

Theme 5: Quality Education for Socio-Economic Transformation

Integrating Practical Entrepreneurship Skills in Degree Curricula as a Basis for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

In today's job market, entrepreneurial skills are essential for professional success and sustainable development. This study examines the integration of practical entrepreneurship skills in degree curricula, considering globalisation and digital transformation. Using unstructured interviews, focus groups, and critical data reflection, the study identifies socio-economic and socio-cultural reasons for the relevance of this integration. data was analysed using Stata software for qualitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Majority of the respondents lacked creativity, initiative, self-efficacy and resilience, strategic planning, problem-solving, decision-making, transformational leadership, clear communication, teamwork and networking, and digital communication skills necessary for job creation. The study concludes that many learners lacked hands-on skills and confidence, and lecturers do not sufficiently expose learners to innovative activities. Strengthening human productivity by integrating practical entrepreneurship skill into the curriculum is essential for learner's live hood.

Keywords: Curriculum; Integrating entrepreneurial skills; Sustainable development

Introduction

Integrating entrepreneurship in education: Entrepreneurship education provides a comprehensive learning management for entrepreneur learners, helping them to establish correct values, enhance innovation, and integrate new knowledge to shape their innovative ability and personalities (Anderson, N., Potočnik, K., and Zhou, J. (2014).

Kuratko and Hodgetts. (2004), describe entrepreneurship as a dynamic process involving vision, change, and creation requiring energy, passion, risk-taking, teamwork, resource management, business planning, and opportunity utilisation. (Sánchez, 2011; Burgoyne, 1989; Kraiger et al., 1993; Fisher et al., 2008), argue that entrepreneurial education aims to develop competencies like knowledge, skills and attitudes affecting entrepreneurial performance

Klofsten. (2000) proposes three activities to stimulate entrepreneurship in universities: nurturing an entrepreneurial culture, providing distinctive programmes, and offering specific training for aspiring entrepreneurs. This involves equipping learners with entrepreneurial knowledge and real-world experiences.

Researchers claim that a learning-by-doing approach is essential for developing entrepreneurial skills. Interdisciplinary teamwork and interaction with external stakeholders are particularly effective (Schultz, C., 2022). Bagiatis, Saiti & Chletsos. (2020) argue that integrating entrepreneurship in education develops real-world skills, such as teamwork, public speaking, data analysis, social media advocacy, and problem-solving.

Mariam S, (2023) reports high unemployment rates among graduates, exacerbated by inadequate entrepreneurship programmes. According to Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2019), the unemployment rate in Uganda increased to 2.44 per cent in 2020 from 1.80 per cent in 2019, and in 2021, the unemployment rate increased by 0.2 percentage points, giving a total of the unemployment rate of 2.94 per cent in 2021 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

The aim of the study

To investigate the need for integrating practical entrepreneurship skills in all degree curricula at higher education institutions as a basis for sustainable development.

Objectives

1. To identify activities to nurture and sustain an enduring entrepreneurial culture at universities.
2. Investigate the challenges of integrating entrepreneurship skills in degree curricula.
3. Highlight success stories of graduates who acquired practical entrepreneurship skills.

Related Literature

Anti-colonial theory promoted the inclusion of indigenous cultural values in education, criticising modernity's dominance (Adyanga, 2014). It draws upon indigenous literature to achieve this. Dei (2002) argues the theory criticizes the adoption of modernity and global spaces by countries at the expense of tradition and culture. Proponents of this theory like Frantz Fanon, Mohandas Gandhi, Kwame Nkrumah, Mao Tso-Tung, and Leopold Senghor argue for integrating positive attributes of traditional education into contemporary curricula (Simmons and Dei, 2012), challenging colonial influences. The anti-colonial theory fits well with the study because it is about pre-colonial knowledge; it is an epistemology of the colonised and it is anchored in the indigenous sense of the collective and common colonial conscious (Dei, 2008). The theory questions the methodology through which curriculum in Africa is made and approved (Adyanga, 2014). It supports the idea of going back to indigenous education to identify and select the positive attributes of indigenous education for integration into contemporary curriculum. Therefore, it supports integration of indigenous social ethics into the EFC. The theory demonstrates that adoption of practical entrepreneurship skills is at the centre of developing a counter intervention to the epistemic injustices that occurred to African knowledge systems. They helped to understand the urgency in addressing the challenges facing university graduates and the traditional lived experiences, to frame the questions and the data analysis process during the study.

Methodology

The study aimed to investigate the need to integrate practical entrepreneurship skills into the curricula of all degree programmes at higher education institutions as a basis for sustainable development in Uganda.

