THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN GABONSE SCHOOLS: JUSTIFICATIONS FOR A NEW CURRICULUM DESIGN

Značaj preduzetničkog obrazovanja u gabonskim školama: opravdanja za dizajnom novog nastavnog programa

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Abstract

The apparent struggle to find employment by Gabonese graduates has confirmed the necessity for a new school curriculum. It is believed that entrepreneurship education is one of the solutions to the problem. However, with the introduction of entrepreneurship education in the Gabonese education system, a change of curriculum will definitely be required. This paper therefore discusses the importance of curriculum change to adapt to the teaching of entrepreneurship education.

Participants in this study included learners, teachers and a government official representing the Ministry of Education. The study adopted a mixed method for data collection. Therefore, face-to-face interviews and self-administered questionnaires were used to collect in-depth information as well as achieve a larger representation of population. Results confirm that there is a necessity for entrepreneurship education thus suggesting the need for a new curriculum which should include some specific subjects. According to the results, these subjects could also be used for teacher training purposes as

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well; the adoption of the new curriculum would be challenging if teachers are not properly trained. Therefore, though a new curriculum (incorporating entrepreneurship education) is perceived as favorable to the education system in Gabon, teacher training is also viewed as ancillary to the effort. If a new curriculum is to be designed, teacher training must be considered as well to facilitate learner identification with entrepreneurship education.

**Keywords:** Youth unemployment, Curriculum design and development, Gabon, Entrepreneurship education

1. Introduction

Many reasons can be listed for youth unemployment in Africa. Salami (2011) lists a few which include little economic growth, stumpy economic activity and low investment. Gabon being part of Africa is not spared from the phenomenon.

Entrepreneurship has been adopted globally as a means of boosting the economy of countries (Pihie & Bagheri, 2011). Developed and even developing countries have assumed that entrepreneurship is not only a way out for declining economies but also for stagnating ones (Matlay, 2004:704). If entrepreneurship is viewed as an important factor for socioeconomic development considering the number of opportunities it provides for the populations (Karimi, Chizari, Biemans & Mulder, 2010), entrepreneurship education on the other hand is known to equip individuals with entrepreneurial capability and skills (Lope Pihie & Bagheri, 2011). In fact, there is enormous proof that entrepreneurship education impacts entrepreneurship intention (e.g., Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino 2007). However, Achor, Wilfred-Bonse and Kate (2013) argue that for entrepreneurship education to be taught in schools there needs to be a curriculum change that will fit the demand of the new subject. Apart from curriculum design that is necessary in the case of implementing entrepreneurship education in schools, Arthur, Hisrich and Cabrera (2012) confirm the necessity of trained teachers to facilitate the understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship. Thus, if teachers are not trained transmission of information might be challenging.

2. Objective of the paper

This paper seeks to establish the relationship between entrepreneurship education in Gabonese schools and a need for curriculum change. More specifically, it addresses youth unemployment in Gabon while considering the implementation of entrepreneurship education in schools to reduce youth unemployment phenomenon and the importance of teacher training.

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Overview of unemployment in Gabon

Unemployment is not a problem faced by Gabon alone. Many other countries in the world are experiencing the same. (Goussous (2009) noted that youth unemployment in Jordan is attributed to lack of career guidance for youth, lack of opportunities for jobs after graduation, difficulty in finding jobs that are compatible with one’s qualifications, and the gap between graduates’ skills and those needed by the employers. In North America, the increasing capital intensity of production, labour market regulations, and
generous welfare benefits are among the factors that propel youth unemployment (ECA, 2002).

Gabon is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of per capita gross national income, reflecting its modest population (1.5 million) and significant oil revenues (Carney, 2013). Sadly, while unemployment rate in Gabon increased to sixteen per cent in 2010 from fifteen per cent in 2005, job creation has not been proportionate to economic growth. In 2012, the national unemployment rate stood at twenty per cent (IMF, 2013). The International Monetary Fund (2013) confirms that employment has been largely sustained by the public sector, with a surge in public employment in recent years bringing its share in formal employment to sixty two per cent in 2010.

Figure - 1: Unemployment rate in Gabon

3.2. Overview of youth unemployment in Gabon/ Overview of the Gabonese economy

Although Gabon enjoys a per capita income four times that of most sub-Saharan Africa, a large proportion of the population remains poor. Youth unemployment is over the roof, in spite of the country’s vast natural resources. Statistics of this kind does not do well for any country’s image. In fact, Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) attest that the level of unemployment is a major image of the state of a nation’s economy. According to The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2013) unemployment and poverty in Gabon remain on the rise despite the abundance of natural resources, including oil, on which the country is still very dependent (Ndiho, 2013). However, since Gabon aspires to become an emerging economy by 2035, as immediate strategy the government encourages domestic and foreign private investments.

