreneurial qualities in students; to assist students exploit business opportunities; to engage students in business start-ups; to develop entrepreneurial culture among young people; to promote innovative thinking; and to contribute to job creation.

4.4 Implication of Results

During the course of the study, many issues relating to the implications of entrepreneurship education were presented. Entrepreneurship gives students a new way of looking at the world, irrespective of whether or not they opt to develop their own enterprises. The young entrepreneur faces many challenges in attempting to launch and grow potentially good businesses. Entrepreneurship education provides individuals with career options and has great potential to aid society to become self-sustaining.

Besides the achievement of these objectives, the following conclusions can be made:

- 1) Students with higher level of education tends to have higher entrepreneurial intentions
- 2) Entrepreneurship education provides viable alternative from working for someone else
- 3) Entrepreneurship education may reinforce students towards an entrepreneurial career choice.
- 4) Entrepreneurship education inspire individual students to become entrepreneurs

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