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## Empowerment of the Graduates through an Entrepreneurial Approach in the Educational Curriculum

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### **Abstract :**

*This study aimed to evaluate the empowerment of the graduates through an entrepreneurial approach in the educational curriculum. The study was conducted from December 2021 to March 2022 and is based on information collected from both primary and secondary sources. The sample for this study is taken from lecturers and students at Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. The study adopted a simple random sampling technique to select a sample of 200 respondents. The students distributed two hundred questionnaires, but only 195 were returned. Primary data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. Collected data were analyzed and presented in the form of tables, pie charts, and graphs. Findings of this study revealed that the study found that opportunity recognition, independence, and pitching of business ideas were the top items in the module content that inspired the intention to start an enterprise among undergraduate students. The study adds value to curriculum development by identifying entrepreneurship course content that increases the desire to be independent and shifts students' focus from a job seeker to a career and enterprise development orientation. Therefore, practical activities are recommended for stimulating entrepreneurial intentions among students rather than theoretical learning approaches such as telling success stories and sharing videos. The study was limited in that it included respondents from Midlands State University.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, entrepreneurial approach

### **1. Introduction**

Tertiary institutes have a significant role in developing human capital and ensuring the production of highly competent and skilled individuals that are creative problem solvers of the challenges we face in today's dynamic and forever-changing environment. According to Lackeus (2015), 'the idea of infusing entrepreneurship into education has spurred much enthusiasm in the last few decades.' This is primarily because of the constantly escalating levels of unemployment amongst graduates in most African countries, which has been a significant concern as thousands of university graduates join the struggle of searching for employment. The number increases each year and is exacerbated by the increased number of tertiary institutes mushrooming in the country. Akpan and Etor (2013) suggest that introducing entrepreneurship into the curriculum is an empowerment strategy for graduates to eradicate poverty and shift their mind-set from seeking formal employment to creating solutions for their problems. This paper focuses on accessing students' perceptions of an entrepreneurial approach in the educational curriculum.

#### **1.1. Problem Statement**

Employment opportunities are shrinking daily, as significantly noted by over 90% of the graduates being unemployed. Zvinoira (2020), supported by the British Council, notes that only 24% of youths, that is, people in the age group between 18-35, are formally employed, and more youths, especially in Africa, believe in formal employment instead of creating employment themselves. According to Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstat), the informal sector dominates, with 2.2 million or 76 percent of the 2.9 million earning a living within the informal sector. On realising the

inability to contain the graduates, the government, through the ministry of Small to medium enterprises, introduced policies for a university to include entrepreneurial courses in the curriculum to curb unemployment (Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises Document, 2004). However, this has created many problems for Zimbabwe as we see high rates of young people migrating to other countries leaving Zimbabwe with less experienced young graduates. Despite government initiatives, unemployment rates continue to mushroom. According to Ibrahim forum report (2019), 70% of the sub-Saharan migrants stay within the continent, while only one out of four migrates to Europe. This migration is simply a result of the high levels of dissatisfaction with initiatives done by the government in employment creation. This is supported by Africa's Development Dynamics (2018) as they note that 'the continental trend is one of resilient but jobless growths.' A high level of ignorance regarding employment creation through entrepreneurial initiatives has been portrayed.

### 1.2. Research Objectives

- To find the role of entrepreneurial skills through entrepreneurship curriculum in changing student perceptions about life after graduation.
- To find out the role of the entrepreneurial course in instilling confidence towards entrepreneurial projects, ventures, or activities.
- To establish strategies to enhance confidence towards entrepreneurial curriculum.
- To establish the constraints to effective entrepreneurship education curriculum contents delivery at Midlands State University.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Entrepreneurship