Gabon is ranked 15th out of 46 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa, and its overall score is lower than the world average according to The Heritage Foundation Index of Economic Freedom (2015). The high level of unemployment and poor business environment reflect both a skills mismatch and a poor business environment. Less than eight per cent of students receive technical education, leading to a severe shortage of these types of workers in the labour market (IMF, 2013).
3.3. What is entrepreneurship education?

Ekong (2008) defines entrepreneurship education as tutoring provided to enhance an individual’s skills in order to instil in him the desire to start a business and the competency to plan for it and manage it. While Mankinen and Turpeinen (1999) note that the objective of entrepreneurship education is to provide learners with knowledge that will help them in the future whether they are employees or employers, Ayeduso (2004) identifies seven detailed objectives. These are listed below:

1. Provide meaningful education for the youth which could make them self-reliant and subsequently encourage them to derive profit and be independent or self-developed;
2. Provide small and medium size companies with the opportunity to recruit qualified graduates who will receive training and tutoring in the skills relevant to the management of the small and medium business centres;
3. Provide graduates with the training and support necessary to help them established a career in small and medium size business;
4. Provide graduate in training skills that will make them meet the manpower needs of society;
5. Provide graduates with enough training in risk management to make uncertainty become possible and easy;
6. Stimulate industrial and economic growth of rural and less developed areas;
7. Provide graduates with enough training that will make them creative and innovative in identifying new business opportunities.

However, for learners to be equipped with entrepreneurial skills it is believed that teacher’s entrepreneurial skills must be up to date. In other words, teachers will find it challenging to teach entrepreneurship if they do not have the understanding of it (Seikkula-Leino et al., 2010). Moreover for entrepreneurship education to be implemented in Gabonese schools there is a need to consider curriculum design as an entrepreneurship oriented curricula can assist learners in identifying new business opportunities (Kourilsky & Esfandiari, 1997).

3.4. Curriculum design

The word curriculum originates from the Latin ‘currere’ which means ‘to run’ (McKimm, 2003). This simply refers to the way the action of learning takes place. According to Schield (2004) the goals attached to the interest of learners determine the content of a curriculum. In other words, if as mentioned above one of the objectives of schooling is to provide graduate-in-training with skills that will make him meet the manpower needs of society then there is a need for business oriented subjects in the curriculum. And for the success of the change, Huizinga et al., (2014) argue that teachers must be involved. However, before talking about necessity of curriculum design one must look at curricular cycle. A curricular cycle for entrepreneurship education designed, and adapted from Peyton (1998) is presented below:
Before developing a new programme, one needs to evaluate whether there is a need for the programme first. The outcome of the needs analysis will determine the design and then implementation of the new curriculum.

4. Methodology

Data were collected in three selected schools in Libreville where entrepreneurship education is not taught. This study adopted a mixed method. As defined by Kvaal, Halding and Kvigne (2013:105), a mixed-methods design may be defined as 'research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data using quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study. For the quantitative part of the study, the researcher randomly chose fifty grade 12 learners from three different schools. Purposive sampling method was employed in order to collect qualitative data. Participants in this exercise included principals, teachers and a government official. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered, but only 111 were returned.

Although SPSS is a common software package used by many researchers, the program is not that user friendly (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2014). Having said this, the researchers chose instead to use Microsoft Excel to analyze the quantitative data as it was easy to use, and also allowed the researchers to create graphs to analyze information (Niglas 2007).

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

Good research requires strong adherence to ethics. Ethics in this instance is defined as protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects at the same time (McMillan
Learners are not really faced with information on entrepreneurship. So entrepreneurship is not yet taught in school simply because it’s not yet in our culture’.

Principal 1 affirmed that the actual subjects are not appropriate for potential entrepreneurs: ‘…the actual program does not prepare the pupils to start their own business.’

5. Results

In our analysis we first evaluated if learners were familiar with the concept - entrepreneurship education or its associated subjects. Then we asked them if they would be interested in learning entrepreneurship education.

Figure – 3: Responses of the teachers regarding whether or not entrepreneurship education is taught in Gabonese schools

Teacher 2 (School C) said: ‘we don’t directly teach entrepreneurship as a subject but in our Commercial Techniques lectures we touch the 4P’s: product, price, promotion and place.’ In addition, the official from the Ministry of Education stated: ‘Learners are not really faced with information on entrepreneurship. So entrepreneurship is not yet taught in school simply because it’s not yet in our culture’.

