

Revisiting Entrepreneurship Training for Adults: Basic Education Curriculum for Employability

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ABSTRACT The Adult Basic Education Department at University of South Africa offers courses that equip adults with knowledge and skills for self-employment hence the inclusion of entrepreneurship in its programmes. Unfortunately the entrepreneurship modules have been taken off the programmes after the restructuring of the courses. The objective of this paper is to find out how programmes can be redesigned in entrepreneurship to teach adults self-employment skills. The qualitative method was used to interview the Chair of Department, 20 former and current students and 3 academics for their views on the reintroduction of entrepreneurship and small business development into the basic education courses at UNISA. The study found out that course participants and former students would like to see the reintroduction of small business courses in the adult education curriculum. It is recommended that entrepreneurship modules be introduced in all the undergraduate programmes.

INTRODUCTION

The University of South Africa is a leading provider of quality education for many South Africans and other nationalities across the world. The provision of education through distance by Unisa started in 1869 as a correspondence institution. This approach to education has evolved from its original correspondence mode of delivery to a fully-fledged open distance learning (ODL) institution. This has been made possible because of its application of the open distance learning mode of delivery. The university is popular in the provision of basic education for adults. It is one of the few universities in South Africa which has a functional Department of Adult Education which offers programmes from certificate to doctoral degrees.

The basic education courses offered at the Department of Adult Basic Education aim at equipping adults with knowledge and skills for self-employment hence the inclusion of entrepreneurship in its programmes in the past. Many students enrol for the basic education courses to acquire the skills for self-employment through the creation of small, micro and medium scale enterprises. Unfortunately the entrepreneurship modules which used to be called Business Economics which offered modules in entrepreneurship and small business development have been taken off the programmes after the restructuring of the courses. The structure of the South Afri-

can economy is normally described as a dual economy as it exhibits the features of both developed and developing economy. It is therefore imperative for people to have good education and specialised skills to enable them to be able to actively participate in it. The primary sector which most developing economies depend on is however mostly owned and controlled by the minority as a result of colonialism and the past apartheid policies. This paper argues that redesigning programmes in entrepreneurship can go a long way in teaching adults' self-employment skills to enable them to create jobs for themselves, employ others as well as teaching them skills for self-employment. Rideout and Gray (2013) note that recent research indicates that small businesses are drivers of economic growth as well as generating more new jobs than large firms. Crayford et al. (2012) argue that it is imperative for higher education institutions to develop entrepreneurship among their graduates which should be exhibited by the entrepreneurial qualities. Meanwhile the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor cited by Rideout and Gray (2013) identify the three major barriers to entrepreneurship as: social and cultural barriers, lack of capital, and lack of education. Entrepreneurship education has the potential to educate adult learners about entrepreneurship and how they can apply what they learn in practice to start their own businesses and teach their adult learners as well. Citing Gibb (2002), Vanevenhoven

and Liguori (2013) argue that all individuals should be exposed to some form of entrepreneurship training and development, because evidence shows that graduates are three times more likely to start their own business, three times more likely to be self-employed, have annual incomes of 27% higher, own 62% more assets, and are more satisfied with their jobs (Charney and Libecap 2000). Shane and Venkataraman (2000) aver that the main intention of entrepreneurship education is to provide potential and future entrepreneurs with the requisite knowledge with regards to opportunity identification, creating, evaluating and exploiting those opportunities. This measure can reduce unemployment among the economically active citizens of the country. The qualitative method was used to interview 20 former and current students and three academics from the Department of Adult Education for their views on the reintroduction of entrepreneurship and small business development into the basic education courses at UNISA. The study found out that course participants would like to see the reintroduction of small business courses in the adult education curriculum. The past learners and the academics were of the view that the reintroduction of entrepreneurship and small business development will enrich the ABET curriculum. This measure can reduce the unacceptably high and growing unemployment rates in the country. A recommendation has been made to the Department of Adult Education under the College of Education to reconsider for modules in entrepreneurship education to be included in the ABET certificate and diploma qualifications. Crayford et al. (2012) argue that institutions of higher learning should endeavour to develop individuals through their training not only to create new ventures, but also contribute to the 'Big Society' through the growing of organisation that can contribute to the creation of employment.

