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Rationalising the introduction of entrepreneurship education in Gabon

Abstract

The paper reports the findings of a study that investigated the need for entrepreneurship education in Gabonese schools. Gabon is facing problems such as high rate of poverty, youth and graduate unemployment and overdependence on the government for basic needs. This study therefore stresses the importance of entrepreneurship education as a means to assist in developing the Gabonese economy by equipping learners with entrepreneurial skills, which will likely free them from depending on the government. Participants in this study included learners, teachers and a government official representing the Ministry of Education. For data collection, the study made use of interviews and self-administered questionnaires, which assisted in obtaining a more comprehensive picture of the problem at hand. Microsoft Excel was used for data analysis because it was easy to use, and also allowed the researchers to create graphs for easy understanding of the analysis. While the findings suggest that there is a yearning for entrepreneurship education in Gabonese schools, there was also ample evidence that there is a necessity for teachers to be trained in entrepreneurship. Although previous studies have produced almost similar results, this study is unique in that it is the very first of its kind to be focused on Gabon; principally Libreville.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, teachers training, secondary schools, curriculum design, Gabon.

JEL Classification: I250, O150.

Introduction

Most studies have considered entrepreneurship as a potential force that can positively influence the economic environment (Kritikos, 2014; Liñán & Fernandez-Serrano, 2014). Originally from the French word '*entreprendre*' (Raman, Anantharaman & Ramanathan, 2013, p. 16), entrepreneurship is important because the individual is able to create jobs and wealth while bringing innovation to the market (Henrekson & Sanandaji, 2014, p. 1760). Despite the fact that there have been some uncertainties regarding whether or not entrepreneurship can be taught (Henry, Hill, & Leitch, 2005), Marques and Albuquerque (2012) found that it has been taught at university level for the past sixty years and academic entrepreneurship is now being considered (Siegel & Wright, 2015).

According to Fayolle (2013, p. 292), entrepreneurship education is a hot topic on the political agenda. This is mainly due to the fact that it is believed that entrepreneurship education encourages venture creation and as a result, contributes to economic growth and development (Gerba, 2012, p. 227). Because education is a key to shaping young people's atti-

tudes, skills and culture, it is vital that entrepreneurship education is addressed from an early age (EC, 2012, p. 5). Unemployment is a rampant challenge in many communities and as such most people seeking employment depend on entrepreneurs to embark on new ventures and hire them (Lekoko, Rankhumise & Ras, 2012, pp. 12-25), hence the importance of entrepreneurship education. In Uganda, the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004-2015 report observed that children and students from primary and post-primary levels were not acquiring the skills and knowledge they needed for either the world of work or further studies from their schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2004). For this reason, there was a need for curriculum re-conception. As a result, entrepreneurship skills education was introduced in Ugandan primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions in 2003, as one of the curriculum innovations, to make education responsive to the needs of society; specifically eradicating poverty and unemployment (Jimmy, Stephen & Richard, 2014, p. 204). In this context, it is important to understand the needs of the Gabonese society when it comes to poverty and unemployment. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the necessity of entrepreneurship education in the Gabonese secondary education curriculum. This was done by means of a mixed methods approach involving three high schools in Libreville, the capital city of Gabon.

1. Literature review

1.1. The concept of entrepreneurship education. Considering Vesper's (1997, p. 406) account of the history of entrepreneurship, it is interesting to learn that the Harvard Business School introduced courses

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in entrepreneurship education in 1945. Since then, the world has been positively impacted by the entrepreneurial ingenuity of people such as Bill Gates of Microsoft, Steve Jobs of Apple, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, Yunus Mohammed of Grameen Bank and several other renowned entrepreneurs. While it is debatable whether these entrepreneurs benefitted from entrepreneurship education, it is quite clear that entrepreneurship precipitates employment generation, assists with the growth of the economy and the overall promotion of sustainable economic growth and development in a number of nations (Raimi & Towobola, 2011). The question that however begs an answer is whether entrepreneurship should be taught. We are however consoled by the findings of previous studies which found a significant relationship between entrepreneurship education and intention to pursue entrepreneurship. According to Maina (2014), it is yet to be proven that entrepreneurship training does not guarantee success; thus entrepreneurship education is still considered as a significant tool to increase the probabilities of success in the business environment. Its benefits have been celebrated by researchers and educators (Karimi, Biemans, Lans, Mulder, & Chizari, 2012). In fact, quite recently, Jimmy, Stephen and Richard (2014, p. 203), found that the minds of educationists world over have been preoccupied by the need to adjust the education system so as to be responsive to the needs of the learner and the society as a whole. This adjustment no doubt has significant implications for entrepreneurship education considering that entrepreneurship education has been reflected as an actual approach to deal with unemployment.