A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable as it focuses on interpreting the perspectives and perceptions of the subject under investigation. The study employed a phenomenological research design within a constructivist paradigm to delve into the lived experiences and viewpoints of participants. Purposive sampling was utilised to select individuals who were competent in the study context. University Academic staff from the Education Foundations Department were chosen as participants due to their expertise in designing, implementing and evaluating curriculum goals and objectives. Twelve academic staff members and 200 learners from various universities across faculties in Uganda were contacted, all of whom consented to participate. The study employed three data collection methods in conjunction: focus group discussion, document analysis and personal interviews.

Focus group discussions facilitated, detailed and analytical exchanges among participants. Interviews helped in capturing specific perspectives of lecturers on the integration of practical entrepreneurship into curriculum in Uganda.

Additionally, a documentary analysis of official documents from the Education Foundations Department such as departmental curriculum, annual self-assessment reports, and programme/course structure, provided insight into the department's current practices. To ensure methodological rigour in both procedures and results, strategies like triangulation, selection of appropriate participants for credible data, and methodological coherence were employed. Triangulation involved using multiple data collection methods to verify information obtained from each method. Methodological coherence ensured alignment between research questions, methods, theory, and literature at every stage of the study's design and implementation.

Results

The following themes and their subthemes were distilled from data:

1. A Strong Advocacy for Integrating Practical Entrepreneurship in Degree Curriculum

Participants unanimously agreed that adopting a contextualised curriculum focused on equipping graduates with practical entrepreneurship skills in Ugandan universities was crucial. Some viewed the integration of practical entrepreneurship as a form of education that transcended mere academic learning. Participant 20 expressed,

“In this era, we have many learned individuals but very few truly educated ones. We should emphasize entrepreneurship workshops like “Harvest for Money” organised by Vision Group, under the guidance of entrepreneurship experts.” Participant 4 added:

“The environment in which learners live, study and operate is very key in determining what to teach. In situations where unemployment is very high due to scarcity of jobs on the job market, I believe it is time to tap into a kind of education that can address that societal problem. This definitely requires a review of curriculum to include practical entrepreneurship.”

Participants recognised a disconnect between the current curriculum emphasis and the societal educational needs. This discrepancy echoes Mart's (2011) assertion that African universities often fail to align with African contexts. Some participants acknowledged that there are many “learned but few educated” individuals, which highlights the inadequacy of contemporary education. Scholars have also emphasised the importance of incorporating diverse knowledge forms, particularly practical entrepreneurship skills (Adebisi, 2016; Grange, 2016; Heleta, 2016; Adyanga, 2014; De Carvalho and Florez-Florez, 2014), to produce graduates rooted in cultural contexts. Participants' responses underscored the and the benefits and necessity of integrating indigenous knowledge in the curriculum. This finding resonates with advocates of decolonisation and anti-colonial theory, who oppose epistemic colonialism and advocate for freeing Africans from various forms of imperialism— cognitive, linguistic, and social (Mbembe, 2016; Adebisi, 2016; Ndlovu, 2012; Dei, 2012; Dei, 2010). These scholars along with others worldwide (De Carvalho and Florez-Florez, 2014; Mignolo, 2010; Smith, 1999) strive for an inclusive curriculum that recovers specific knowledge systems capable of influencing social phenomena in their respective regions.

1.1 Success stories of university graduates gone through entrepreneurship workshops

Illustrating the benefits of integrating practical entrepreneurship into the degree curriculum, participants strongly argued that possession of creditable amounts of entrepreneurship knowledge significantly influence employee's work behaviour across various professions. They acknowledged the link between adherence to higher professional standards and entrepreneurship skills as a means of enhancing income generation.

Participant 3 emphasises the importance of practical entrepreneurship in cultivating professional behaviour:

“Practical entrepreneurship is so vital in aligning one’s behaviour to societal expectations and they are a bedrock in uplifting standards of living in a particular community. The sooner we integrate such knowledges into the curriculum, the better it would be for our country.”

Participant 6 echoed this sentiment:

“If Uganda had earlier embedded those indigenous elements into the curriculum, we should have minimized the mess we are witnessing in all sectors of society, education inclusive. This mess is the result of ignoring indigenous social principles that guided social and professional behaviour. Many people have the techniques and art of performing their professional duties, but they fail because their character and attitudes do not support their competencies.”

“Thus, it can be inferred that knowledge of professional codes of conduct and social ethics complement each other in contributing to social order. Additionally, the proposal to merge practical entrepreneurship with existing university curriculum components aims to address the social ethics gap while promoting an African educational model that blends diverse skills and knowledge beneficial to humanity. 2. Challenges of integrating practical entrepreneurship into the curriculum”

The study revealed that all participants recognised the benefits of integrating practical entrepreneurship into the university curricula. Despite lecturers having the responsibility of designing and reviewing curricula, they face challenges in integrating practical entrepreneurship into departmental curriculum. They cited various challenges such as:

2.1. Inadequate resources to support the programme

Some participants felt that due to numerous requirements, their institutions lacked sufficient resources to support the programme. Integrating practical entrepreneurship necessitate involving entrepreneurship experts and accommodating diverse cultural and social ethics, and values, making it challenging to feasibly incorporate it into the curriculum. Participant 2 raised a concern: “Who will meet the cost, is it the institutions or the students?”

