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**STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF
ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE
OF A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSIT.**

Abstract:

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic prosperity, and its promotion as a solution to unemployment has been highlighted as a high priority by the South African government. Currently, Higher Education Institutions in South Africa experience a constant need to produce more entrepreneurial graduates. In order to do so, these institutions have to foster and promote an entrepreneurial culture amongst students. However, the question can be asked: are universities doing enough to support and develop entrepreneurship? The purpose of this paper is to examine South African students' perceptions on the role of the university that they are currently enrolled at, in developing entrepreneurship. The results provide this university with valuable insights that may enable them to re-invent the entrepreneurship objectives of the university.

Keywords:

Students, perceptions, entrepreneurship development, South Africa, university

JEL Classification: L26, I23, I29

1 Introduction

Research on the field of entrepreneurship have become increasingly popular (Bancu *et al.*, 2012; Szaban, 2018; Malebana, 2017). This might be due to the fact that entrepreneurship plays an imperative role in some of the greatest challenges through being a process for transforming knowledge into products and services that can spawn economic growth, and at the same time creating new jobs which will ultimately enhance several opportunities in the labour market (Malebana, 2017; Bancu *et al.*, 2012; Szaban, 2018). Several definitions for the terms entrepreneur and entrepreneurship exist, which create confusions in the way these two terms are used (Chmielecki & Sulkowski, 2016). Before one can fully understand the impact of entrepreneurship, it is of utmost importance to grasp the meaning of these two concepts. The term “entrepreneur” can be defined as the individual who recognizes market needs and unveil new businesses to meet the acknowledged market needs and these individuals are set apart from others by the specific innovative behaviour, their ability to seize these prospects and are viewed as individuals who establish new firms for the purpose of profit and growth (Lebambo *et al.*, 2017; Longenecker, 2006; Sousa, 2018). Entrepreneurship are then referred to as all the activities undertaken by the entrepreneur to start a new business venture which requires vision, change and creation through the application of energy and passion in order to be successful (Lebambo, 2017; Kuratko, 2016).

According to Lans *et al.* (2014) one of the greatest myths are the fact that entrepreneurs are born and not made. If one consider the fact that entrepreneurs are differentiated from others based on certain traits, innovative behaviour, and a certain set of technical skills, then one can argue that entrepreneurs can be taught through entrepreneurship education (Lans *et al.*, 2014; Gonçalves, 2017). As stated by Spinelli and Adams (2012), entrepreneurship education has offered the opportunity to procreate a new education architype for teaching and learning which can transmute how students learn and apply their knowledge of the field. Furthermore, governments and universities with increased research potential in the field have recognized the opportunity to pursue efforts in promoting entrepreneurship in the academic field (Schaeffer & Matt, 2016). The reason for this is three-fold: universities are experiencing increased pressure in terms of competing with start-up creation, university derivatives have an immense positive impact on and underwrites economic undercurrents, and the creation of academic spin-offs encourages the conversion of scientific knowledge into knowledge that can be actively applied to benefit the greater civilization (Fontes, 2005; Vincett, 2010; Siegel & Wright, 2015).

Entrepreneurship and the development thereof is regarded as a critical driving force for economic progress (Brush & Cooper, 2012; Balaraman *et al.*, 2014). Even more so, the unremitting development of entrepreneurship will directly contribute to the augmentation of policies that are specifically developed to allow economies to benefit from the

prospects it offers (Kelley *et al.*, 2015). The fact that South Africa is regarded a developing economy with its unemployment rate being alarmingly low at 26.7%, it is imperative for the South African government to highlight the expansion of entrepreneurship through creating and fostering an entrepreneurial culture as a tenacious matter that needs urgent consideration and devotion (Mamabolo, 2017; STATSSA, 2017; Kelley *et al.*, 2015; Grant, 2013). The fact that South Africa is also demonstrating low TEA rates (the percentage of people of an adult population in an economy who is in the process of starting their own businesses) is also of great concern, seeing that South Africa is finding it challenging to compete on a global level when it comes to TEA (Herrington *et al.*, 2017; Kelley *et al.*, 2015). Table 1 proposes the TEA rates of South Africa compared to the average of the African region for the age group 18-24 years since 2001:

Table 1: Total early-stage entrepreneurial activity for the age group 18-24 years

	2001	2005	2009	2013	2014	2015	2016 South Africa	2016 African Region
18-24 Years	3.4%*	3.1%	4.7%	7.8%	4.8%	6.3%	6.7%	16.3%

Source: GEM Report (Herrington *et al.*, 2017)

From table 1 it is evident that the population between the ages of 18 and 24 years that engaged in early-stage entrepreneurial activity was considerably less (6.7%) than that of the average for the African region (16.3%) in 2016.

