

Exploring Avenues in Fostering Effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Education Programs in South African Public Secondary Schools: Fostering an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Phakamani Irvine Dlamini

University of Mpumalanga, Mbombela, South Africa

Email: dlaminiphaka@gmail.com

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Abstract

The study has utilized the quantitative research method. This study sought to establish the current forms of entrepreneurship education programs offered in South African public secondary schools furthermore, to investigate the current status quo of entrepreneurship education programs in South African public secondary schools. Data was collected from schoolteachers who teach the subjects Life Orientation and Entrepreneurship and Business Management in state secondary schools. An in-depth interview would be conducted to get detailed information on a small topic. One of the main results of this study was the identification of an entrepreneurial mindset as a key outcome of entrepreneurship education programs. This finding has important implications for the overall impact of these programs on students and the future of entrepreneurship in South Africa.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship, Public Schools, Education, Programs

1. Introduction

The paper will initiate with a brief background to the current situation of entrepreneurship education in South African schools. It will then illustrate the purpose of the study underpinning the reason for choosing to use entrepreneurship education as the tool to develop an entrepreneurial mindset with a special interest in the youth's awareness of social and economic issues in their community. This part of the study will conclude with the expectation for changes in the

community and possible future research to evaluate the effectiveness of the study.

Entrepreneurship education has been increasing in South Africa. However, policy recommendations are below par. The current situation of structured entrepreneurship programs taking place in public secondary schools has been less effective and, in most cases, non-existent. Hence, this provides limited options for the youth to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Even in cases where such programs exist, it is not clear on what the possible economic or social impact could be. The paper presents an avenue to increase the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs in South African public secondary schools with the goal to develop an entrepreneurial mindset in the youth, teaching them to identify possible social and economic issues in their community and an opportunity to address these issues.

1.1. Background

Entrepreneurship education in South Africa is being urged to play a more active role in addressing these objectives. There is a consensus that the entrepreneurship curriculum should seek to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, as well as to provide learners with the knowledge and skills relevant to surviving in the global marketplace. This represents a shift away from the conventional approach which sought to provide individuals with the skills required to establish and run small businesses, in response to the high levels of unemployment resulting from the failure of the formal economy to absorb the growing numbers of job seekers. This is regarded as a component of the broader education reform process which seeks to equip learners with the knowledge, skills and values required to take advantage of economic opportunities that will enable them to lead satisfying and rewarding lives, and to contribute to the socio-economic well-being of their communities. Entrepreneurship education is therefore expected to play a role in enhancing the general educational outcomes for learners, as well as contributing to the development of the economy.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

Given the above, we would assume then it is being done very effectively. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Most efforts to date have been unable to demonstrate significant change in creating a more entrepreneurial society and general populace. The combination of education and entrepreneurship is still a relatively new area of inquiry, and there is still much to be learned. The purpose of this study will be to investigate the effectiveness of teaching entrepreneurship and the more indirect effect of it being taught through other subjects. It is hypothesized that dedicated entrepreneurship courses are more effective, but that there is resistance in implementing these as there is a belief that the youth should focus on “core” subjects.

This study aims to explore the efficacy of the current entrepreneurship educa-

tion programs offered in South African public secondary schools. Entrepreneurship education programs have been with us for many years, and various models or approaches have been employed in an attempt to imbue the entrepreneurial mindset. As the economies of the world grow ever more interconnected and the scramble for jobs becomes ever so competitive, it is increasingly important that the youth of today should be active creators of their futures, rather than passive recipients. The idea of fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education is both appealing and feasible. Education is a prime vehicle for change, and building a country with an entrepreneurial direction depends on how successfully the drivers of change are educated, or how they educate others. Therefore, education in entrepreneurship should be the cornerstone for any vision of the future.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framing of the Study

The human capital theory provides a framework for understanding the development of key skills through education, work experience, informal learning, etc., all treated as investments. Second, human capital is considered a state-dependent function, i.e. investments interact with existing human capital to be more or less productive at the time the investment is made. This finding calls for the conclusion that the return on investment in human capital is stage specific. Third, it is assumed that entrepreneurial human capital produced by entrepreneurship education consists of more than just skills (Lackéus, 2020; Makai & Dóry, 2023). Entrepreneurial education has evolved into a broad demand for academic programs whose purpose is not only to enable a new project, but also to encourage the broader development of entrepreneurial attitudes, competencies, etc. Research on such programs is diverse and goes to the extent that some researchers propose their own discipline of entrepreneurship education (Sreenivasan and Suresh, 2023).