Studies reveal that there is no one universal way of defining entrepreneurship as they are diverse perspectives ranging from an economic, behaviourist that is psychological, social, and innovative, amongst many others. Entrepreneurship has existed for a relatively long time and has evolved with time because of diverse opinions emerging with time. Nagarajan (2011) posits that the roots of the word entrepreneurship can be traced back to France by authors such as Richard Cantillon, who derived the meaning of entrepreneurship from an economics point of view. He defines entrepreneurship as someone who engages in exchange for profit and exercises cautious business judgement in the dynamic and highly uncertain business environment. This has been the general perception of what entrepreneurship is with so many people, as supported by McFarlane (2016) as he suggests that entrepreneurship is concerned with creating wealth, economic development, evolution, and devolution of change. Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen (2004) concur with Schumpeter (1965; 1934), who identifies entrepreneurial activities as the backbone of economic development. He further cites that the core of entrepreneurship is centred on exploiting business opportunities, finding new ways to use national resources, and finding alternative ways of maximising them. Longenecker, J. G, Moore, C. W, Petty, W.J and Palich, L. E (2008) suggest that entrepreneurs are frequently thought to be individuals who discover market needs and launch new firms to meet those needs.

Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen (2004) define entrepreneurship from a behaviourist perspective and confine it to psychologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists, and other specialist human behaviour. Max Weber (1930) is noted as one of the pioneers in defining entrepreneurship from a behaviourist perspective and perceives entrepreneurs as innovators, independent people business leaders. Drucker (1985) concurs with this definition as he views innovation as the core of entrepreneurship. Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen (2004) note that the behaviourist perspective defines entrepreneurship according to the characteristics they portray. Murray (2014) notes that attributes can be used to define entrepreneurs, and there is no dominating or common attribute. These attributes either acquired or inborn, are situational in nature. In a study carried out in Nigeria by Muogbo Uju Sussan and Tomola Obamuyi (2018), it is agreed that it is about a kind of behaviour that includes:

- Initiative taking,
- Organizing and
- Reorganizing social and economic mechanisms to turn resources and situations into practical accounts and the acceptance of risk or failure.

### 2.2. Role of Entrepreneurial Skills

The main motive behind most people going to school is to get a degree and a job afterward. Social constructs have shaped or moulded our mind-sets to think this way. This has, in turn, affected our attitudes, perceptions, and desire to consider enterprising as an alternative to getting a job. However, the dynamic and forever-changing environment has created conditions not conducive for young people to remain stagnant but rather to find ways to sustain livelihood through some form of entrepreneurial initiative. This has raised the need to acquire some entrepreneurial skills to ensure sustainable operations. Rahini, Amini, and Jahanbani (2015) note that because of this rather sombre situation that graduates face, there is an increased need to develop entrepreneurial skills to create new businesses, using unexploited capacities, developing contemporary capacities, and solving social problems is axiomatic. Idea generation, innovation, and creativity are at the heart of effective entrepreneurial skills and initiatives and will enhance their chances of survival. Murray (2014) notes that entrepreneurs, who face stiff competition, resort to creativity and innovation to solve problems. Large organizations often overlook this, thus ultimately managing the opportunity gap in the market. Murray further notes that Peter Drucker cited that innovation is the entrepreneur's weapon of mass destruction as they use it to exploit opportunities for different businesses or services.

Entrepreneurship in education mainly impacts relevant and adequate skills that enable learners to undertake their business initiatives. Oluseye, Adebayo, Olulanu, and Adesola (2017) identify that entrepreneurial education as encompassing skills that enable one to turn ideas into actions. They further add by citing that it includes one's ability to be creative, innovative, risk-taking, goal-oriented, and able to plan. Furthermore, it must cause an increased appetite for the learner to want to start their business venture. Chiaha and Agu (2013) conquered with Oluseye (2017) et al. by stating that entrepreneurial education should inculcate individual skills that could equip them to be creative and solve problems in normative ways. According to Kee et al. (2006), an entrepreneur has to exhibit some traits, which include the ability to identify opportunities, creativity, and critical thinking. Maigida, Saba, and Namkere (2013) further add that amongst the traits noted by Kee et al. (2006), coordination, organiser, gap filler, leader and innovator or creative imitator should also be added. However, skills are not limited only to one's ability to be creative, innovative, and a risk taker.

