Unlocking Zimbabwe’s global competitiveness through compulsory entrepreneurial education: Evidence from Chinhoyi University of Technology

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Higher Education-Industry Synergy

Abstract
Zimbabwe’s pathetic position on world global competitiveness rankings calls for the need to strategically position the country for economic leadership. The provision of the CUT Act (2001) prescribing the mentoring of entrepreneurial graduates is taken in this research as an agent for unlocking Zimbabwe’s potential for global competitiveness, through the strengthening of the pillars of global competitiveness; hence the intention of this study was to explore the success of CUT’s entrepreneurial education-for-all policy in converting prospective job seekers into aggressive entrepreneurs. First semester and finalist students were identified to ascertain pre and post-learning entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions and intentions. The research addresses the essence of integrating entrepreneurship into the Zimbabwean education system as a tool for unlocking the country’s potential for global competitiveness. This study found that compulsory entrepreneurial education at CUT is currently failing to transform students’ entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions and intentions to some reasonable extent. Students’ satisfaction with the entrepreneurship course in terms of course materials, teaching methods and achievement of expected learning outcomes is low. Basing on the findings, an integrated model for sustainable compulsory entrepreneurial education across the Zimbabwean education system is developed and recommended to for adoption in the Zimbabwean context.

Keywords: Global Competitiveness; Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial Education

1. Introduction and Background

On the World Economic Forum ratings for countries’ global competitiveness the world over, Zimbabwe has remained lowly rated in the category of the bottom twenty, though some tentative arbitrary improvement has been noted in the 2011 to 2012 report in which the country moved up slightly in the global competitive rankings, moving to 132nd place out of 142 countries from 138th place in the preceding year. The tentative improvement might be based on macroeconomic conditions and attempts by the government to curb corruption and inefficiency in public institutions. This leaves enough room for improvement. According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Index for 2012-2013, Zimbabwe is ranked 132nd out of 144 countries worldwide, while South Africa and Mauritius rank 52 and 54 respectively. The dawn of the twenty first century saw the Government of Zimbabwe recognise the need for the country to academically breed aggressive entrepreneurs who can work towards strategically positioning the country’s economy for leadership through global competitiveness, as well as to ease the flaming rate of graduate unemployment in the country. Among the measures taken by the government was tasking Chinhoyi University of Technology to churn out entrepreneurial graduates who are ready to start businesses. This is precisely enshrined in the Chinhoyi University of Technology Act of 2001 as a key object of the University. In an endeavour to fulfil the mandate, the University had to promptly implement a policy which sees every student take at least one course in entrepreneurship. This was meant to give each student an entrepreneurial eye in their area of study; thus, ensuring that graduates are churned out to identify and exploit business opportunities so as to create rather than seek employment. In addition, the university had to launch an honours degree

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programme in entrepreneurship which was the first of its kind in Zimbabwe. This meant nurturing highly sensitive, versatile and aggressive entrepreneurs whose eyes are readily open in pursuit of existing business opportunities and who can also pioneer and discover new business ventures. The success factors for the entrepreneurial thrust therefore would be the transformation of a student who enrols at the University with a job seeker mentality into an aggressive entrepreneur who has no passion for seeking employment. This would translate to employment creation for the unemployed personnel around the country as well as causing a boom in the country’s productivity which also boosts exports, improves balance of payments and most significantly brings about the much desired economic turnaround and hence global competitiveness. Unemployment however has been the country’s enemy over the past decade and is ever deepening. The country is also to a great extent relying on imports since the productive sector of the economy is not fully operational. On the world global competitiveness scale, we remain poorly rated.

2.2 Problem Statement

Zimbabwe has remained poorly rated in terms of global competitiveness, yet cognisant of this fact the government has already entrusted CUT to convert prospective job-seekers into innovative and entrepreneurial graduates. There is therefore need to gather evidence with regards to the success of the entrepreneurial thrust as a key for unlocking the country’s global competitiveness potential. As it is also quite troubling to imagine what really makes one geared for starting their own business ventures, this research is set to intervene in the old debate of whether entrepreneurship is entirely an inborn quality or can be learnt.

2.3 Research Objectives

1. To assess the effectiveness of compulsory entrepreneurial education at CUT in transforming students’ entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions and intentions.
2. To investigate students’ satisfaction with the entrepreneurship course in terms of course materials, teaching methods and achievement of expected learning outcomes.
3. To propose an integrated model for sustainable compulsory entrepreneurial education across the Zimbabwean education system.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Global Competitiveness

The International Institute for Management Development defines competitiveness as “a field of economic knowledge which analyses the facts and policies that shape the ability of a nation to create and maintain an environment that sustains more value creation for its enterprises and more prosperity for its people.” The World Economic Forum definition is: “the ability of a country to achieve sustained high rates of growth in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.” It follows therefore that only nations which are highly productive will become domestically and globally competitive and have the capacity to exploit existing market opportunities to sustain and expand employment and real income growth in the long term. For ranking economies for global competitiveness, the World Economic Forum depends on twelve themes which have now been popularly referred to as the twelve pillars of global competitiveness. The pillars are as listed below:

- Institutions (Public and private)
- Infrastructure
- Macroeconomic stability
- Health and primary education
- Higher education and training
- Goods market efficiency
- Labour market efficiency
- Financial market sophistication
- Technological readiness
- Market size
- Business sophistication
- Innovation

2.2 Imperatives for Enhancing Global Competitiveness

Abdullah (2012) asserted that the imperatives for global competitiveness involve addressing the following issues: macroeconomic policies; government practices and regulations; the cost of doing business; education and skills upgrading; R&D and innovation; sustainable environmental management; conformity with international standards; and total factor productivity (TFP). The principal consultant had this to say ‘Globalization and trade liberalization coupled with rapid advances in information and communications technology have resulted in an unprecedented intensification of market competition worldwide’. The governments of many Asian countries have made competitiveness a high priority in their strategic planning and policy formulation for development plans. As Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi of Malaysia (currently chairing the Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness, which is focusing on developing Malaysia’s competitive advantage to complement its traditional comparative advantage) stated, “If ever there is an issue that we must be single-minded about, it must be about improving and continuously improving our national competitiveness; all our strategies, plans, programs, and policies must be directed toward raising our productivity.”

2.3 An entrepreneur

The definition of an entrepreneur dates back to as early as 1911, when Schumpeter defined an entrepreneur as a person who destroys the existing economic order to create and benefit from the new structure by introducing new products and services, or by creating new forms of organisation,
or by exploiting new raw materials. Thompson (1999) defined an entrepreneur as someone who is able to identify and exploit a new business opportunity.

Ming Yu Cheng, Wai Sei Chan, Amir Mahmood, (2009) had this to say: ‘Though the definitions that constitute an entrepreneur differ in description, there is a consensus that an entrepreneur is someone who has a unique instinct, mind-set, inspiration or vision, and has the strengths, willingness, and ability to conceptualise ideas and implement a business plan and who sees change as an opportunity to create value.’

2.4 Entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurship

There is not much documented work on entrepreneurial education in respect of undergraduate degree programs in Zimbabwe. However, orientation towards the practice of entrepreneurship is one of the most important features of all CUT undergraduate programs. A thorough search of literature reveals that entrepreneurial education plays a significant role in cultivating the entrepreneurship spirit among graduates (Ronstadt, 1987; Katz, 2003; Solomon et al., 2002; Robinson and Hayes, 1991; Sexton and Upton, 1984). Kolvereid and Moen (1997) found out that students who have taken a course or major in entrepreneurship have shown greater interest in becoming entrepreneurs and these students act more entrepreneurially than other students in taking up the challenge to start a new business. The studies imply that education does have an effect in contributing to the formation of entrepreneurship. According to Ibrahim and Soufani (2002), the school and education system plays a critical role in identifying and shaping entrepreneurial traits. Clarke (1990), as well as Menzies and Paradi (2003) precisely pointed out that entrepreneurial education, especially education that provides technological training, is crucial to enhance entrepreneurs’ innovation skills in an increasingly challenging environment. It is evident from the several studies that despite the old school of thought that entrepreneurs are born and not made, there are ways to instil entrepreneurship. Although Nabi and Linan (2011) asserted that there is a lack of research in the field of graduate entrepreneurship in the developing world, and that further research in developing countries may help to understand and shed light on the issues evolving around graduate entrepreneurial intentions and business start-up and education, evidence from several researches carried out on entrepreneurial education has it that many universities all over the world have now inculcated entrepreneurship in their curricula. In a landmark study by Adejimola and Olufunmilayo (2009) in Nigeria, the introduction of entrepreneurial education as a compulsory course in the university system was seen as a measure to address the problem of graduate unemployment and strategically position the economy for leadership in Africa. The researchers recommended that the Nigerian ecosystem must be harnessed before meaningful entrepreneurship development can take place. They concluded that curriculum review, sensitisation, advocacy and mobilisation of support for entrepreneurial education, programme focus and funding together with the political will and stability of the government should be provided for entrepreneurship culture and development. Lazenby and Machaba (2011) made a number of interesting inferences from their study carried out in South Africa. For example, it seemed university graduates were less likely to give up the comfort zone of employment and risk time and capital to start a business. It was also inferred that it cannot conclusively be said that entrepreneurial propensity in people is a deterministic outcome. The researchers also concluded that there is certainty that entrepreneurs are endowed with inborn qualities that separate them from those who don’t have them. By relying extensively on articles on entrepreneurship development and government statistical documentations, Anyadike et al. (2012) made several findings and recommendations among which is that government should make entrepreneurship sellable to the people by inculcating it into the educational curriculum at every strata of the educational sector and also utilize a re-modelled scheme to educate the youths more on the importance, essence and need for entrepreneurship development especially on a practical basis and then find a means of supporting these entrepreneurship projects cutting across all spheres of the country; and also create enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive by ensuring social security and adequate infrastructural facilities. In Malaysia, it was noted by Ming Yu Cheng (2009) that entrepreneurial education was not matching students’ skill expectations with skill acquisition. The findings also indicated that the level of understanding on “what is entrepreneurship” was still low among the respondents selected in the study. Packham et al. (2010) found that enterprise education had a positive impact on entrepreneurial attitude of French and Polish students. Conversely, the course had a negative impact on male German students. It was also found that while female students are more likely to perceive a greater benefit from the learning experience, the impact of enterprise education on entrepreneurial attitude is actually more significant for male students. Based on the result of their study, Lee et al. (2000) concluded that the impact of entrepreneurial education in Korea is much greater than that in the U.S. According to the same researchers, this result strongly suggests that the impact of entrepreneurial education in countries where entrepreneurship oriented culture is poor or still in the embryonic stage of development will be greater than that in countries with a strong entrepreneurship-oriented culture.