This belief is consistent with research in the field that shows that the most important key human capital skills for entrepreneurship are related to mental qualities such as “mindset” (Ncube & Lekhanya, 2021) and “primary mindset.” Academics are also involved in the adaptation process of business education, especially restaurant management. Hospitality students are future entrepreneurs (Cooper, 2005).

The introduction of the new school subject, Business Studies, could possibly facilitate the education of entrepreneurship in South African schools. Although it was not specifically designed to teach entrepreneurship, the subject content includes small business management and economics, which are components of entrepreneurship (Geza, Ngidi, Slotow, & Mabhaudh, 2022). According to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades R-12, Business Studies aims to enable learners to understand and appreciate the nature and scope of the essential business functions as well as the role of business in providing employment and helping to alleviate poverty. Learners will start to be exposed to the possibility of business as a career and will be taught business skills to function as em-

employers or employees in the microenvironment. The subject is offered at Higher and Standard grades and will be appealing to many learners due to the practical nature of the content and the fact that it is easier to understand compared to other subjects (Forcher-Mayr & Mahlknecht, 2020). However, it is arguable that the potential impact of Business Studies on fostering an entrepreneurial mindset is being undermined by the current state of education in South Africa.

International Research on Entrepreneurship Education

International studies emphasize that, somewhat paradoxically, entrepreneurship education has both common characteristics and unique elements, which often result from different educational systems inside and outside universities. The entrepreneurial experience of these case studies is further shaped by the degree of internationalization of the classroom and the influence of regional cultural and institutional influences. Placement features create complex relationships between case study informants, alumni, and successful entrepreneurs. These interactions influence stakeholder attitudes toward business cooperation and the extent to which institutions instill positive attitudes toward courses in graduates (Yan, Huang, & Xiao, 2022). Business leaders often do not learn about alumni-level processes, let alone the broader impact of curricula on attitudes, until they meet informally with young and experienced alumni during recruitment and early job searches. Under these circumstances, few universities or colleges actively encourage alumni or successful entrepreneurs to participate in course development.

As recent international research has shown, the social and cultural milieu can influence the nature and impact of entrepreneurship education. Policy imperatives have also been demonstrated to be significant drivers of entrepreneurial education (Bauman & Lucy, 2021). Indeed, within a paper in this special issue (Koudelková & Svobodová, 2014), it is noted that the “formalization of entrepreneurship education can reflect national policy” and can thus alter the dynamics of academic program development (or the participation and attitudes of students or faculty) in relation to actually being entrepreneurial or in shaping the nature and impact of any academic program design or curricular content.

Current State of Entrepreneurship Education in South African Public Secondary Schools

Entrepreneurship is often believed to be an innate talent and entrepreneurial skills cannot be taught. Contrary to this belief, it has been argued that entrepreneurship can be taught and the notion of necessity entrepreneurship, which is pursued by necessity motivated individuals. This type of entrepreneurship can be promoted through capacity development which is largely viewed as the outcome of education and training. Educating the youth on entrepreneurship is seen as a way of addressing the high unemployment levels in South Africa, as entrepreneurship has been recognised as a career choice and a viable option to formal sector employment. Many young people do not have the skills or knowledge to gain formal sector employment and educating them on entrepreneurship can assist in the development of businesses that can absorb surplus labour.

A study conducted by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) found that fifty percent of South Africans believed there were good opportunities to start a business in the country, however only 17% of individuals were involved in Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA).