Nyaruwata (2017) identifies that to be an entrepreneur, one must believe in oneself. Self-confidence is a fundamental skill one must have as it influences their decisions and how far one will go in nurturing their business venture. Entrepreneurial courses are fundamental because of the benefits they bring to the individual and the nation at large. Naude (2008) identifies that entrepreneurial courses benefit because they facilitate production, which facilitates employment creation and reduces economic waste. Al-Mahrouq (2010) reveals that entrepreneurs are the backbone of many economies and are significant contributors to gross domestic product and employment creation. Mbuyisa (2019) and Chivasa (2014) note that SMEs contribute significantly toward socio-economic development. This means they ensure that poverty is eradicated and effective livelihood sustainability.

### *2.3. Role of the Entrepreneurial Course in Instilling Confidence towards Entrepreneurial Projects, Ventures, or Activities*

Entrepreneurial courses are highly significant, particularly considering the macro and micro environmental factors we operate in. People need to access relevant and usable knowledge they can apply to their enterprises. Those aspiring to establish enterprises would get the motivation to start. Barringer, Jones, and Neubaum (2005) note that entrepreneurship is a key element for any country aiming to be competitive in the knowledge-based global market because it has been generally viewed as a method promoting economic, creativity, and innovation. It is a significant factor to ensure that curriculum content is very relevant. It can alter the recipients' perceptions of the content in viewing entrepreneurship as a viable and lucrative career path that can yield successful business enterprises. The introduction of entrepreneurship education has brought about significant changes and contributions to the African economy, leading to the mushrooming of business enterprises and a progressing economy. It has led to some creativity, innovation, and new product developments in Africa. This has caused many benefits, such as employment, poverty reduction, and value addition on raw minerals in the country.

In a study conducted in Romania in 2002, it was established that due to pressure that the Ministry of education felt from international programs, they decided to introduce entrepreneurship courses to their learners and widely spread it to ensure everyone does it. Most of their efforts were on teaching the courses theoretically to undergraduate students and having events that ensured to create and develop a pro-entrepreneurial attitude among students and equipped them with knowledge on entrepreneurship to make them view entrepreneurship as a viable career option (European Commission, 2019). The realisation of the entrepreneurship curriculum is fundamental, particularly in cultivating a culture of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. It helps open up the learners' minds and expose them to the endless opportunities at their disposal as a result of the subject. This is primarily done through student clubs, interactive workshops, and a drive from heads of universities to create platforms for entrepreneurship to be taken seriously and observed as a career path. Through the activities and interaction with the internal environment, entrepreneurship can alter perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs centred on entrepreneurship.

### *2.4. Strategies to Enhance Confidence towards Entrepreneurial Curriculum*

Cultivating and enhancing a culture of entrepreneurship amongst learners and also in a country at large can be a daunting process that often requires effective strategies that can alter perceptions and attitudes of people towards entrepreneurship. Hartshorn and Parvin (1999) state that previous studies investigating the empowerment of undergrads through the use of entrepreneurial education advocate for student exposure to local entrepreneurs as a highly relevant method of motivating them to establish their enterprises. This is a way of transforming their mindsets and perceptions towards the subject so that when a formal curriculum is introduced, it has a good resting ground as the learner's confidence is already channeled toward being receptive to it. The introduction of mentorship programs can help cultivate entrepreneurship skills and passion. It helps students get more precise and practical knowledge and skills as they interact with people experienced in that regard and that have stood the test of time. Mentorship programs are highly effective as they match practical knowledge and experience with theory.

Kent (1990) observes that seminars can be one strategy to ensure that learners have the right attitude and confidence towards the subject of entrepreneurship. Seminars allow students to meet with people from diverse walks of life, which help them share their experience and knowledge on the subject and their innovations and new products. Universities teach adults, and these people have to be given autonomy in choosing what they want to learn. The humanist approach is essential in teaching and learning in tertiary education as it helps ensure that people's rights are not infringed or violated. Human beings must be respected, despite the fact that they are still learning, and their opinion must be valued at all costs.

