

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AT THE MIDLANDS
STATE UNIVERSITY IN THE MIDLANDS PROVINCE OF
ZIMBABWE**

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Abstract

This paper sought to explore the teaching of entrepreneurship at the Midlands State University. Through the use of convenience sampling data was collected from lecturers and students in the Midlands State University, Zimbabwe and analysed through content analysis. The findings from the research indicate that there is no alignment of the objectives with the audience, course content and the teaching methods. Recommendations were made for institution to use more of the non traditional methods of teaching which are more appropriate for educating for entrepreneurship.

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has been noted to be a panacea for solving graduate unemployment in Zimbabwe. In 2012 the Midlands State University took a decision to introduce entrepreneurship education to be a compulsory module for all university students. The decision was taken because statistics were indicating that the majority of students who graduated were not able to get jobs, so it was decided that they should be taught to be entrepreneurial through the introduction of a compulsory entrepreneurship module.

This paper seeks to explore entrepreneurship education at the Midlands State University and identify its objectives, the contents of the program and the teaching methods used. The paper is structured as follows. The existing literature to identify entrepreneurship education and its aims and objectives will be discussed including literature on the teaching/learning methods. The paper will go on further to discuss the methodology used in the research. Findings and policy recommendations will conclude the paper.

Literature Review

A number of authors have stated that there is considerable confusion on the definition of entrepreneurship education and one of the reasons attributed to this is the design of the entrepreneurship education programs is not explicit, thus leading to contextualization, implementation, monitoring and assessment problems. (Maritz and Brown, 2012)

Fayolle et al (2006:702) define entrepreneurship education as ‘any pedagogical program or process education for entrepreneurial attitudes and skills which involves developing personal qualities’

Gibb and Cotton (1998) assert that there is still a considerable confusion as to what constitutes entrepreneurship education. Others call it enterprise education, whilst other scholars refer to it as entrepreneurship education. Some literature has sought to distinguish it from traditional management studies. (Gibb 1999, Solomon et al 2002). The boundaries are blurred and it is usually associated with concepts such as work related learning (Dweryhouse 2001), action learning (Revans 1991, Jones-Evans et al 2000, Smith 2001), experiential learning (Kolb 1984) and entrepreneurial learning (Gibb1999; Rae 2000).

Objectives

Bridge et al 2010 have suggested three different roles of entrepreneurship education programs;

To learn to understand entrepreneurship (what do entrepreneurs do? What is entrepreneurship? Why are entrepreneurs needed?)

To learn to become entrepreneurial (I need to take responsibility for my learning career and life. How do I do it?)

To learn to become an entrepreneur. (Can I become an entrepreneur? How do I become an entrepreneur? How do I manage the business?)

It is noted that the first objective discusses the role of entrepreneurship in the economy and a general understanding of entrepreneurship. (Hytti and O’Gorman 2014). This comes in the form of interventions targeted at specific groups interested in entrepreneurship which is an awareness building to prepare people for entrepreneurial careers. Oakely et al (1998), state that providing individuals with alternative options for employment prepare them to become entrepreneurs later on in their careers.

Hytti and O’Gorman further on discuss the second objective which deals with individual taking responsibility in defining their career goals. They state that individuals need to take increased responsibility to continuously update their skills base as the working environment is changing to accommodate self employment, frequent movement between firms. (Mallon 1998, Templar and Cawsey 1999, Sullivan 1999).

The third objective looks at how start a business. This is implemented through experimenting with an idea by setting up a mini business in a controlled environment. This is meant to prepare individuals to be entrepreneurs and to learn to manage a new business. (Jack and Anderson 1999, Solomon et al 2002).

Audience

Several authors have stated that it is possible to group entrepreneurship programs in terms of their focus, level of education and target audience. (Kirby 2004, Finkle and Deeds 2001, Channey and Libecap 2000, Laukanen 2000). Kirby 2004 reviewed a little more than 200 entrepreneurship programs and concluded that their main focus was the following:

Programs that are for giving an orientation and awareness about entrepreneurship; programs that develop competences for new enterprise formation, self employment or economic self sufficiency and programs that focus on small business survival and growth.