When considering the above-mentioned, it becomes easier to agree with the fact that entrepreneurship education and the need thereof has become more and more vital (Arokiasamy, 2011; Isaacs *et al.*, 2007). The fact that entrepreneurship education outlines the entrepreneurial attitudes of students while at the same time providing these students with essential skills and knowledge that underwrites the development of an entrepreneurial culture, contributes to the aforementioned statement (Chimucheka, 2014; Aja-Okorie & Adali, 2013). According to Chimucheka (2014) it is clear that student will be more motivated to participate in entrepreneurial activities when they are of the opinion that they are receiving adequate assistance through entrepreneurship education in their university. Should universities be successful in offering adequate support and fostering an entrepreneurial culture among students, it will influence the number of novel business start-up activities that implicitly affect the development of local and national economies unshakably (Nicolaidis, 2011). However, Isaacs *et al.* (2007) states that it still remains the obligation of the government of the country to appreciate the implication of entrepreneurship education in order to contribution to and support universities' efforts in successively developing entrepreneurship education visions. It is clear that a definite need to localize entrepreneurship education and training in order to develop customized

programs for local entrepreneurs that will more effectively and successfully contribute to the improvement and development of entrepreneurship. Through the analysis and research of the local environment and context, new knowledge and methodologies can be developed in order to assist entrepreneurial training offered by universities and other higher education institutions (Isaacs *et al.*, 2007; Iacobucci & Micozzi, 2012).

From the literature review provided, it was concluded that entrepreneurship education and development in universities is crucial if the aim is to motivate students to engage more enthusiastically in early-stage entrepreneurial activity in order to make an exceptional difference in communities and ultimately economic growth (McClelland *et al.*, 2005). It is also clear that previous research studies have been conducted in determining the importance of entrepreneurship education, but very little research has been conducted in order to measure the students' opinion regarding the approach to the development of entrepreneurship of universities.

2 Methodology

The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of students' perceptions regarding the importance of entrepreneurship development at a South African university. A descriptive research design was used, which was followed by a single cross-sectional approach.

2.1 Sampling method

The target population for the specific study was defined as students, enrolled full-time at a South African university. For the sampling frame, one campus located in Vanderbijlpark in the Gauteng province was selected. Thereafter, a non-probability convenience sample of 328 undergraduate students was used to conduct the main study. The research design followed a quantitative approach. For the purpose of this study a positivist approach was adopted. This was done to ensure that the researcher remained objective towards the study, as well as data collection and the actual research (Remenyi, Williams, Money & Swartz, 1998:32; Collins, 2010:38). For the empirical portion of this study, a descriptive research design is followed.

2.2 Research instrument and data collection

A semi-structure, self-administered questionnaire was distributed to collect the necessary data for this study. This was done in order to determine what the perceptions of students at this specific South African university are regarding the development of entrepreneurship at university level. The questionnaire comprised of two sections where the first section gathered the students' demographic information and the second section included the 22-item scale concerning the importance of universities support in the development of entrepreneurship, and students' opinion regarding the current state of entrepreneurship support and development at their university. The students' perceptions

and opinions were determined on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (4). This was based on the students' agreement or disagreement to the statements relating to the entrepreneurial motivations and attitudes. The 4-point Likert scale, without a neutral point was used to motivate the participants to commit to either a positive or a negative opinion (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). In order to establish reliability, the questionnaire was piloted on a convenience sample of 56 students that did not form part of the main sample. A Cronbach alpha value of 0.998 was computed for the entire scale, which is above the suggested level of 0.70 (Pallant, 2016). The questionnaires were distributed to students after the necessary permission was pertained from the lecturers. Reliability and validity analysis, descriptive statistical analysis and a one-sample t-test were used for the statistical analysis of the gathered data. The data was capture in Microsoft Excel and were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS), Version 25 for Windows.