According to Aloni et al. (2011), humanism focuses on the dignity, autonomy, freedom, integrity, well-being, equity, and potential of learners. Humans enjoy making decisions about their lives, and educators must trust that learners' educational choices are well-reasoned. The humanist approach ensures that learning is made easy and encourages the

learners to express their concerns and opinions regarding the subject at hand. People in tertiary education come from diverse backgrounds, and thus, their norms, values, and beliefs may differ. Therefore, it is important to ensure that in teaching and learning in tertiary education, learners are respected so that they feel comfortable during the learning process. For example, one might teach gay children that these students have to be respected and not judged or criticised because it is their right to choose what they want to be. In addition, some students may have different opinions regarding certain issues and thus must be respected.

According to Elias and Merriam (2005), this approach includes:

- Focus on personal growth and development,
- Self-evaluation of one's learning,
- Reflective thought leading to self-actualization, and
- Teachers providing autonomy, freedom, and meaningful learning

This approach ensures that while knowledge is being imparted onto the learner, they also grow personally and have a holistic development as a person. Education is not meant to ensure that one gets a paper and graduates but ensures that people grow and mature into better and more refined people in life who find solutions to problems in the world we live in.

### *2.5. The Constraints to Effective Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum Contents Delivery in Universities*

University education is the training of the mind, to learn to think, to develop those strengths of character we call virtues, to acquire a social formation, to prepare for life. It is usually classified under tertiary education. Simon (2018) notes that higher tertiary education leads to the award of an academic degree. Higher education, also called post-secondary education, third-level, or tertiary education, is an optional final stage of formal learning after completing secondary education. Education in Africa has been accused of imitating the European style of education for the longest time. Hauser, Howlett, and Matthews (2009) and Nyamnjoh (2004) support this by stating that universities in Africa have often been accused of being semblances of western epistemologies propelling an encumbering and debilitating Eurocentric education, characterised by an attendant tenacity to exclude and marginalise an indigenous presence and ways of knowing in higher education. This makes its relevance and effectiveness almost impossible primarily because of its incompatibility with the environment in which it is being implemented.

Bourdieu (2004) observes that given the currency of the knowledge economy or society, universities have become progressively more politically and economically critical institutions for producing and disseminating knowledge. Universities in Africa have to re-orient to remain relevant because many graduates are struggling to innovate and sustain livelihood amid the high unemployment rates. Kaya and Seleti (2013) observe that there has been a challenge in providing a clear definition of what indigenous systems mean. Nkondo (2012) argues that the western perception of African indigenous knowledge as a mere repetition of practices without any theory to explain them depicts Western cultural and intellectual arrogance. The most significant challenge is that African universities have a highly dysfunctional system that needs proper realignment to ensure its production is effective and efficient. Smith, (2002) asserts that the basic problem is that educational structures inherited from colonialism are based on cultural values different from those existing in most African indigenous societies. The continued social, economic, and technological ties perpetuate the lack of relevance between African countries and their former colonising powers. Higher education in Africa is one of the main tools used to foster this bond rather than reduce it. However, reforms in African education are still conceived and implemented within the framework of this relationship by marginalising the integration of African cultural values and indigenous languages into the education system at all levels (Walter, 2002).

### **3. Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the respondents' thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes towards entrepreneurial initiatives in creating employment. It also employed a longitudinal research design because the researchers wanted to gather the learner's perceptions prior to taking entrepreneurial lessons and after. This study, therefore, used a structured questionnaire to collect the data. The research design was a cross-sectional survey that analyzed data at a specific period in time. The data were analysed using SPSS.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, and 192 were successfully returned, meaning there was a response rate of 96%. The researcher also targeted to interview ten lecturers, and 60% of the lecturers interviewed responded. The study established that 55% of the respondents were female, while 45% were male.