1.2. Theoretical links: theory of planned behavior and self-efficacy theory. The theory of planned behavior (TPB), introduced by Icek Ajzen in 1985 is a theory that recommends that behaviors are subjective to intentions and that behavioral intentions are influenced by three components namely 'attitude toward the behavior', 'subjective norm' and 'perceived behavioral control' (Kim, Njite & Hancer, 2013, p. 256). Another theoretical framework that guided this study was Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977). This framework has been applied by various researchers in several disciplines including educational psychology and organizational development (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Nilsen, 2009). Self-efficacy refers to "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (Bandura, 1977). Bandura asserts that motivation is primarily concerned with activation and consistency of behavior. For instance, if learners perceive entrepreneurship as a likely vehicle for self-employment they are more likely to modify their behavior to consider entrepreneurship education as a necessity in their curriculum as well as worthy of practice. Therefore self-efficacy theory (SET) can be used

to explain an individual's self-confidence to perform a particular behavior in any circumstance (Lee, Kuo, Fanaw, Perng & Juang, 2012, p. 915).

The theory of planned behavior and the self-efficacy theory are two theories that can help understand how the knowledge of entrepreneurship can empower the educational system in Gabon and assist decision makers plan better. Following Ajzen's logic we can assume that if learners are taught entrepreneurship education in schools with the right environment and knowledgeable teachers in the field, without forgetting the intent to succeed, they will definitely do well. That means that their behaviors towards business will be affected positively. This will then influence their self-efficacy or sense of confidence in their ability to perform in business in general as explained by Lee, Kuo, Fanaw, Perng and Juang (2012, p. 915).

1.3. Advantages of entrepreneurship education in secondary schools. One of the objectives of entrepreneurship education is to improve learners' knowledge and business skills (Udoye & Ndum, 2014). According to Ogundipe, Kosile, Olaleye, Ogundipe and Olatunde (2012) once an individual acquires entrepreneurial abilities he or she can engage in an entrepreneurial activity. It is suggested that entrepreneurship education in high school has a pronounced influence on learners and their desire to start a business after graduation (Rodrigues, Dinis, do Paço, Ferreira & Raposo, 2012). This is against the common understanding that entrepreneurship education empowers learners to become innovative and as a result transform them into responsible individuals for their future careers (Dehghanpour, 2013). Therefore, entrepreneurship education can have a positive effect on the future of the youth as well as school leavers/graduates to compete within the business world.

1.4. Youth unemployment in Gabon. Youth unemployment can be defined within the context of a group of young people with diverse experience or education, ready and capable to work, but cannot find any job (Okafor, 2011). In Gabon, accurate and up to date unemployment rates are difficult to access. However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a recent report stated that unemployment and poverty in Gabon are still on the increase regardless of the vast natural resources (such as oil), which the country massively relies on (Ndiho, 2013). On the basis of this, we can argue that youth unemployment and poverty are high and widespread in Gabon, hence the need for entrepreneurship education. Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010, p. 831) attest that a nation's level of unemployment can serve as a parameter for gauging the status of health of the nation's economy. Gabon's youth unem-

ployment level is worrying and if the country's graduates remain unemployed, it presents a bad image to the country. Therefore if nothing is done regarding this issue, the country's economic status will keep on deteriorating. When it is difficult for graduates to be gainfully employed in the formal sector, a few of them engage in informal employment and end up being underemployed (Echebiri, 2005; Onah, 2001). This is the case for the young Gabonese as well.

2. Methodology

Data were collected in three selected schools in Libreville where entrepreneurship education is not taught. This study adopted a mixed method approach in collecting data. Quantitative method allows for the collection of data from a large population and for this study a total of 150 questionnaires were administered, but only 111 questionnaires were returned confirming a response rate of 74%. Qualitative methods allow for deeper insight into a phenomenon. To ensure learners' participation, the researchers randomly chose fifty grade 12 learners from the different schools. Purposive sampling method was employed in order to collect qualitative data. Other participants in this exercise included principals, teachers and a government official.

SPSS is quite popular for rigorous statistical analysis and is mostly preferred by many researchers (Jones, 2007). However, the program is not that user friendly (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2014) and moreover the study was basically descriptive in nature and will not require the expediency of a statistical program such as SPSS. Having said this, the researchers chose instead Microsoft Excel to analyze the quantitative data as it was easy to use, and also

allowed the researchers to create graphs to analyze information (Niglas, 2007).

The researchers made use of codes, categorization and themes in the analysis of qualitative data. To confirm the findings from coding and categorizing, wordle, a practical and useful research tool for qualitative analysis (McNaught & Lam, 2010) was used. Wordle is counted among the numerous online tools available for qualitative data analysis. Word cloud is an image of text where the more a word is used in the interview the bigger it appears on the image (McNaught & Lam, 2010).

3. Results

The Figure below shows the learners' views on their skills regarding job creation. 34 (30.63%) learners thought they had the necessary skills to start a business at that point of their education while 77 (69.37%) learners thought otherwise.