2.1. Importance of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education has other important and wider social implications. Most entrepreneurs are innovators, and entrepreneurship is based on the idea that individuals should be free to pursue their goals in a creative and autonomous manner. The fostering of such attitudes among young people will not only prepare them for an increasingly competitive job market but enable them to be more self-reliant and fulfilled throughout their lives. This is particularly relevant for today's youth, who are growing up in a world very different from that of their parents and grandparents, and for whom fast-paced change has become a fact of life. It is essential that the future generation has the skills and flexibility to prosper in such an environment, and entrepreneurship education is perhaps the best way to cultivate these attributes (De Lannoy, Graham, Patel, & Leibbrandt, 2020). Finally, it is hoped that a greater entrepreneurial culture will help to address various social and economic problems both in South Africa and abroad. Small businesses are often pioneers of social change, and an entrepreneurial populace is more likely to identify and take advantage of opportunities to improve their circumstances.

The importance of entrepreneurship education cannot be understated. It has been hailed as a course of study with the potential to significantly influence the future economic and social health of societies. At the individual level, it strives to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to achieve in this ever-changing, competitive, and uncertain world. This is very much in line with the mindset and qualities of entrepreneurs. Given the current lack of job security in many sectors, it is widely held that the best safeguard an individual can have is the skills to employ him or herself. Entrepreneurship education paves the way for this. For the more economically minded, the lure of potential monetary success and the lowering of the unemployment rate through the training of future entrepreneurs may prove an enticing argument. This is no less important at a national level, with entrepreneurship being seen as a key means of ensuring that a nation is able to adapt to rapid and radical economic changes. It is widely accepted that small businesses are vital to achieving this as they often produce groundbreaking products and are a major source of employment.

2.2. Current State of Entrepreneurship Education in South African Public Secondary Schools

There are mixed signals regarding the provision and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in the school system. Few public schools offer entrepreneurship education and it is not offered at all at senior secondary level. However, it is important to qualify the statement as South Africa is the only country in the

world that has a dedicated national curriculum for entrepreneurship education. The Learning Outcomes based Curriculum (LOs) for entrepreneurship education is offered as a learning programme in Grades 10 - 12. The content is not prescribed in detail by the National Department of Education and is left to individual teachers to determine what is taught. This is problematic as teachers may not have the requisite skills or knowledge to deliver and facilitate the programme effectively. The curriculum is made more confusing by the introduction of the new 3 stream schooling system. The new curriculum is a valiant first attempt at providing a framework for entrepreneurship education but unfortunately has fallen short due to poor implementation. This is as a result of the economic and management science teachers who teach the subject not being adequately trained to teach entrepreneurship and starting and running a small business. The Umsinsi methodology is used in conjunction with the LOs curriculum and is designed to be a comprehensive guide for the teacher through teaching the subject. However, it is costly and the training for teachers is not being carried out often, so it remains an underutilised tool for teaching entrepreneurship. Some very low fee independent schools have tried to implement the Junior Achievement programme which seeks to bridge the theoretical work on microeconomics with application through a real business. This method is widely regarded as the best form of entrepreneurship education, but the programme too has not been very successful in implementation.

2.3. Challenges and Limitations

This section will discuss the challenges and limitations experienced by educators when trying to implement a new program. There are several difficulties, such as resistance from traditional forces and lack of facilities, but these are not unique to this situation. To properly discuss the limitations of implementing an entrepreneurial education program, it is necessary to make implicit comparisons to traditional forms of education, which are not subject to the same criticisms. To the end, the principal limitation on implementing an entrepreneurial education program is its ambiguity. With traditional subjects such as math or science, it is obvious what should be taught and how this should be done. Entrepreneurship education is a relative newcomer and does not benefit from specific curriculum guidelines, which means that mandatory changes to the traditional programs may not occur (Ngwenya, Nkosi, Mchunu, Ferguson, Seeley, & Doyle, 2020). Further to this, entrepreneurship itself is poorly defined within an educational context, and while this may be the subject of another discussion, it has a direct impact on what we consider to be entrepreneurship education. This lack of direction may be the biggest hurdle to overcome, as a lack of clarity leads to a lack of understanding, meaning that a program may exist only in name and with no meaningful result (Duby, Jonas, Bunce, Bergh, Maruping, Fowler, Reddy, Govindasamy, & Mathews, 2022). In conclusion, the paper returns to the recommendation of increased autonomy for schools. The limitations discussed stem in

