FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN SHAPING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the critical role of entrepreneurship education in cultivating and enhancing the entrepreneurial mindset among undergraduate students in South African universities. Globally, there is a shift and increasing recognition of entrepreneurial skills in preparing the students for the world of work. The study examined various pedagogical approaches, curriculum designs, and experiential learning methods employed in entrepreneurship education programmes. It further assessed their impact on shaping the entrepreneurial mindset of undergraduate students. In pursuit to achieving the study's goal, twenty participants who met the specified criteria (Entrepreneurship and Business-related module Lecturers) were sampled within the Faculty of Management Sciences, at the Durban University of Technology, across two campuses of Riverside and ML Sultan. Additionally, seventeen lecturing staff members, were purposefully selected to participate in the study, based on their experience. Qualitative analysis was conducted, aided by the software analysis NVIVO 10. was conducted to obtain rich, detailed, and complex accounts of the participants' experiences regarding entrepreneurial education and its practice, to further uncover trends, identify words with similar meanings, and displaying them through word clouds and tree maps. Thematic analysis involved organizing data into categories based on themes, concepts, or similar features. The findings of the study underscored the role of Entrepreneurial Education in preparing students for entrepreneurial journey, promotion of pathways to business start-ups, skills knowledge development to further encourage students to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours, enhancement and promotion of business plan development, the emphasis on self-job creation, as well as campus entrepreneurship whereby students are encouraged to sell items on campus, to indoctrinate the entrepreneurial culture.

INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly evolving educational landscape of the 21st century, the imperative that higher education extends beyond the traditional boundaries of academic knowledge. A paradigm shift is gaining traction, demanding that universities equip undergraduate students not only with theoretical understanding but, also with practical skills and an entrepreneurial mindset that can navigate the complexities of the dynamic global environment. Recognizing this demand, entrepreneurship education has emerged as a pivotal component of contemporary higher education, promising to cultivate the innovative and enterprising spirit necessary for success in diverse professional arenas.

The manuscript under investigation seeks to explore a comprehensive and critical role played by entrepreneurship education in fostering and enhancing the entrepreneurial mindset among undergraduate students within the university setting. As the world undergoes unprecedented transformations, characterized by technological advancements, including Artificial Intelligence, economic shifts, and social changes, there is an increasing recognition of the significance in instilling entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. The imperative to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities presented by this dynamic landscape has never been more pronounced.

Problem Statement: In contemporary higher education, there exists a pressing need to equip undergraduate students with not only academic knowledge but also the practical skills and entrepreneurial mindset necessary for success in an ever-changing global landscape. Recognizing this imperative, entrepreneurship education has gained prominence; however, there remains a gap in understanding the specific impact of these programmes in shaping the entrepreneurial spirit of undergraduate students. The manuscript in question seeks to address this gap by critically examining the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in instilling an entrepreneurial mindset and preparing students for the complex challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Objectives:

1. Investigate and analyse the various pedagogical approaches employed in entrepreneurship education programs at the undergraduate level.
2. Examine the existing entrepreneurship education curriculum designs and experiential learning methods implemented in universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review: The literature review will encompass a comprehensive examination of existing research and scholarly works related to entrepreneurship education and its influence on the entrepreneurial mindset of undergraduate students. Key areas of focus include:

The Evolution of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education has witnessed a transformative journey, evolving in response to societal, economic, and technological advances. In the early stages, entrepreneurship education primarily focused on imparting business skills. Over time, a paradigm shift occurred, emphasizing not only the technical aspects but also the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset. Notable milestones include the introduction of entrepreneurship courses in the mid-20th century, reflecting a shift from theoretical frameworks to practical application. The 21st century marked a significant turning point, with an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary aproaches and the integration of technology to bolster the expected results of entrepreneurial spirit amongst undergraduate students. Key paradigm shifts include a move towards experiential learning, collaborative projects, and a more inclusive definition of entrepreneurship that embraces social and environmental dimensions.