The results display how much learners know about entrepreneurship education. While we notice that the majority do not know much about the subject, another important fact is that the disparity between those who thought they had the necessary skills and those who do not have is quite big (43 learners). The interesting thing about this finding is the confidence with which the 34 learners indicated their 'ability' to conduct business. One wonders whether this show of confidence is based on their familiarity with the business world (either from family member) or could it be that the lessons learnt in school are empowering enough. However one looks at this finding, it generally implies that there is perhaps much more to do in order to popularize entrepreneurship education in Gabonese schools.

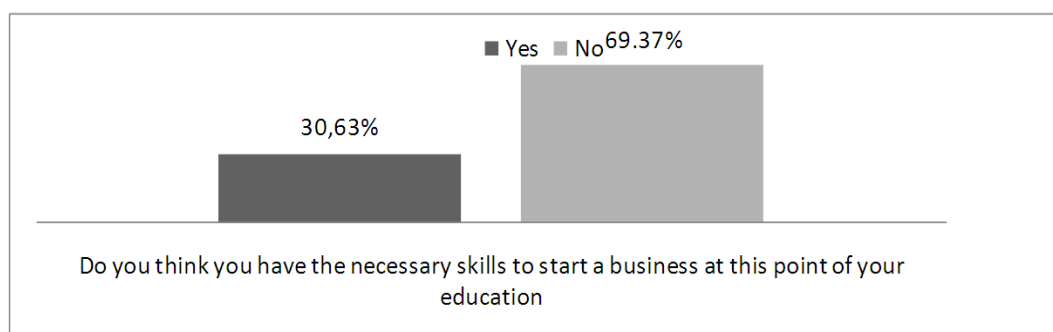


Fig. 1. Learners' views regarding their skills to start a business

Figure 2 below depicts the views of learners regarding the necessity of entrepreneurship education in schools. 87 (78.38%) said 'yes it is necessary to study entrepreneurship' while 24 (21.62%) learners said it is not necessary. This finding reveals the interest of learners in business in general

and in entrepreneurship education in particular. Here, the majority considers entrepreneurship education necessary. Therefore decision makers in education can rely on this finding to contemplate the idea of implementing entrepreneurship education in schools.

simply because they do not have the basic skills in entrepreneurship. This finding is relevant because it shows that entrepreneurship is not taught in Gabonese schools. Most of the participants (77.48%) agreed that it would be a good idea for entrepreneurship education to be part of school curriculum. An interesting percentage of participants (78.38%) found it necessary to study entrepreneurship. A few studies have reported that the earlier an adolescent is interested in a certain vocation and has aspirations toward that specific career the more he/she is likely to engage in it later on (Trice & McClellan, 1993; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Schoon, 2001). We then consider that if secondary school learners understand and consider it essential for entrepreneurship education to be taught, that means they have a certain desire to become entrepreneurs or simply engage in business. With regard to this, entrepreneurship education can and should be taught at secondary school (Brown, 2000). Moreover, we discover that not only learners want to be taught entrepreneurship but teachers, principals and government official also thought of it as necessary (Figure 4). It appears that the schools' administration understand that teaching entrepreneurship education to secondary school learners is a plus to the economy because it empowers young minds with skills which will allow them to create employment and grow the Gabonese economy. Therefore, following the theory of planned behavior, for entrepreneurship education to be implemented in Gabonese schools and having learner's motivations and interest captivated, learners must be willing to learn (Figure 3); the government must be willing to implement the project and invest in it. Regarding those who are not that positive about entrepreneurship education, they might be influenced by motivated and trained teachers as well as peers (Ajzen, 1991).

It is recommended, among others that either a new curriculum is designed for Gabonese schools, in order to include entrepreneurship education or an entrepreneurship education school on its own is

established to train those interested in developing their entrepreneurial skills. It is also recommended that teachers should be trained so that the implementation of entrepreneurship education in schools can be realised. Without teachers training in entrepreneurship, it may be problematic to realize this goal.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to highlight the significance of implementing entrepreneurship education in the Gabonese schools. Though argued in the past, it is nowadays believed that entrepreneurship can be taught. After a long struggle in finding the link between school and work (as in how to apply what is learnt in school at work), entrepreneurship education was introduced in school (Fayolle & Klandt, 2006; Cheung, 2008). This study is a call to consider empowering Gabonese secondary school learners with entrepreneurial skills. Introducing entrepreneurship in Gabonese schools will stir up the entrepreneurial side of some learners while equipping them with the necessary skills to not only open a business but also to enjoy a healthy career in the future. The apparent interest in entrepreneurship by learners, the rampant growth of entrepreneurship education worldwide and the benefits of entrepreneurship education are enough to encourage the Gabonese authorities to introduce entrepreneurship education in school. An earlier exposure to entrepreneurship education might assist in reducing the rate of unemployment amongst the youth. Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. Though there is mention of school leavers in the study regarding the benefits of entrepreneurship education, by the time data were collected, only registered learners participated in the study. Secondly, Microsoft Excel was used against commonly used and recognized statistical tools such as SPSS. In another paper, one may want to include school leavers as participants. Also, instead of including entrepreneurship education into an already designed curriculum, the possibility of an entrepreneurial school should be looked at.

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