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Table – 2: Learners’ awareness of entrepreneurship education

When asked if they had ever heard of entrepreneurship education, 48 (43.24 per cent) learners said yes while 63 (56.76 per cent) learners said no. An assumption can be made that although a good percentage of learners (56.76%) have heard of entrepreneurship education, very few really know what it is exactly therefore introducing entrepreneurship education into the curriculum may not be a bad idea. Table 2 above depicts the responses.

Table – 3: Learners’ desire to become entrepreneurs

To assess the interest of learners regarding entrepreneurship, they were asked whether or not they would want to become entrepreneurs at some point. Table 3 presents the responses of learners. Most of the learners harbor the desire to become entrepreneurs. Although the percentage difference between the two categories of learners is not vast, the results indicate that learners aspire to become entrepreneurs and this calls for an inquiry into the current curriculum which was not initially designed to accommodate pupils who want to engage in business later on.
Figure – 4: Teachers’ views of the subjects that should be taught for entrepreneurship education

Principal 1 only spoke about teaching methods without putting a particular accent on new subjects: ‘Program will focus on practical activities and subjects such as marketing, accounting for all kinds of teaching either general or technical. We will use case studies with real life experiences.’ In order to give to learners a solid foundation in business, Teacher 2 (School A) thinks that there is a need to talk about how to start up a business: ‘We will teach everything from how to start a business to how to keep the business growing, with some lessons in marketing and management as well’. Figure 3 above explains further.

Table – 4: Learners’ views on how adequate their current school curriculum is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good with minor improvements necessary</td>
<td>45.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor with major improvements necessary</td>
<td>16.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally adequate and needs no further</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally inadequate and needs drastic</td>
<td>25.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>10.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine the adequacy of their current subjects, learners were given four options in the data collection instrument: good with minor improvements necessary, poor with major improvements necessary, totally adequate and needs no further improvements and totally inadequate and needs drastic changes. The majority of learners (45.04%) said the school curriculum is good but needs minor improvements. However, very few (2.7%) thought the programme is totally adequate and needs no further improvements. An alarming number of participants did not respond to the question. The researchers believe that those learners refused to share their views for personal reasons although stipulated in the questionnaires was that identity would not be disclosed. While this question may not have seemed appropriate for learners, we
considered it to be helpful in terms of unraveling learners’ perception of the concept of entrepreneurship.

6. Discussion

Several studies have found that entrepreneurship education enhances one’s entrepreneurial skills (Osuala, 2010; Gibb, 1993; Jones & Iredale, 2010; Ekong, 2008) and desire to start a business (Maina, 2014; Marques & Albuquerque, 2012). Pursuant to this, we embarked on determining the relationship between entrepreneurship education and the need for curriculum change in Gabon. Interestingly, it emerged that firstly, very little is known about entrepreneurship among learners in Gabon. In this study, a considerable percentage of learners (25.23%) think that the current curriculum is inadequate and needs drastic improvements. This alone is a drive for a review of the Gabonese school curriculum. When asked whether entrepreneurship or its associated subjects were taught in Gabonese schools, teachers and principals asked entrepreneurship taught in Gabonese schools teachers and principals main answer was ‘ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION is not TAUGHT YET’. However, since education in Gabon is divided into two streams: technical teaching and general teaching, whatever is being taught in the technical stream is not necessarily taught in the general stream. Thus, a teacher (Teacher 2, School C) from technical stream indicated that they do not teach entrepreneurship directly but ‘commercial techniques which sort of address the 4P’s (product, price, promotion and Place).

The results suggest that there is no evidence of entrepreneurship education in Libreville’s secondary schools, although most learners want to engage in business after school. In fact the results confirm that almost fifty one per cent of the learners wish to become entrepreneurs. The results also confirm that forty four per cent of learners have heard about entrepreneurship education. Isaacs, Visser, Friedrich and Brijlal (2007) suggest that teachers use entrepreneurship education to empower learners with business skills for future business involvement. We believe that the first empowerment starts with the knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurship education. However, it is worrying that none of the three schools which participated in the study offered entrepreneurship or associated subjects (see Figure 2) although one of the teachers admitted that their commercial technique marginally covers the 4P’s. We are therefore of the opinion that a number of business subjects should be taught in secondary schools in order for learners to align with their desire to become entrepreneurs or businessmen and expect some successful results. These subjects include: business, marketing, accounting, management. However, although some of these subjects have the science side (management and business abilities) of teaching there is need for the arts side (creative and innovative thinking that will lead to starting up a business) of teaching (Rae, 2004; Jack and Anderson, 1999). This suggests a mix of science and arts subjects which should be included in the new school curriculum of Gabonese schools.