Theoretical Framework

The need to reintroduce entrepreneurship education in the ABET curriculum is imperative in a country such as South Africa where a lot of the economically active population is not able to participate fully in the economy of the country. The reason is that these people do not have the relevant education and skills that are needed by a knowledge-based economy such as South Africa. The introduction of entrepreneurship edu-

cation into the educational curriculum can go a long way in addressing some of the socio-economic challenges the country faces. The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the "action theory" and Schultz's "human capital" theory. The action learning theory which is credited to Revans posits that it is a process by which individuals, groups and organisations take action on real issues or challenges in real time and learning through questioning and reflection while doing so. In effect this approach to learning involves actual experience and critical reflection on that experience, through trial and error, discovery and learning from one another (Dickson et al. 2008; Zuber-Skenitt 1993). The development of an entrepreneurship curriculum uses a lot of the assumptions underlying the action learning theory. The human capital theory on the other hand suggests that education and training increases the productivity of workers by equipping them with the relevant knowledge and skills which provides them the opportunity to raise their earnings in the future (Becker 1964; Denison 1962; Schultz 1961). The Human capital theory provides a framework for examining the impact of acquired variables such as education, learning and experience on career outcomes. It is further developed on the assumption that education can serve as a key determinant of decision choice and providing benefits to specific ventures (Dickson et al. 2008).

Weaver et al. (2006) note that the action theory theoretical frameworks identify the key focus of entrepreneurial education as impacting on attitudes, skills development, and entrepreneurial action. Weaver et al. (2008) found out that Bandura's social learning is closely related to human capital theory and the action learning theories. They point out that Bandura's theory involves the following five key steps to learning:

1. Skills and attitude assessment
2. Skills and attitude learning
3. Behavioural guidelines and action steps
4. Skill and attitude analysis
5. Skill practice

Marquardt and Waddill (2004) note that a belief of the action learning theory is premised on the fact that learners learn best when they embark upon actions which they reflect on and as a consequence, learn from it. Various objectives have been identified by different researchers for entrepreneurship education. Garavan and

O’Cinnede (1994) cited in Niyonkuru identified some of the objectives of entrepreneurship education as comprising:

- ♦ acquiring knowledge relevant to entrepreneurship;
- ♦ acquiring skills in the use of techniques, in the analysis of business situations and in the use of action plans;
- ♦ identifying and stimulating entrepreneurial drive, talent and skills;
- ♦ undoing the risk-adverse bias of many analytical techniques;
- ♦ developing empathy and support for the technique aspects of entrepreneurship;
- ♦ devising attitudes towards change;
- ♦ encouraging new start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures; and
- ♦ stimulating the effective socialization element.

Citing Falkang and Alberti (2000), Hartshorn (2002), Levie (1999), and Postigo and Tamborini (2000), Niyonkuru (2005) points out that entrepreneurship education courses can be grouped into the following two categories:

- ♦ courses that aim at preparing learners for entrepreneurship. The expected outcome of such a course will be to educate and train learners in the acquisition of the skills they need to develop their own businesses; and
- ♦ teaching learners the awareness about entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship and the role of small businesses in society and the economy at large.

The two theories are important for explaining the importance of reintroducing entrepreneurship education in the ABET programmes at Unisa. Entrepreneurship education curriculum applies the principle of action learning which involves the reflection on actions in the learning environment that help in solving real life problems. There is massive unemployment in South Africa which recent media reports have put narrowly at 25.2% and in broad terms between 35% and 40%. Reintroducing entrepreneurship education will enable ABET learners to reflect on their learning that will lead some of them to have the awareness that can prompt them to start their own business. In addition to that ABET students are expected in most cases to teach other adult learners at the grass root level. Even at that level basic entrepreneurship education can still create the awareness and the skills people need to start

small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) especially in the informal sector. Entrepreneurship education programmes normally involve practical activities mostly through case studies, group activities and to some extent meeting practitioners in the field who share their experiences with students.

The human capital theory on the other hand deals with equipping students with the relevant education and skills that will enable them to be productive in an economy. This training enables them to develop themselves which increases their earning potential as well as opening up the choices they have in society. Reintroducing entrepreneurship education in ABET will go a long way in helping Unisa students to become aware of the prospects in the SMME environment as well as equipping them with the skills they need to venture in the sector.