Participants expressed apprehension regarding the logistical complexities associated with representing the broad diversity inherent in a more localised approach to practical entrepreneurship would entail. Despite initiatives like Vision Group’s ‘Harvest for Money’ program over the past decade aimed at enhancing practical entrepreneurship knowledge among Ugandans, many individuals remain excluded. While participants acknowledged the benefits of integrating practical entrepreneurship, they expressed genuine concerns about ensuring inclusivity.

It is evident from the data that there is a lack of consensus on which kind of entrepreneurship knowledge should be included in or excluded from the curriculum. Many unanswered questions need resolution before engaging in a curriculum review favouring indigenous knowledge integration. Lecturers admitted to lacking comprehensive knowledge of practical entrepreneurship themselves. Despite acknowledging its importance, they were hesitant to include it in their teaching practice and curricula. This limited understanding negatively impact their ability to implement what they deemed essential.

Responses like those shared revealed that lecturers require further education on practical entrepreneurship. Acknowledging their lack of practical entrepreneurship knowledge indicates a need for lecturers to receive training in these areas to effectively deliver the same knowledge to learners. Previous studies by Seehawer. (2018), Drinkwater. (2014), and Sayed et al. (2017), have also highlighted this challenge in academic research.

It appears that academics are being tasked with introducing concepts they were not exposed to during their training.

2.2. Negative attitudes and feelings about practical entrepreneurship

Some participants expressed reservations about embracing curriculum localisation despite acknowledging its desirability. To some, integrating practical entrepreneurship was viewed as unsustainable. They perceived it as a costly endeavour, arguing that Uganda's poor economy could not sustain such an initiative. Participant 6 remarked:

“While including our own ethics and knowledge in the curriculum is commendable, how can we eliminate Eurocentric educational approaches when the government struggles to finance education sustainably? Uganda heavily relies on donor funds, making it risky to abandon Eurocentric epistemologies at this juncture.”

3. Perceived role of systemic/regulatory frameworks in the practical entrepreneurship integration process

Participants emphasised the significance of higher education regulatory bodies in facilitating the integration of practical entrepreneurship skills. However, conflicting views emerged whether these bodies constrained lecturers' academic autonomy. Some lecturers expressed uncertainty about integrating practical entrepreneurship into the curricula due to concerns about accreditation standards set by regulatory bodies like the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). They questioned how accreditation requirements could be met if deviations from norms occurred without clear guidelines for integrating practical entrepreneurship.

Participants seemed unsure about their autonomy in curriculum design and whether NCHE imposed limitations on this aspect. These uncertainties posed challenges to integrating practical entrepreneurship into curricula. Consultation with the NCHE Quality Assurance Framework for Universities revealed discrepancies between participants' perceptions and NCHE guidelines. Participants assumed that NCHE provided strict guidelines for curriculum development and standardized qualifications across universities. However, NCHE actually offers minimum standards that institutions can build upon based on their visions, missions, and unique characteristics.

The excerpt from NCHE guidelines emphasises autonomy and academic freedom in curriculum design, indicating that lecturers have the freedom to expand on minimum standards without the interference from NCHE. This departure from general guidelines during curriculum design may impact the effectiveness of planning and implementation.

4. Success stories of those who acquired practical entrepreneurship skills in academic institutions

A sample survey of 80 learners selected from a pool of 187 graduates from the Faculty of Business and Management, where practical entrepreneurship is emphasised, revealed that 60% of them had initiated their own ventures. Furthermore, it was evident that even those who secured formal employment were capable of running their individual income-generating projects. The implementation of entrepreneurship workshops in certain universities has significantly impacted the livelihoods of those who have undergone this training.

Conclusion

The study revealed lecturers' perspectives on integrating practical entrepreneurship into university curricula. They advocate for the practical entrepreneurship, aiming to enhance upskilling of Ugandan graduates and combat poverty. They emphasise that practical entrepreneurship remains a crucial pillar in Ugandan society.

Recommendations

There is a need for universities to consistently provide academic staff with the necessary knowledge, particularly understanding the important of actions and how to execute them effectively. It is important to enhance human productivity by integrating practical entrepreneurship skill as a means to improve learners' livelihoods. Furthermore, universities should revise their curriculum by including a practical component in each semester to enhance the educational value for all.

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