4.1. The Extent to Which Entrepreneurship Education Spread in Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions

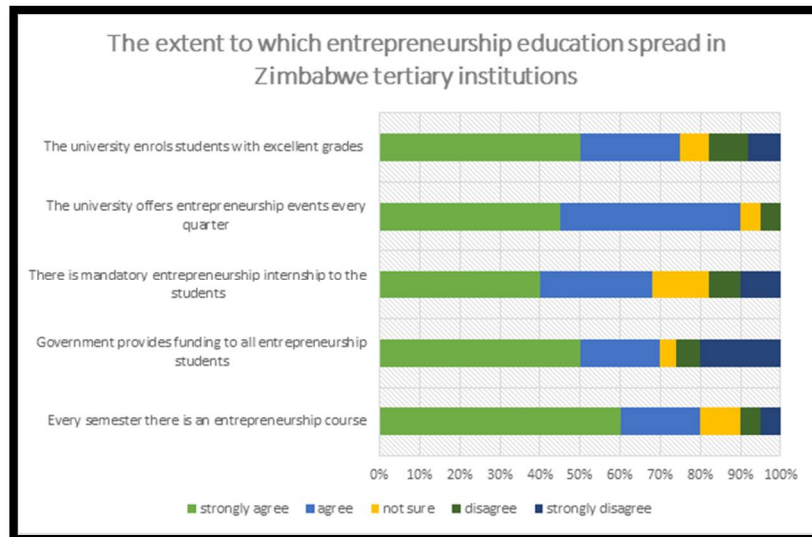


Figure 1: The Extent to Which Entrepreneurship Education Spread in Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions  
Source: Primary Data (2022)

The diagram above shows how entrepreneurship education spread in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. From the diagram, 60% strongly agree, 20% agree, 10% are not sure, while 5% disagree and strongly disagree that there is an entrepreneur course every semester. 50% strongly agree, 20% agree, 4% are unsure, 6% disagree, and 20% strongly disagree that governments provide funding to all entrepreneur students. 40% strongly agree, 28% agree, 14% are unsure, 8% disagree, and 10% strongly disagree that there is a mandatory entrepreneurship internship for the students. 50% strongly agree, 25% agree, 7% are unsure, 10% disagree, and 8% strongly disagree that the university enrolls students with excellent grades. Most respondents showed that the university offers university students entrepreneurship events every quarter, as indicated by 90% of respondents who agree. The results correlate with Bamford (2020), who indicates that entrepreneurship events must be done yearly to allow the students to know their field and its opportunities.

From the interviews done, most university employees indicated that there is a mandatory entrepreneurship internship for all the students to allow them to know the challenges and opportunities within the entrepreneurship discipline. From the interviews, the results are in line with Schools (2019), who carried out the same interviews and found out that there is power in training and developing entrepreneurs through practical teaching, and every student will be equipped with enough knowledge.

4.2. Teaching and Assessment Methods Currently in Use in Higher Education Institutions in Zimbabwe

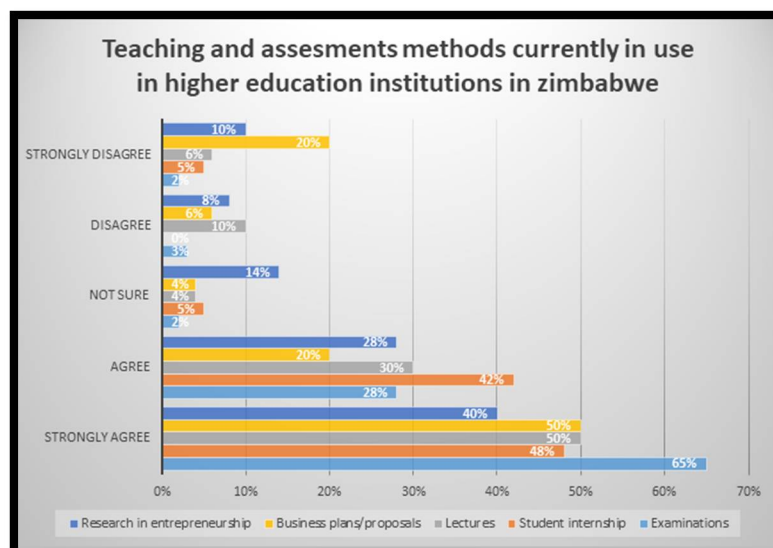


Figure 2: Teaching and Assessment Methods Currently in Use in Higher Education Institutions in Zimbabwe  
Source: Primary Data (2022)