Problem Statement

It is expected that students who complete the certificate and diploma in ABET will secure employment with in the public, private and NGO sectors of the economy. This is not often the case as vacancies in the formal sector of the economy are very limited because of budgetary and other constraints. Those who get employed with the Department of Basic Education are mostly given contracts for less than a year where they have to re-apply again the following year. There are quite a number of past ABET graduates who have not been able to find employment since they completed their programmes years ago in the formal sector of the economy. Fayolle (2007) questions why the education system educates people and sends the message to them that the ultimate goal of their training and their job security lies with them working for somebody or the state. The phasing away of the entrepreneurship modules in the ABET courses at Unisa could have detrimental effects on our graduates and their ability to become self-employed and creating jobs for others in their communities and the economy as a whole. The question that arises out of this can thus be stated as:

In which way can courses in business and entrepreneurship education be re-introduced into the ABET curriculum at Unisa to equip our graduates with entrepreneurial?

On the basis of the problem above the following questions are formulated to guide the research:

- ♦ why did the ABET Department drop the entrepreneurship modules from its certificate and diploma qualifications?
- ♦ what are the opinions of present and past students about the reintroduction of the entrepreneurship modules in the ABET curriculum?
- ♦ what content should be taught in any proposed ABET entrepreneurship module?
- ♦ who should ensure that the entrepreneurship modules are reintroduced into the ABET programmes?

The Place of Entrepreneurship Education in Adult Education

Adult learners are said to be volunteers who embark on learning for various reasons. Knowles' (1984) concept of andragogy according to Smith (2002) is premised on the following five assumptions:

- ♦ The self-concept which means that as people mature they move away from depending on others and becoming self-dependent and self-directed.
- ♦ Experience: Adult learners come into the learning environment with a lot of life experiences which they use as a learning resource
- ♦ Readiness to learn: As people mature they are ready to fuse their learning into their social and developmental roles.
- ♦ Orientation to learning: Mature learners what to apply their learning experiences to their lives. This implies that they want their learning to help them in addressing their live problems rather than just learning academic subjects.
- ♦ Motivation to learn: Mature learners are motivated by intrinsic factors when it comes to learning.

The assumptions above imply that adult learners are ready and motivated to learn but they expect that what they learn should be relevant to their lives. The relevance of entrepreneurship to ABET students in South Africa cannot be over-emphasised as the rate of unemployment increases in the country. Tahir (2004) draws attention to the important role of ABE practitioners perform and the goals they fulfil in society. He identified some of their tasks to include "imparting useful practical skills, knowledge, information and attitudes, sensitisation of community members and

social mobilisation of citizens for self-improvement and community improvement". The reintroduction of entrepreneurship in Unisa's ABET curriculum will go a long way in fulfilling some of the tasks Tahir identified above.

Kourilsky (1995) defines entrepreneurial education as opportunity recognition, marshalling of resources in the presence of risk, and building a business venture. This definition suggests that an entrepreneurial curriculum is made up of three components which are opportunity recognition, resource mobilization and managing the business. Gibb (2008) cited in Crayford et al. (2012) propose a broader definition of entrepreneurship education which covers a wide range that meets a lot of purposes as:

[...] behaviours, skills and attributes applied individually and /or collectively to help individuals and organizations of all kinds, to create, cope with and enjoy change and innovation involving higher levels of uncertainty and complexity as a means to achieving personal fulfilment and organisational effectiveness.

In effect entrepreneurial education looks at all the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are acquired by individuals, groups and organizations through learning to become entrepreneurs. The importance of entrepreneurial education as indicated above is to develop the skills of students so that they can create enterprises to employ themselves as well as employing others. Institutions of higher learning are taking the current world economic order into account to equip students to acquire the relevant attitudes, qualities, behaviours, skills and the knowledge for the market place (Crayford et al. 2012).

Entrepreneurship education is gaining increasing attention in higher education intuitions across the world. The need for designing curricula that will be able to equip students as entrepreneurs and in the Unisa context preparing the students who teach others is imperative. Kourilsky and Walstad (2000) argue that developing and refining curriculum should be based on evidence that prepare students to "make-jobs" rather than "take-jobs". In the case of adult education the curriculum should be designed to meet the academic standards as well as making it more practical to the entrepreneurial climate. This view is shared by Solomon et al. (2000) who allude that the challenge for entrepreneurship educators is to ensure that the curricula meet the stringent rigours of the academia whilst keeping a

reality-based focus and entrepreneurial climate in the learning environment.