The results confirm the findings of a previous study (Goussous, 2009) in terms of skills mismatch and high level of unemployment. We discovered that Gabonese learners are interested in business studies and would love to engage in business but the curriculum does not fully allow them. Knowing that entrepreneurship plays a specific role in a country’s economic growth (Ahlstrom & Zhujun Ding) and that the more people know about and practice entrepreneurship the more the economy grows (Smith, 2010), there is a need to align the Gabonese school curriculum with the global demand
for entrepreneurship. When this is done, the youth will increase their knowledge of and practice of entrepreneurship which will allow them to create employment and grow the economy. This can only be possible if there is a link between subjects taught in school and the realities (graduate unemployment and poverty) the Gabonese population is facing.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to establish a relationship between entrepreneurship education in Gabonese schools and a need for curriculum change. This is on the backdrop of the high rates of unemployment and poverty. It is commonly argued that entrepreneurship education provides the opportunity for growth in an economy through better understanding of business processes and investment. Considering that entrepreneurship education is an opportunity for pupils today to become successful entrepreneurs and/or business people tomorrow, one can understand that classic subjects such as mathematics, philosophy or marketing, management and business are not enough but rather a mixed curriculum will be more beneficial for learners.

Our findings suggest a need for entrepreneurship education in Gabonese schools, therefore necessitating a review of the current curriculum. This is based on the much talked about significance of entrepreneurship as a major driver of economic growth in any economy. We are conversant with several studies which have argued for the need for entrepreneurship education as a means of instilling business development and management sense into the youth. We are equally aware that the mere introduction of entrepreneurship education in the curriculum will not produce the necessary socioeconomic boost in a developing economy such as Gabon. Therefore, we suggest that this proposal, on implementation, be supported by various stakeholders namely government, civil society and teachers’ professional unions. On the government side, there will be the need for well-equipped schools, well-trained teachers and so on. Civil society can play a role by working with schools to extend classroom learning. With many stakeholders encouraging learners to study entrepreneurship at school, there is the likelihood of positive economic turnaround of the Gabon economy in the near future.

This study has some limitations anyway. For instance, the use of Microsoft Excel may have shortchanged the findings. Perhaps a more rigorous statistical tool such as SPSS may have interacted with the data better. Therefore, there is a need for future studies to engage the leaners in a more rigorous statistical application. Earlier, we singled out a particular question to have provided an opportunity for us to gauge how much learners knew about the concept entrepreneurship. Perhaps we should have followed up by way of an unstructured interview mechanism, to uncover the true meaning of entrepreneurship from the learners. Also, the participation of more schools in the study may have provided more diverse findings. Finally, future research should focus on designing a business-focused curriculum for Gabonese schools.
References


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Apstrakt

Očigledana borba gabonskih diplomaca potvrdila je potrebu za novim nastavnim planom i programom škole. Veruje se da je preduzetničko obrazovanje jedno od rešenja problema. Međutim, sa uvođenjem preduzetničkog obrazovanja u gabonskom obrazovnom sistemu definitivno će biti potrebna i promena nastavnog plana i programa. Ovaj dokument s toga govori o značaju promene nastavnog plana i programa i prilagođavanja nastave preduzetničkom obrazovanju. U ovoj studiji uključeni su učenici, nastavnici i jedan vladin zvaničnik koji predstavlja Ministarstvo prosvete. Studija je usvojila mešoviti metod prikupljanja podataka. U prikupljanju detaljnih podataka korišćeni su direktni intervjui (lice u lice) i upitnici kako bi se obezbedila veća zastupljenost populacije. Rezultati su potvrdili da postoji potreba za preduzetničkim obrazovanjem. Dakle, potreban je novi dizajn nastavnog plana i programa sa konkretnim temama koje bi trebalo uključiti u nastavni program. Prema dobijenim rezultatima evidentno je da ove predmete mogu koristiti i učitelji jer će usvajanje novog nastavnog programa za učitelje biti veliki izazov ukoliko nisu adekvatno obučeni. Iako se novi nastavni program (uključivanje preduzetničkog obrazovanja) smatra povoljnim za gabonski sistem obrazovanja, obuka nastavnika je podređena ovim naporima. Preporučuje se da, iako je potrebno da se dizajnira novi nastavni plan i program, obuka nastavnika mora se smatrati kao olakšica identifikacije učenika sa preduzetničkim obrazovanjem.

Ključne reči: nezaposlenost mladih, dizajn nastavnog plana i programa, obrazovanje i razvoj, Gabon, preduzetničko obrazovanje