2.3 Sample description

A total number of 338 questionnaires were distributed, of which 319 completed and usable questionnaires were returned. This signifies a 94 percent response rate. The sample included both female participants (62.0%) and male participants (38.0%) of which the greater number indicated that they were female. The majority of participants were 20 years (28.3%) of age, followed by 20.6% of participants specifying that they were 19 years of age. A greater number of the participants indicated that they were of African race (83.5%), followed by participants 12.9% indicated that they were white and 3.0% indicated that they were coloured. The majority of participants indicated their mother-tongue language as Sesotho (36.4%). Concerning the participants' current year of study the majority of the participants were students in the first year of study (77.4%), followed by students in their second year of study (11.3%) and those in their third year of study (8.5%). Table 2 indicates a description of the above-mentioned sample.

Table 2: Sample description

Gender	(%)	Age	(%)	Race	(%)	Mother tongue language	(%)	Year of study	(%)
Males	38.0	18	4.8	African	83.5	Afrikaans	11.1	1 st	77.4
Females	62.0	19	20.6	Coloured	3.0	English	8.4	2 nd	11.3
		20	28.1	Asian	0.6	IsiNdebele	1.2	3 rd	8.5
		21	20.3	White	12.9	IsiXhosa	7.2	4 th	0.9
		22	12.6			IsiZulu	20.5	Hons	1.9
		23	4.5			Sesotho	36.6		
		24	4.2			Setswana	8.4		
		25	1.5			SiSwati	3.3		

26	0.9	Tshivenda	1.2
28	0.3	Xitsonga	2.1
29	0.6		
33	0.3		
36	1.0		
41	0.3		

Source: Authors' own compilation

2.4 Reliability and validity

A Cronbach alpha value of 0.911 was computed for the entire scale measuring students' perceptions and opinions. This provided evidence of internal-consistency reliability, seeing that it exceeded the recommended value of 0.70 (Brace *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, the average inter-item correlation were also calculated and were, 0.284, which was within the recommended range of 0.15 to 0.50 (Clark & Watson, 1995), therefore providing further proof of reliability. The afore-mentioned also suggests convergent and discriminant validity of the scale measuring students' motivations and attitudes.

2.5 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for students' perception regarding the importance of universities' support in the development of entrepreneurship at their university. Table 3 reports on the means and standard deviations concerning these perceptions and opinions of the respondents.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics regarding students' perception of the importance of universities' support in the development of entrepreneurship

Items for the importance of universities to support entrepreneurship	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
It is important for universities to generate entrepreneurial attitudes amongst students	3.49	4.0	0.606
It is important for universities to generate entrepreneurial behaviour amongst students (motivating students to start their own businesses)	3.48	4.0	0.586
It is important for universities to generate entrepreneurial skills amongst students	3.47	4.0	0.564
It is important for universities to promote business start-ups by students on campus	3.43	3.0	0.633
It is important for universities to commercialise research outputs	3.25	3.0	0.588

It is important for universities to promote technology intensive business start-ups	3.29	3.0	0.636
It is important for universities to promote business start-ups that will create jobs	3.53	4.0	0.591
It is important for universities to generate alternative revenues for universities through start-ups	3.14	3.0	0.692
It is important for universities to generate an innovative and creative culture amongst students who intend to be entrepreneurs	3.50	4.0	0.576
It is important for universities to formally educate students on the importance of entrepreneurship and job creation	3.53	4.0	0.585
It is important for universities to have a permanent entrepreneurship set-up	3.40	3.0	0.644
It is important for universities to offer incubation facilities	3.27	3.0	0.698

Source: Authors' own compilation

As presented in Table 3, the highest mean across students' perception of the importance of universities' support in the development of entrepreneurship items was recorded for item 10 (mean=3.55), followed by item 9 (mean=3.50). This implies that students feel it is of utmost importance for universities to formally educate students on the importance of entrepreneurship and job creation, as well as to generate an innovative and creative culture amongst students who intend to become entrepreneurs. The lowest mean was recorded for item 8 (mean=3.14). This suggests that students at this specific university feel that it is not important for the university to generate alternative revenues for the university through start-ups. Table 3 serves as an indication of the students' opinions regarding the importance of the university's approach to entrepreneurship development at their university.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics regarding students' opinion of the importance of the university's approach to entrepreneurship development