Contents of an Entrepreneurship Education Module

Brown (2000) cited in Niyonkuru (2005) argues that there are variations in what institutions of higher learning teach about entrepreneurship but there are areas they agree on. Brown adds that “entrepreneurial education can be viewed broadly in terms of the skills that can be taught and the characteristics that can be engendered in individuals that will enable them to develop new and innovative plans”. Kourislsky (1995) identified the core attributes of entrepreneurship education as:

- ♦ opportunity perception and evaluation
- ♦ marshalling and commitment of resources to exploit the opportunity
- ♦ the creation of an operating business organisation to deliver the product or service which includes financing, marketing, and management skills.

This view of what an entrepreneurship education should be is shared by Gorman et al. (1997) who point out that any effective entrepreneurial education should include the ability to detect, exploit a business opportunity as fast as possible and the ability to plan and grow the business further in the future. Henry et al. (2003) are of the opinion that entrepreneurship education should provide students with outcomes that give insights to:

- ♦ ascertain and create entrepreneurial opportunities,
- ♦ evaluate potential concepts, and
- ♦ manage their own businesses to take advantage of opportunities

Curriculum development is a broader concept than simply designing a module or course as it goes beyond the goals, objectives and outcomes. Curriculum is not merely a course of study, nor is it a list of goals or objectives; rather it encompasses all of the learning experiences that the students have under the direction of an institution (Carl 1995). It should be noted that what is to be taught and how it should be taught (pedagogies) as well as the process of the teaching and learning should be part of every curriculum.

Garavan and O’Cinnede (1994) cited in Niyonkuru (2005:20) note that the challenges educators and researchers are confronted with in

entrepreneurship education are related to the appropriateness of curricula and training programmes. Albert et al. (2004) identified five main issues when dealing with issues relating to entrepreneurship education as: the variety of audiences and objectives, contents of entrepreneurship courses, pedagogies and assessment methods. They add that there is no consensus on dealing with the issues in entrepreneurship education around content and pedagogies. According to Aberti et al. (2004) the starting point (1) deals with the educational goals which is determined by the target group which they refer to as the audience; (2) deals with the issues of assessment which can only be done if the goals are fixed and clearly defined; (3) deals with the content which is dictated by the goals. The goals depend on the audience (4); whereas the pedagogies are based on the content (5); and the audience (6); the assessment depends on contents (7); and pedagogies (8). Although eight relationships are discussed regarding the success of designing any curriculum, all the five aspects (the variety of audience, the objectives, the content, pedagogies and assessment methods) are the main issues that are discussed in any curriculum development.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative method of enquiry through semi-structured interview to collect data from respondents. The purposive sampling technique was used to interview 10 past students and 10 current ABET students who are registered for the certificate and diploma courses, two lecturers in the Department of Adult Education and the Chair of Department (CoD). The researcher conducted the interviews in Vryburg, Mafikeng and Sunny side with the past and current students and at the offices of the academics who were part of the research at the main campus. The phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a particular situation (Leedy and Ormrod 2005).

Population

Population is defined as the aggregate of cases with a common assigned criterion and features as subjects for a study. The target popula-

tion for this study is all the all the learners who are currently registered for the ABET certificate and diploma qualifications with Unisa, past ABET certificate and diploma students, lecturers in ABET and the Chair of Department of ABET.

Sampling

The diverse nature of the past and present learners of Unisa's ABET qualifications across the country makes the use of the non-probability sampling approach ideal for such a study. In non-probability sampling the researcher has no way of ensuring that each of the elements of the population will be represented in the sample. In this study the convenience sampling technique is used because of the difficulty involved in tracing the past learners. In addition to that money and time constraints made the researcher to use his contacts in Pretoria and the North West Province where he had stayed and worked as a tutor to get access to some of the past learners.

Criteria for Inclusion in the Study

The people who were considered for the study had to meet the following criteria:

- ♦ should be registered for the ABET certificate or diploma programme with Unisa for the 2012 academic year.
- ♦ should have completed ABET certificate or diploma programme within the past six years.
- ♦ Should be a lecturer at the Department of ABET for at least one year.

Data Collection

The researcher used his past contacts with 10 past students in Mafikeng and Taung where he spent three days in the first week of June 2012. He conducted semi-structured interviews with the past students. Another 10 current students were contact in Pretoria who agreed and participated in the interview in the second week of June 2012. The interview with two lecturers and the CoD took place at the offices of the academics in the third week of June 2012. The convenient sampling is a technique in which particular settings, persons or events are selected deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be obtained from other choices (Wilson 2010). In this study the participants were students and academics who were selected and

agreed to be part of the interview. The interviews took place at the homes and work places of the past students at the times they indicated were convenient to them. Arrangements were made with the current students who attend tutorial classes at the Sunny Side Campus of Unisa where the interviews took place in the third week of June 2012.