Categorisation of Education About, for and through Entrepreneurship

There is no consensus over the definition of entrepreneurship or regarding a suitable model for entrepreneurship education. Nevertheless, Jabeen et al. (2017) have tried to define what entrepreneurship education is: Entrepreneurship education is the set of activities aimed at developing enterprising or entrepreneurial people and cultivating their understanding and knowledge about entrepreneurship and enterprising. Unfortunately, even this definition does not resolve the debate on how entrepreneurship education should be carried out (Bauman and Lucy 2019). There is a difference between education about entrepreneurship and education for entrepreneurship. Education about entrepreneurship raises awareness about entrepreneurship while education for entrepreneurship teaches students about starting and carrying on a business (Rauch and Hulsink 2015; Botha and Bignotti 2017). The latter type of education emphasises a practice and action-oriented learning philosophy (Fellnhofer 2017a; Iwu et al. 2019: 3). Such education programmes promote knowledge and competencies that increase the likelihood of starting a business, identifying and stimulating entrepreneurial ambition and talent aimed at supporting the creation of new ventures. Understanding the difference between education about and education for entrepreneurship is helpful in the evaluation of education outcomes (Fidalgo-Blanco et al. 2018).

Teaching "through" means a process based and often experiential approach where students go through an actual entrepreneurial learning process. This approach depends on the wider definition of entrepreneurship and can be integrated into other subjects in general education, connecting entrepreneurial characteristics, processes and experiences to the core subject (Fulgence 2015; Armuna 2020). While "the about and for approaches are relevant primarily to a subset of students on secondary and higher levels of education, the embedded approach of teaching through entrepreneurship can be relevant to all students and on all levels of education" (Botha and Bignotti 2017: 1073). However, according to Fulgence (2015), some important challenges have been identified when trying to embed entrepreneurship into education this way, such as resource and time constraints, resistance from teachers, assessment challenges and cost implications.

It can be noted that curriculum design and delivery in entrepreneurship education is still being developed not only in South Africa but, the latter is taking place globally as well, posing uncertainty around suitable pedagogic practices, course scope and position within institutions. Ramchander (2019) postulates that there is no evaluation system in place to determine whether the teaching techniques used could accomplish the course objectives. To improve the entrepreneurship course design and delivery, Bauman and Lucy (2019) recommended practices such as the evaluation of teaching and assessment methodologies, curriculum development, increased usage of interactive teaching methods (role-playing and simulation) and the use of outside classroom methods (internships, small business consulting and community development).

Pedagogical Approaches in Entrepreneurship Education

1. The Origins of Entrepreneurship Education: entrepreneurship education has witnessed a transformative journey, in response to societal, economic, and technological modifications. In the early stages, entrepreneurship education primarily focused on imparting business skills that minimally prepared students with practical exposure to pursue their

entrepreneurial endeavours. Over time, a paradigm shift ensued, emphasizing not only the technical aspects but also the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset. Notable milestones included the introduction of entrepreneurship courses in the mid-20th century, reflecting a shift from theoretical frameworks to practical application. The 21st century marked a significant turning point, with an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and the integration of technology in advancing students' aspirations to become active entrepreneurs. Key paradigm shifts include a move towards experiential learning, collaborative projects, and a more inclusive definition of entrepreneurship that embraces social and environmental dimensions.

2. Pedagogical Approaches in Entrepreneurship Education: A diverse array of pedagogical approaches, characterises entrepreneurship education; each designed to engage students and foster an entrepreneurial mindset. Case studies, often rooted in real-world scenarios, offer students practical insights into the challenges and successes of entrepreneurs. Simulations provide a risk-free environment for experimenting with business strategies. Project-based learning integrates theory with practice, enabling students to apply entrepreneurial concepts to tangible projects. The effectiveness of these approaches varies based on the context, student demographics, and the nature of the entrepreneurship programme. Emerging trends suggest an increasing focus on interactive and collaborative methods, incorporating technology to simulate entrepreneurial scenarios in virtual environments, including the incorporation of the ever-growing demand for Artificial Intelligence.

Impact of Experiential Learning in Enhancing Entrepreneurial Endeavours

Impact of Experiential Learning: Student who take part in the experiential learning tend to exhibit and learn skills that are trickier teach under normal classroom settings, for example, working with peers and an urgent need and etiquette required by a specific profession. The practical experience gained solidifies students' confidence while they make pertinent decisions regarding their future career conduits. Furthermore, such programmes infuse practical skills and offer insights to students' future endeavours (Bradberry and De Maio, 2019).

In conclusion, the literature underscores the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship education, its evolving pedagogical landscape, and the transformative impact of experiential learning on shaping the entrepreneurial mindset of undergraduate students.

Understanding the historical origins of entrepreneurial aspirations, evaluating pedagogical approaches, and recognizing the profound influence of experiential learning are crucial for optimizing entrepreneurship education programmes. Similarly, the latter is capable to prepare students for the persistent challenges and opportunities presented by the 21st century demands. The next sections delves into empirical findings, drawing connections between these insights and the objectives of the study.