Items importance of the university's approach	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
I feel that entrepreneurship as a career option has been adequately highlighted by my university	2.82	3.0	0.794
I feel that entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions will eventually help in creating more university-based start-ups	3.20	3.0	0.632
I feel that it is of utmost importance to teach entrepreneurship to students in higher education institutions	3.38	3.0	0.595

I feel that it is the responsibility of universities to actively encourage students for entrepreneurship activities	3.06	3.0	0.763
I feel that text books are useful in understanding innovation and entrepreneurship	3.04	3.0	0.767
I feel that external speakers and guest-lectures help improve the understanding of entrepreneurship	3.35	3.0	0.653
I feel that my university is an ideal place to learn about starting a business	3.06	3.0	0.769
I feel that more educational programmes about entrepreneurship and business management on campus could help students start a business	3.38	3.0	0.626
I feel that it is the responsibility of universities to encourage students to pursue entrepreneurship ventures in the university	2.99	3.0	0.791
I feel that the university should create the opportunity for people/students with good ideas for new businesses to meet each other	3.49	4.0	0.632

Source: Authors' own compilation

From table 4 it is evident that the highest mean for items pertaining to students' opinion regarding the importance of the university's approach to the development of entrepreneurship was recorded for item 22 (mean=3.49), followed by items 15 (mean=3.38) and 20 (mean=3.38). This implies that students first and foremost feel that it is imperative for the university to create opportunities for like-minded students who have good ideas for new businesses to meet each other. Furthermore, they also see the great need for the university to teach entrepreneurship to students in higher education institutions and that more educational programs about entrepreneurship and business management on campus could assist students to become entrepreneurs who star their own ventures. The lowest mean was recorded for item 13 (mean=2.82). This prove to be quite alarming as these students feel that entrepreneurship as a career option has not been adequately highlighted by the university.

2.6 One-sample t-test

In order to identify the significance of the items regarding the students' perceptions of the importance of the university's support in the development of entrepreneurship and their opinion regarding the university's approach to the development of entrepreneurship a one-sample t-test was computed. Table 5 and Table 6 reports on the calculated means, standard deviations, t-values and p-values.

Table 5: One sample t-test for students' perception of the importance of universities' support in the development of entrepreneurship

Items for the importance of universities to support entrepreneurship	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error	t-values	P- values
It is important for universities to generate entrepreneurial attitudes amongst students	3.49	0.577	0.034	10.401	0.000*
It is important for universities to generate entrepreneurial behaviour amongst students (motivating students to start their own businesses)	3.48	0.564	0.033	10.586	0.000*
It is important for universities to generate entrepreneurial skills amongst students	3.46	0.563	0.033	10.552	0.000*
It is important for universities to promote business start-ups by students on campus	3.43	0.624	0.036	9.448	0.000*
It is important for universities to commercialise research outputs	3.26	0.574	0.033	9.756	0.001*
It is important for universities to promote technology intensive business start-ups	3.27	0.636	0.037	8.849	0.000*
It is important for universities to promote business start-ups that will create jobs	3.54	0.569	0.033	10.690	0.000*
It is important for universities to generate alternative revenues for universities through start-ups	3.15	0.684	0.040	7.910	0.000*
It is important for universities to generate an innovative and creative culture amongst students who intend to be entrepreneurs	3.50	0.582	0.034	10.315	0.000*
It is important for universities to formally educate students on the importance of entrepreneurship and job creation	3.54	0.569	0.033	10.690	0.000*
It is important for universities to have a permanent entrepreneurship set-up	3.40	0.642	0.037	9.111	0.000*
It is important for universities to offer incubation facilities	3.27	0.696	0.041	8.075	0.000*

* Significant at $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed)

Source: Authors' own compilation

From Table 5 it is evident that significant p-values ($p=0.000 < 0.05$) were computed for all the items stipulated regarding students' perception of the importance of universities' support in the development of entrepreneurship. This concludes that South African students at this specific higher education institution are very much aware of the important

responsibility the university face to promote business start-ups that will create jobs that will contribute to the development of the local economic development. These results agree with the result from the studies conducted by Fontes (2005), Vincett (2010), and Siegel and Wright (2015). The fact that students feel this is the most important significant item contributes to the continuous pressure universities and government experience regarding the importance of competing in the creation of business start-ups as mentioned by Fontes (2015). Furthermore, these students also agree with the studies conducted by Chimucheka (2014) and Nicolaidis (2011) that it is imperative for universities to develop and foster an entrepreneurial culture amongst students who intend to become entrepreneurs. Table 6 indicates the entrepreneurial attitudes conferred in the one-sample t-test that stems from the entrepreneurial motivations as signified in Table 6.