The interviews were tape recorded in addition to a journal that was used to record issues which frequently occurred during the interviews with the participants. Each of the interviews lasted for between 10 and 15 minutes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews was done through content analysis which identified common themes, issues and words that recurred in the interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed to determine the overall picture of the cases as well as integrating the meanings of issues in typical experience. Some few responses from the interviews were translated verbatim to capture their experiences and feelings.

The CoD

He indicated that he was aware of the problem that has been created in an attempt to revise the ABET certificate and diploma modules. He explained that although he was a lecturer in the department, the redesigning of the current curricula was contracted to a consultant outside the university. He indicated that he has already started the processes for SMME and entrepreneurship education to be included in the ABET certificate and diploma modules. He had this to say when asked about his views on the importance of entrepreneurship education

"I am aware of the potential SMMEs have in development. I know more than 15 of my past students who are successful entrepreneurs who are changing lives in their communities. They all indicate that the Business Economics modules exposed them to entrepreneurship and gave them most of the skills they needed to start and successfully run their businesses".

The Lecturers

Both of the lecturers interviewed agreed that entrepreneurship education is important for the

students as it has the potential to expose them to creating their own enterprises. Both of the lecturers indicated that they joined the ABET Department in 2010 when the new modules were being phased in and the old ones being phased out. The two lecturers indicated that they are fully in support of reintroducing modules in business and entrepreneurship in the ABET Certificate and diploma programmes.

Past Students

All the past students interviewed were surprised to hear that the Business Economics modules were being phased out of the ABET modules. Three of the past students indicated that they had established their own businesses through the application of what they learned at ABET, especially from the Business Economics module. One forty-two year old woman lamented saying

"This is unfair. Where will I be without this exposure? Do you know that I am currently employing six other people in my business? Please reconsider the reintroduction of these modules".

Current Students

Half of the current students who were interviewed were not aware there used to be any entrepreneurship and small business modules in the ABET programmes. The remaining half was aware of the modules on Business Economics and small business development in the previous curriculum. Most of the students indicated that it is difficult to find permanent employment with the ABET certificate in the Department of Basic Education which happens to be the main employer of ABET graduates. When asked about the reintroduction of modules in entrepreneurship and small business, most of them were of the opinion that they will be very glad to learn business skills that can help them to start and operate their own businesses. One twenty-eight year old woman had this to say

"Modules in entrepreneurship and SMME development can help us in creating our own business rather than waiting all the time for the Department of Education to offer us temporal work from March to October. We are tired of not securing permanent employment with this qualification and want to start our own businesses."

One thirty-six year old woman said
"There are so many duplications in the modules that are offered in our programme. Modules in entrepreneurship education and basic education in food gardening and food processing should be part of the modules".

CONCLUSION

The article examined the possibility of reintroducing entrepreneurship modules in the ABET certificate and diploma programmes. An entrepreneurial curriculum focuses on the creation of awareness among the target audience as well as equipping them with the needed skills to enable them to start and run successful business as well as being able to teach others as adult educators in the case of ABET learners at Unisa. The empirical study found out that all the participants in the study were of the view that entrepreneurship education modules should be reintroduced in the ABET certificate qualifications. Such programmes it is believed will help our ABET learners to become more employable by others as well as they themselves become employers in their communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the literature study and the empirical study the following recommendations are made:

- ♦ That the Department of Adult Education reconsiders the reintroduction of the entrepreneurship and SMME development at the certificate and diploma programmes. Such a move will go a long way in attracting students to the ABE programmes and also help in equipping the learners with the entrepreneurial awareness as well as equipping them with the skills to start and manage SMMEs.
- ♦ The curriculum should have aspects that focus on teaching adult learners basic business skills.
- ♦ The content of the modules should be on awareness creation and skills development in entrepreneurship.
- ♦ Unisa's entrepreneurship programme should be designed in such a way that it can help students to initiate businesses from the concept stage to the management and evaluation of the business.
- ♦ Experiential learning should be a key part of the proposed curriculum

- ♦ The use of case studies as individual and group work should be part of the proposed programme.
- ♦ The CoD should constitute a committee to help him to look at the new programme and see where the entrepreneurship education modules can be placed and which modules have to be restructured.

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