By addressing the objectives of the study, and conducting a thorough literature review, the paper aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform educators, policymakers, and researchers on how to optimize entrepreneurship education for undergraduate students and nurture the next generation of innovative and enterprising individuals.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) highlights the significance of observational learning, where individuals acquire knowledge and skills by observing others. In the context of entrepreneurship education, students are exposed to various entrepreneurial role models, successful entrepreneurs, and business leaders. Through observation decision-making processes, and strategies, students can internalise entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviours, and skills to be better equipped and prepared to pursue their entrepreneurial endeavours. For instance, witnessing the strategies adopted by entrepreneurs to overcome challenges, identify opportunities, and innovate can inspire students with valuable insights into the entrepreneurial journey.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) accentuates that individuals often imitate and model their behaviour after those they perceive as successful or competent. Within the realm of entrepreneurship education, students may emulate the behaviours and strategies demonstrated by successful entrepreneurs and mentors. By observing how entrepreneurs navigate uncertainties, take calculated risks, and demonstrate resilience, students can adopt similar approaches in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Modelling successful entrepreneurial behaviours not only provides students with practical guidance, but it also instills confidence in their own abilities to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.

The Theory adopted for this study, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), ~~also~~ further recogniszes the influence of peers in shaping behaviour and attitudes. In entrepreneurship education settings, students engage with peers who share similar interests and aspirations. Through peer interactions, discussions, and collaborative projects, students exchange ideas, share experiences, and provide mutual support. Peers serve as important sources of motivation, encouragement, and feedback, while fostering a supportive environment conducive to entrepreneurial learning and development. Additionally, peer networks can offer opportunities for collaboration, co-creation, and collective problem-solving, enhancing students' entrepreneurial skills and confidence.

The espoused theory (SCT) underscores the importance of hands-on experiences and feedback in learning and skill development. Entrepreneurship education often incorporates experiential learning approaches such as internships, start-up competitions, and entrepreneurial projects (REF). . Through hands-on experiences, students apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, confront challenges, and refine their entrepreneurial capabilities. Moreover, receiving constructive feedback from instructors, mentors, and peers enables students to reflect on their actions, identify areas for improvement, and iterate on their entrepreneurial strategies. This iterative process of learning from experience and feedback enhances students' self-efficacy and competence in entrepreneurship.

Social Cognitive Theory provides valuable insights into how entrepreneurship education influences undergraduate students' entrepreneurial spirit by emphasizing the role of observational learning, imitation, modelling, peer influence, hands-on experiences, and feedback. By leveraging these mechanisms, entrepreneurship education can effectively shape students' attitudes, behaviours, and skills, empowering them to embark on entrepreneurial ventures with confidence and resilience.

METHODOLOGY

This section delineates the methodology intended for conducting the research. Firstly, it discusses the philosophical paradigm adopted. Secondly, it elaborates on the methodological approach chosen. Thirdly, it outlines the methods for data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with considerations on reliability, validity, and ethical concerns.

In this study, the interpretive philosophical paradigm was utilized. The interpretative paradigm is deeply rooted in the realm of information systems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), positing that reality is shaped by human interpretation and influence on phenomena. Thus, understanding the phenomenon necessitates human representation. Consequently, the interpretive paradigm in this research aims to comprehend the phenomena in their reality from the perspective of involved participants (Myers & Avison, 2002), focusing on the impact of entrepreneurship education on shaping undergraduate students' entrepreneurial spirit.

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study as it facilitated obtaining an accurate account of participants in their natural environment. To justify the qualitative research study, a case study approach was chosen to generate an in-depth understanding of the complex issue in its real-life context (Myers & Avison, 2002). Given the research aim to investigate the critical role of entrepreneurship education in cultivating and enhancing the entrepreneurial mindset among undergraduate students, a case study methodology was most appropriate.