Maritz and Brown (2012) stress the importance to understand the heterogeneity of the audience as participants have different learning needs. Fayolle and Gailly (2008) add that understanding the needs of the audience of a program will influence the objectives of the program.

Chen et al (1998) have concluded that university student researches have the advantage of access to large samples, however the results obtained raise a lot of concerns such as the fact that they are more concerned with passing the exam than acquiring skills to start a business. Also the length of the program is only a semester making it too short to have a lasting impact.

Bechard and Gregoire (2005), Fayolle and Gailly (2008), concur that understanding a programs audience requires an understanding of their background, social environment and psychological characteristics.

Content

It has been noted that there is extensive variation in the content of entrepreneurship education programs offered by different institutions. (Maritz et al 2011, Bran et al 2007, Henry et al 2003, Sexton and Bowman 1984) Fiet (2000) made a similar observation in his collection of 18 different entrepreneurship courses. The researcher found a total of 116 different topics. Bennet attributed these variations to the lack of a common definition of entrepreneurship and to the absence of a cohesive theoretical framework in entrepreneurship education.

Teaching/learning methods

Gibb (2005,2011) believes that the teaching methods used in entrepreneurship education should be based on the active involvement of learners what is called the learner centered approach. The researcher thus advocates for non-traditional teaching methods. Solomon (2007) notes that educational institutions have now moved to knowledge sharing where class discussions and guest speakers are more popular. Shepherd (2004) has identified a wide range of teaching methods such as role play, learning diaries, guest speakers, case studies and game simulations.

Methodology

The study employed convenience sampling of subjects. The research was carried out at the Midlands State University in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. A sample size of 100 participants consisting of mostly students and the lecturers was used.

Data collection and analysis

Self administered questionnaire were used as the primary method of collecting data. A pilot test was conducted to ensure the questionnaires validity and reliability. Data was processed through content analysis.

Empirical findings

Programme Objectives

The objectives for the entrepreneurship module are classified into pedagogical, social and economic goals. The pedagogical goals are to help potential entrepreneurs learn about entrepreneurship, while the social goals include the development of an entrepreneurship culture in the society. The economic goals include the creation of new ventures and jobs and these were crafted using the country's strategic document termed Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET).

Programme Audience

The audience for the programme was noted to be heterogeneous as there are seven different faculties in the university.

Course Content

The research noted that there is extensive variation in the content for the programme as the different lecturers pick on the different topics they assume would be appropriate for the students. However the main emphasis on the course content is to have students get a better understanding of entrepreneurship, so the topics taught include the following forms of business ownership, business planning and the regulatory environment.

Teaching methods

The research found that the traditional methods such as lectures and case studies were the most commonly used pedagogical tools, followed by study visits, guest speakers and group projects. The methods used were similar across all faculties. It was noted that the students were only interested in passing the examination rather than in learning to be entrepreneurial.

Recommendations with respect to program objectives

There is need for the objectives to be very clear as the ones stated are very broad and general and are not really to the intended outcomes. The objectives further seem to be focused on learning

about entrepreneurship rather than educating for entrepreneurship such that students are prepared to be entrepreneurial.

Recommendations with respect to audience

The heterogeneity of the audience implies that the teaching methods have to cater for a broad spectrum of disciplines, so that they have an appreciation of starting and managing a business.

Recommendations with respect to course content

The research noted that the course content was too basic to prepare students for entrepreneurship. It is recommended that the content be broadened in scope so that it includes both startup and management issues.

Recommendations with respect to teaching methods

There is need to use methods that involve students more than the traditional method, as this will expose the learners to be involved in the running of ventures, so that they appreciate it from a practical perspective rather than theoretically.

Conclusion

It is important that the teaching of entrepreneurship be aligned from the objectives, to the audience, course content and teaching methods so that it achieves its intended outcomes.

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