part from the restrictions of the education system and even with a clear definition of entrepreneurship education and a thoroughly planned program, there may still be resistance from traditional forces Zuma, Seeley, Mdluli et al. (2020). With freedom to innovate, however, these restrictions dissipate, and it may be then that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in South African public secondary schools can be enhanced.

3. Methodology

This provides significant advantages to researchers who can probe an interviewee's earlier responses and ask how and why certain things have happened. It is particularly useful when the researcher does not know what to ask. Information would also be obtained from the Department of Education, which would provide a lot of necessary secondary data needed for this research. This would give a clearer understanding of what is happening to the school curriculum and what the government wants as an outcome for the learners. Industry-related entrepreneurs, SME owners, and sometimes government officials will also be interviewed to obtain a holistic view on what the country needs in order to reach the set outcome of increased entrepreneurial effectiveness. These interviews would be time-consuming and costly, but the data that is retrieved would be reliable and accurate.

Primary and secondary research will be applied for this research study. The researcher will be making use of new data from the field (primary) and already existing data that was collected by others (secondary). Primarily, data would be collected from the school teachers who teach the subject Life Orientation and Business Economics and Management in public secondary schools. Depth interviews would be carried out to obtain detailed information on a small topic. The advantage of this method is that it is possible to get an in-depth insight into the interviewee's thoughts, opinions, and feelings.

3.1. Research Design

The first form of research conducted was quantitative research, a survey conducted at secondary schools. In alignment with nerve theory (Creswell, 2013), the sample size we chose was of adequate size in relation to the population targeted. A sample of 60 grade 11 learners from Langa High School, 62 grade 11 learners from Hout Bay High School, and 64 grade 11 learners from Claremont High School. This would give a representative view of the population targeted making the findings accurate and relevant. Random sampling was used to select the classes which were used in the survey, and the surveys were handed out to every learner in the selected classes. Surveys were chosen as the tool of data collection because they are cost-effective and it is possible to get a great amount of information in a short space of time. The questions in the survey ranged from close-ended with fixed choice answer questions to open-ended questions in which the respondents could develop their own answers. Close-ended questions

were used to collect the demographic data of the respondents and gain data on whether the students are being influenced by the economic issue and the employment climate in SA (Creswell, 2013). Close-ended questions were also used later in the survey to enable quick data collection on the answers to the research questions. Open-ended questions were the major tool of data collection as they enabled the respondents to answer in depth how the questions relate to South Africa and enabled us to ascertain a great understanding of the variable being studied. Open-ended questions were designed in relation to the survey objectives and were used to collect data on whether youth are aware of the economic climate and its impacts on their present and future livelihood, how they perceive their future life chances in the South African job market, and their attraction to self-employment in SA. A benefit behind using open-ended questions is that it can yield data in the form of direct quotations from the respondents. This is valuable as it enables the best possible understanding of what the respondent is trying to communicate in his answer to an open-ended question.

Research design is the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain the answers. Research design is of crucial importance in investigation because it gives structure and form to the research project (Creswell, 2013). The project has used mixed methods of research and it is regarded appropriate to use a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to get a better understanding of the research problem. This is because the research problem is being conducted in a vastly understudied area and the outcomes from the quantitative research can be used to fill in the gaps between the current theories on the subject and further understand the area.

3.2. Data Collection

Because the program will take place within the school and its effects are both direct and indirect on students, teachers, and the possible spin-offs of student-created businesses, data collection methods will involve a combination of student and teacher surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. These methods will take place pre, during, and post intervention to gauge changes and extensions of effects at these different times.