Data collection method is contingent upon the chosen philosophical paradigm, research approach, and methodology (REF). Thus, the data collection method aligns with the qualitative approach inherent in the Interpretative paradigm. Interviews were selected as the method for collecting data. The research participants consisted of teaching staff in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Durban University of Technology in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. These participants were selected on the basis of their extensive experience, allowing for more insightful data to be collected. The university was chosen due to its prominence as a leading University of Technology in South Africa. Twenty participants who met the specified criteria (Entrepreneurship and Business-related module Lecturers) were ~~chosen~~ sampled for one-on-one interviews in the faculty of Management Sciences, at the Durban University of Technology, across two campuses of Riverside and ML Sultan. Additionally, Seventeen lecturing staff members, were purposefully selected based on their module experience to participate in the study.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, enabling the researchers to obtain rich, detailed, and complex accounts of the participants' experiences regarding entrepreneurial education and its practice. Thematic analysis involved organizing data into categories based on themes, concepts, or similar features (Reilly and Jones 2017: 191). NVIVO 10 software aided in uncovering trends, identifying words with similar meanings, and displaying them through word clouds and tree maps. Cluster analysis revealed main themes and sub-themes, with emerging themes serving as categories or codes for analysis. An external data analyst, impartial and objective, collaborated closely with the researcher to identify prevalent themes, sub-themes, and relevant data excerpts.

Limitations

Due to the purposive sampling method and potential constraints such as time limitations or respondents' unwillingness to participate, it may have been possible that the sample was not be fully representative. Approximately 85% of the participants who agreed to participate completed the survey and engaged in individual interviews. The study focused on educators and students in Kwa-Zulu Natal, particularly final year students and teaching staff in the commercial stream or management department. Graduates, successful or unsuccessful entrepreneurs within the community, and a control group of students not involved in entrepreneurial education courses were not included, potentially limiting the breadth of valuable perspectives. Additionally, high school teachers were included in the same questionnaire as lecturers, although their experiences may have been different, warranting separate analysis.

FINDINGS

Word frequency analysis

Word frequency highlights frequently used words so as to create a graphical representation with approximately 1000 words in alphabetic sequence and different font sizes (May, Hunter and Jason 2017: 109). frequently occurring words from the data set are in Larger fonts illustrate higher frequency of words, not importance (Reilly and Jones 2017). Figure 1 displays the primary word cloud (word frequency analysis) arising from this study.

Figure 1
WORD FREQUENCY ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA AS PER NVIVO 10

The main words identified in the above word cloud include "business", "entrepreneurship", "students", "practical", "managing", "skills", "ideas", "plans" "entrepreneur" and "start".

Theme 1: Role of Entrepreneurial Education

The first theme delves into the fundamental aspects of entrepreneurship education and its contribution to fostering pathways toward business start-up while also modelling South African youths into entrepreneurs.

Promoting Pathways to Business Start-Up

This subtheme explores how entrepreneurial education facilitates a trajectory toward initiating and managing a business.

Skills and Knowledge Development

The primary data underscored the pivotal role of entrepreneurship education in nurturing skills and knowledge within Practical Interactive Learning (PIL) environments. This aspect garnered significant attention, emphasizing the importance of acquiring the following competencies:

Commencing and Sustaining a Business

A paramount aspect highlighted by respondents was the emphasis on imparting skills and knowledge necessary for initiating and maintaining a business. PILs actively cultivate entrepreneurship among students.

As expressed by Teacher respondent TVET-T3:

"We emphasize to our students the significance of embarking on their entrepreneurial journeys. We imbue them with an entrepreneurial mindset to underscore the importance of self-employment."

Teacher respondent TVET-T7 elucidated how TVET Colleges bolster business start-ups:

"Our approach promotes pathways by equipping learners with skills for commencing their own businesses and furnishing them with the requisite knowledge. However, there remains a persistent challenge in altering students' perceptions towards self-employment. The majority still leans towards traditional employment."

Teacher respondent UNIV-T1 highlighted:

"It inspires students to initiate small-scale enterprises on campus. While we have innovative students keen on entrepreneurship, spatial constraints on campus limit their endeavors. With adequate support and resources, we could significantly enhance our efforts in nurturing business start-ups."

Echoing this sentiment, Teacher respondent UOT-T1 emphasized:

"Entrepreneurship education equips students with indispensable skills for commencing and sustaining their ventures. Our institution actively fosters business start-ups and encourages student involvement in entrepreneurial initiatives."

These findings align with research conducted by May, Hunter, and Jason (2017: 109), who assert that entrepreneurship education fosters creative skills essential for supporting

innovation. Becoming a successful entrepreneur necessitates not only technical skills but also access to opportunities, capabilities, and resources. Moreover, leadership abilities are crucial for efficient business conduct and team management (Ismail, Sawang, and Zolin 2018: 172). Bauman and Lucy (2019: 3) regard skills development as a strategic management tool to navigate the evolving business landscape, particularly in a market emphasizing quality, price, and delivery speed over mass production.

Another crucial aspect highlighted by respondents was the emphasis on equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary for creating their business plans.