Table 6: One sample t-test regarding students' opinion of the importance of the university's approach to entrepreneurship development

Items importance of the university's approach	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error	t-values	P-values
I feel that entrepreneurship as a career option has been adequately highlighted by my university	2.81	0.787	0.046	6.127	0.000*
I feel that entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions will eventually help in creating more university-based start-ups	3.20	0.615	0.036	8.936	0.000*
I feel that it is of utmost importance to teach entrepreneurship to students in higher education institutions	3.38	0.588	0.034	9.880	0.000*
I feel that it is the responsibility of universities to actively encourage students for entrepreneurship activities	3.05	0.756	0.044	6.927	0.000*
I feel that text books are useful in understanding innovation and entrepreneurship	3.05	0.764	0.044	6.819	0.000*
I feel that external speakers and guest-lectures help improve the understanding of entrepreneurship	3.36	0.639	0.037	9.033	0.000*
I feel that my university is an ideal place to learn about starting a business	3.05	0.774	0.045	6.767	0.000*
I feel that more educational programmes about entrepreneurship and business management on campus could help students start a business	3.38	0.611	0.036	9.511	0.000*
I feel that it is the responsibility of universities to encourage students to pursue entrepreneurship ventures in the university	2.98	0.784	0.046	6.513	0.000*
I feel that the university should create the opportunity for people/students with good ideas for	3.52	0.605	0.035	9.976	0.000*

new businesses to meet each other

* Significant at $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed)

Source: Authors' own compilation

As indicated in Table 6, significant p-values ($p=0.000 < 0.05$) were also computed for all the items stipulating students' opinion regarding the importance of the university's approach to entrepreneurship development. This suggests that South African students are of the opinion that the most significant approach is for universities to create the opportunities for students who want to engage in entrepreneurial activity to meet each other and at the same time they feel that entrepreneurship as a career choice have not been adequately highlighted by the university. Given the fact that it is unarguably important for universities to develop and foster an entrepreneurial culture (Nicolaidis, 2011; Isaacs *et al.*, 2007) it is critical that the university involved in this study develop better strategies to promote entrepreneurship and to create a supporting environment for like-minded students who want to engage in entrepreneurial activity.

3 Conclusion

From the literature review it is clear that entrepreneurial activity remains a key driving force for any economy. South Africa demonstrates an alarming decrease in total entrepreneurial activity amongst the adult population between the age of 18-24 years (Von Broembsen *et al.*, 2005:36; Swanepoel *et al.*, 2010:58; Grant, 2013:86; Kelly *et al.*, 2016:4). Entrepreneurship education and development in universities is crucial if the aim is to motivate students to engage more enthusiastically in early-stage entrepreneurial activity in order to make an exceptional difference in communities and ultimately economic growth (McClelland *et al.*, 2005). Entrepreneurship education is of utmost importance, as it shapes the entrepreneurial attitudes of students whilst providing these students with the necessary skills and knowledge that are considered a key aspect in the development of an entrepreneurial culture in HEI's (Chimucheka, 2014:404; Aja-Okorie & Adali, 2013:113). Furthermore, in order to harness the power of entrepreneurship in decreasing unemployment, entrepreneurship education should be localized in order to develop customized programs for local entrepreneurs that will more effectively and successfully contribute to the improvement and development of entrepreneurship. This study ultimately concluded that it is of utmost importance for universities to formally educate students on the importance of entrepreneurship and job creation, as well as to generate an innovative and creative culture amongst students who intend to become entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these students also feel that it is crucial for the university to give more attention to highlight entrepreneurship as a career option and to create opportunities for students who want to start their own business ventures to meet each other. Although this finding does not correlate with specific previous studies, it still remains novel as it indicates what the specific university implied in this study can do to enhance their strategies and offerings regarding entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship

development in order to become the Business Hub in the local region, as is one of their main visions. By doing so, they can influence students through offering the necessary guidance, support and assistance to engage in early-stage entrepreneurial activity to ultimately contribute to the positive influx of local economic development.

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