The data collected will be both qualitative and quantitative. Understanding the nature of the program implementation and its effects will require a mixed method to truly capture the essence and the context in which the program is occurring. The mixed methods approach to data collection will also facilitate triangulation, allowing for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the program and the factors which influence it. This is important as there are many variables which may influence the outcomes of the program. It is crucial to either hold constant or understand these variables to make sense of the overall impact the program has.

The goal of the data collection is to provide a detailed understanding of the effects of the EE program and how it manifests within the sampled schools. This

will allow for a clearer understanding of the context and the influence various circumstances within the school may have on the program.

The data collection will focus mainly on the variables: the effectiveness of the post intervention (changes in teaching methods), teachers' attitude and their ability, and sustainability to the continuation of the program within the school. These variables are seen as fundamental in translating the initial and final impact the program may have and what it may lead to in a future context.

3.3. Data Analysis

This research is going to acquire its data from a stratified sample of South African secondary schools with the intention to give a real gauge of the state of entrepreneurship education in this setting. Stratified sampling is a method of sampling from a population which can be divided into subpopulations; in this case South African public schools can be divided in the quintiles system. Quintile one being the poorest 20% of schools in the country and quintile 5 being the most affluent 20%. Stratified sampling ensures that there are an adequate number of cases from each of the subpopulations, according to different demographics. In this case it is deemed important that schools from each quintile are included in the sample so as to get a realistic comparison of experiences and opinions from different areas. It would be presumable that schools from quintile 1 have different entrepreneurship programs to those in quintile 5 and this comparison is integral to the research. An equal number of interviews will be conducted from schools of each quintile and a smaller sample of school principals and Head of Departments of subjects will be also conducted so as to gauge the situation in these schools if the educator's perspective differs from that of the pupils. Informed consent will be sought at all levels in the schools and from parents of pupils who are selected for interviewing. After contacting the schools and explaining the nature and purpose of the research a semi-structured interview will be scheduled with the educators and pupils. The semi-structured interview is deemed the most appropriate method of gathering information for this research because it is a form of guided conversation. This will allow the interviewers flexibility to go into depth on topics which arise in the interviews and the nature of the conversations means that a rapport can be built up with the person being interviewed which will perhaps lead to more honest answers on sometimes controversial topics. The interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder as well as notes being taken, assuming that the interviewee gives consent for this; these recorded interviews will allow for a more accurate analysis of the data at a later time.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

One of the key findings of this research was the identification of the entrepreneurial mindset as a key outcome of entrepreneurship education programs. This result has important implications for the overall impact of these programs on students and on the future of entrepreneurship in South Africa. The develop-

ment of an entrepreneurial mindset is essential for the creation of a culture that is supportive of entrepreneurial activities and for the identification, encouragement and development of potential entrepreneurs. If this outcome is to be achieved, it is necessary for curriculum developers and policymakers to give consideration to what it means to be entrepreneurial and what it would “look like” if young people were demonstrating entrepreneurial behaviour.

The aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of existing entrepreneurship education programs in public secondary schools in South Africa for the development and fostering of an entrepreneurial mindset amongst students. The findings of this study suggest that there is widespread support amongst teachers for the inclusion of entrepreneurship education programs in the school curriculum. Teachers believe that these programs can help to equip students with both the theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to emerge as successful entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs.

4.1. Strategies for Fostering an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Learn from the picture—Entrepreneurial education programs are often built from creative, hands-on teaching methods to integrate an entrepreneurial mindset. Group and cooperative learning experiences can help students to develop an entrepreneurial culture. Various school clubs and extracurricular activities can be used to develop entrepreneurial skills and provide real-life experiences. Changing the learning environment to allow students to take responsibility, be creative, and work on real problems can be achieved through school governance arrangements. Infusing entrepreneurship across the curriculum has been shown to be effective in exposing students to the entrepreneurial concept. A whole school approach involving all stakeholders in creating an entrepreneurial culture has been shown to be effective as it gives students a consistent message and experience. In South Africa, given the unemployment rate and the need for job creators rather than job seekers, it is important to tailor programs to instill an opportunity-driven mindset. Therefore, a teaching approach that helps students to move towards self-employment is desirable. This can be achieved through simulated enterprises, business start-up facilities, and mentoring programs.