The results show teaching and assessment methods currently in use in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. 65% strongly agree, 28% agree, 2% are unsure, 3% disagree, and 2% strongly disagree that examinations are done at the university. 48% strongly agree, 42% agree, 5% are unsure, and 5% strongly disagree that student internships are done. 50% strongly agree, 30% agree, 4% are unsure, 6% disagree, and 20% strongly disagree that lectures are done. 50% strongly agree, 20% agree, 4% are unsure, 6% disagree, and 20% strongly disagree that business plans or proposals form part of teaching and assessment methods. 40% strongly agree, 28% agree, 14% are unsure, 8% disagree, and 10% strongly disagree that entrepreneurship research is done. Most respondents showed that examinations form part of big teaching and assessment methods. The results showed that every university should have examinations to test the knowledge of every student at the university. Results from the interviews showed that examinations form part of the assessment methods, as shown by more than 90% of university lecturers.

#### 4.3. How Entrepreneurship Education Be Effective in Ensuring Creativity and Innovation among Graduates

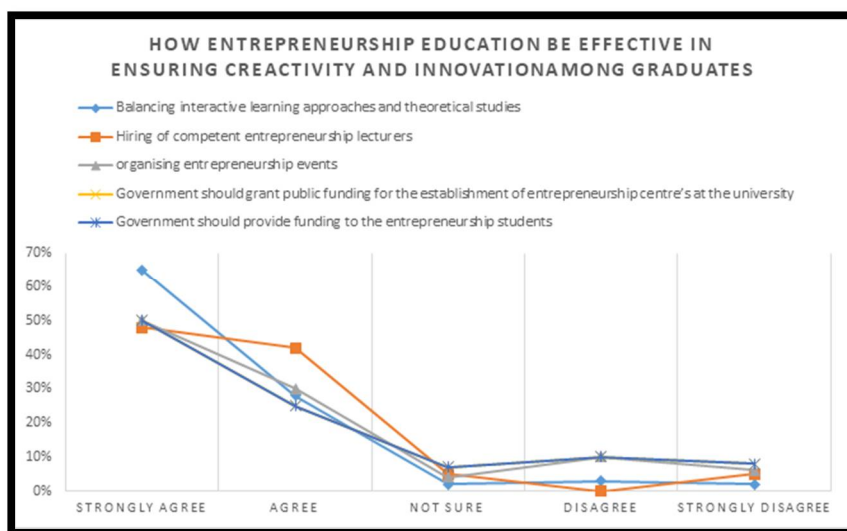


Figure 3: How Entrepreneurship Education Be Effective in Ensuring Creativity and Innovation among Graduates  
Source: Primary Data (2022)

The results show how entrepreneurship education effectively ensures creativity and innovation among graduates. 66% strongly agree, 28% agree, 2% are unsure, 3% disagree, and 2% strongly disagree that balancing interactive learning approaches and theoretical studies ensures creativity and innovation among graduates. 48% strongly agree, 42% agree, 5% are unsure, and 5% strongly disagree that hiring complete entrepreneurs' lecturers ensures creativity. 50% strongly agree, 30% agree, 4% are unsure, 10% disagree, and 6% strongly disagree that organising entrepreneurship events ensures creativity. 50% strongly agree, 25% agree, 7% are unsure, 10% disagree, and 8% strongly disagree that government should grant public funds for establishing entrepreneurship. The results mean that balancing interactive learning approaches and theoretical studies ensures creativity and innovation, as indicated by a majority of more than 90% of respondents who agree. From the interviews, the respondents indicated that hiring qualified and experienced lecturers at the university is the key to ensuring innovation and creativity among the students.

#### 5. Recommendations

Entrepreneurship learning should be taught from a practical point of view instead of a theoretical point of view. A change to more participatory learning methodologies is required, and theoretical studies must be balanced with a developed measure of learning by doing. Traditional tests should be supplemented by an entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial and subsequent evaluation depending on the firm's performance.

Lecturers should be facilitators and encourage more projects to be done by the students instead of learners learning theoretically. In addition, more workshops and seminars should be done to inspire the learners to engage in entrepreneurship more.

The government should again provide public funding for establishing entrepreneurship centres at tertiary institutions to ensure the spread of entrepreneurship across various fields of study within institutions, as well as the exploitation and commercialization of new business ideas and the development of business relationships.

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