Business Plan Development

- Respondent TVET-T3 emphasized: *"We ensure all our first-year students are proficient in drafting comprehensive business plans as it's a fundamental aspect of entrepreneurship."*
- Similarly, Respondent TVET-T9 noted: *"The institution prioritizes teaching learners how to develop a business plan as part of their entrepreneurial education."*
- Echoing this sentiment, Respondent UNIV-T6 stated: *"We provide extensive guidance on drafting business plans as it's considered vital knowledge for aspiring entrepreneurs."*
- Additionally, Respondent UNIV-T9 highlighted: *"Drafting business plans is an integral part of our curriculum to prepare students for entrepreneurship."*

Teachers expressed confidence in their ability to instill entrepreneurial skills, with a business plan being recognized as a strategic tool. Gordon and Bursuc (2018: 135) suggest that a well-crafted business plan enables entrepreneurs to focus on specific steps necessary for their business ideas to thrive and achieve short- and long-term objectives.

Corporate Space Exploration

Exploring opportunities within the corporate space was identified as a strategy to create more job opportunities.

Leadership Development

Teacher respondent UNIV-T5 emphasized: *"We emphasize leadership skills, teaching students to organize and lead teams effectively."*

According to Gordon and Bursuc (2018), entrepreneurial leadership involves setting clear goals, empowering people, and fostering an organizational culture conducive to innovation.

Promotion of Self-Employment

Respondent UOT-T1 highlighted: *"Entrepreneurial education primarily focuses on promoting self-employment opportunities."*

The sentiment on promotion of self-employment aligns with Santos, Neumeyer, and Morris (2019:7), who assert that entrepreneurship education empowers individuals to start and grow their businesses, particularly in regions marked by income inequality and high unemployment rates.

Real-Life Exposure

Real-life exposure emerged as a highly prioritized theme, as the practical application of entrepreneurial skills in real-world settings is essential.

Campus Entrepreneurship

Encouraging students to sell items on campus was viewed as a means to foster real-life experience and entrepreneurial spirit.

Teacher respondent TVET-T1 affirmed: *"We actively encourage students to engage in on-campus sales to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset."*

The study underscores that entrepreneurship programs aim to prepare students for business ownership while addressing evolving needs such as employability. This aligns with Botha and Bignotti (2017), who emphasize the importance of understanding how students learn entrepreneurship in changing circumstances, reflecting the contemporary challenges of entrepreneurship education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurial Skills Development and Awareness amongst South African Youth

- Entrepreneurship students should actively seek opportunities to acquire and enhance their entrepreneurial skills.
- Universities are implored to actively engage students in entrepreneurial incubation dialogues and programmes within their structures.
- Continuous learning through various programmes will contribute to improved entrepreneurial competencies, ultimately benefiting the performance of growth-oriented businesses.
- Universities, including TVET Colleges are encouraged to gazette Entrepreneurial skills modules to be compulsory for all higher education curriculum
- Fully-Functional simulations laboratories established by Universities is recommended. This will assist in preparing students in hands-on projects that can be explored, with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence technologies

Government Support and Awareness

- Participation in skills development programmes offered by government agencies and institutions of higher learning is strongly encouraged in cultivating the culture of Entrepreneurship, thus, contributing to job creation and increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- In pursuit to achieving the Millenium Goals, the government is encouraged to sign Entrepreneurial skill into law for all students in South Africa, including lower levels of education.
- The government should play a proactive role in creating awareness of the support services available to student entrepreneurs.
- Targeted efforts should be made to inform potential entrepreneurs about available resources and support programs.
- Youth entrepreneurs should be made aware of the financial avenues to explore when starting up their businesses, this will also increase the appetite for the youth to venture into entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship ideas
- Financial Government-funded entities to host workshops and seminars on the available opportunities for youth
- Special attention should be given to equipping student entrepreneurs with the skills needed to become employment creators.

LIMITATIONS

1. Geographic Scope:

- The study focused exclusively on entrepreneurship university students in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.
- Caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to the entire country, as characteristics and challenges may vary across different regions.

2. Research Design Limitations:

- The use of a qualitative research design in this study may have inherent limitations.
- The findings should be interpreted with consideration for the specific design used, and future research employing diverse methodologies, aided by Artificial Intelligence may provide a more comprehensive understanding on the strategies that may be adopted by both individual students and universities to foster entrepreneurial endeavours.

Addressing these recommendations and acknowledging the limitations will contribute to a more robust understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurship students in South Africa, and enhance the potential for broader applicability of the findings.

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