4.2. Implementation Guidelines for Entrepreneurship Education Programs

It is critical for the future success of South Africa’s economy to equip learners with entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. This is only likely to happen if a structured, compulsory and well-supported entrepreneurship education program becomes part of the school curriculum. Based on the assumption that this will happen, the authors have proposed a model for the successful delivery of entrepreneurship education, within the framework of the proposed OBE system, aimed at fostering an entrepreneurial mindset. This model is underpinned by best practice, within the entrepreneurship and education sectors, both locally

and internationally. This is in line with the thinking of [Ncube and Lekhanya, 2021](#) who suggested that the evolution of the field of entrepreneurship education, into a legitimate, stand-alone field, deserving long-term commitment from institutions and resource allocation to match, will be realized through the use of relevant models and theories, in conjunction with a more strategic, proactive and planned approach. The proposed model is comprehensive, covering the input, process and output stages, specifically articulating the resources, activities and assessment practices that would be appropriate for entrepreneurship education at school level. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore all these stages in full. However, the authors have provided more detailed guidelines, as Case Study 1, depicting the “business planning and start-up simulation project”, which is proposed as a pilot/trial activity for the model, aimed at improving the enterprise literacy and culture amongst teachers and learners.

4.3. Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Entrepreneurial activities are vital elements in the development of numerous economic systems. The developed states are known to promote innovation in the business segment and call for entrepreneurs. On the other hand, their local market is not the only battlefield in establishing potentially successful undertakings. The primary cause for this relates to advancements in technologies, which gave birth to the global market as well. Therefore, practically every company competes against others scattered all over the world, which increases the level of rivalry, consumer requirements and expectations worldwide. Consequently, potential businesspersons have to face the problems of competition at the global level ([Maheshwari, Kha, & Arokiasamy, 2022](#)). To become competitive, personal traits should be combined with other essential issues such as policies, infrastructure, and so on. Secondly, most of the people and societies attempt to consume more significant portions of resources. The principal proxy in satisfying the hunger for further resources is entrepreneurship. That is why a huge amount of people regard entrepreneurship as one of the main solutions to some issues concerning personal prosperity and public well-being. Their arguments are grounded in the concept of intrinsic correlation between entrepreneurship and economic growth and prosperity. In line with this view, many economies worldwide are endeavoring to boost entrepreneurial trends to diversify their economies as well as to help to reduce high rates of unemployment ([Wang, 2022](#)).

The proposed theoretical framework concerning the development of an entrepreneurial mindset among public school children is based on comparing the existing strategy of the UK government and the new strategy of the South African government. The UK government is leveraging change through school-level initiatives in raising awareness about entrepreneurship as an alternative career choice ([Duby, Jonas, Bunce, Bergh, Maruping et al., 2022](#)). Measures are being piloted that will build a bank of effective classroom materials and teacher professional development that will support the delivery of enterprise education, specif-

ically through the portal of the revised national curriculum for England. A national qualifier, showcasing existing good practice in enterprise education, and a dedicated enterprise education zone within an existing careers exhibition have also been designed to influence young people. This is contrasted with the current situation in South Africa where the government strategy is far broader in that it seeks to build an entrepreneurial culture in South Africa through the development of small, micro, and medium enterprises, recognizing these as the main drivers of economic growth, equitable income distribution, and job creation. This is seen as the optimal context within which young people can consider entrepreneurship as a career choice. Underpinning these are changes to the school curriculum, focusing on equipping learners with the mindset, skillset, and toolset required to be entrepreneurially active in taking control of their own personal development, creating work for themselves and others, and becoming more marketable in the employment sphere.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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