2.5 Entrepreneurship and Global Competitiveness

A landmark study by Stel et al. (2005) which investigated whether total entrepreneurship activity influences GDP growth for a sample of 36 countries, tested whether this influence depends on the level
of economic development measured as GDP per capita. The study found that entrepreneurial activity by nascent entrepreneurs and owners/managers of young businesses affects economic growth, but that this effect depends upon the level of per capita income. Thus, entrepreneurship was found to play a different role in countries in different stages of economic development. Porter (2012) maintained that entrepreneurs are crucial in order to translate Saudi Arabian progress on competitiveness into broad-based economic growth and employment. The great professor also noted that Saudi entrepreneurs have begun to establish themselves as an integral part of the Saudi economy, and also that the future success of Saudi entrepreneurs will depend on sustained efforts to upgrade the Saudi business environment to meet entrepreneurs’ specific needs. Acs et al (2010) in their paper constructed a Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index (GEDI) that captures the contextual feature of entrepreneurship across countries. The study found the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic development to be mildly S-shaped not U-shaped or L-shaped. The study also established that the stages of development are more varied at the innovation driven stage than at either the factor driven stage or the efficiency driven stage.

Research Methodology

This study employed the survey method. The target population of the research consisted of CUT first and final semester students across all the five full time degree programs in the School of Business Sciences and Management. The major instrument was the questionnaire designed by the researchers to reveal the evolution of students’ entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions and intentions as they get access to enterprise education. This marks the effectiveness of the university’s entrepreneurial thrust which entails the provision of entrepreneurial education to all students who study at CUT. For first semester students, the research instrument sought to gather views on students’ pre-learning entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions and intentions and for finalist students, the research instrument sought to trace the evolution of students’ entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions and intentions over the duration of their stay at CUT; thus, how the entrepreneurial thrust has narrowed their minds towards enterprising rather than job-seeking. The research could make use of one group, the final semester students, since their first semester views are also gathered, but the researchers found it prudent to consider first semester students for triangulation purposes. The questionnaire was also designed in a way that allowed the researchers to gain an insight into students’ knowledge of entrepreneurship. Weak points of the entrepreneurial thrust were sought in all the questionnaires used in the research. The study employed the simple random sampling method for both groups of respondents. Given the nature of simple random sampling, respondents were chosen randomly from different departments according to a percentage of the population. For each department, 15% of the students were randomly selected. Thus, all departments were represented by an equal percentage of respondents. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to targeted students. A pilot survey was first conducted where 10 questionnaires were distributed to senior academics and students (who did not form part of the sample) across the whole School, before the distribution of the final questionnaires. Based on the information gathered from the pilot survey, questions in the questionnaires were then amended and improved. The modified questionnaires were then distributed to other students not involved in the pilot study in order to avoid any bias and pre-impression towards the final survey.

3. Findings and discussion

1. Demographic Information

The current study centred on a total sample of 133 students in the School of Business Sciences and Management (Accounting 48; Entrepreneurship 19; Retail Management 17; Marketing 22 and Purchasing 27). This demographic information is depicted in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Study Sample Composition

The respondents in both categories (first semester and final student) had very little or no prior exposure to work or entrepreneurship activities. Thus the sample makes it possible to examine the effectiveness of formal entrepreneurial education conducted at CUT as these respondents had very little knowledge of entrepreneurship prior to taking entrepreneurship courses. A total of 90.2 per cent of the respondents said they had no experience of running their own business while 51 respondents (38.3 per cent) said they had no full-time working experience. For those with full-time working experience, 56.1 per cent worked for less than a year, 14.6 per cent worked between one and two years, 13.4 per cent worked between three and five years, and 15.9 per cent worked more than five years.
2. Effectiveness of entrepreneurship training at CUT

This study examined the effectiveness of entrepreneurial education basing on the conclusion of Souitaris et al (2007), that an effective entrepreneurship programme is one which is able to influence entrepreneurial intentions. A correlation analysis to test the relationship between knowledge about entrepreneurship and intention to start a business upon graduation revealed an insignificant relationship. Thus, this suggests that the entrepreneurship course taught at CUT fails to create an impact to influence students to take up entrepreneurial challenges. Figure 2 below further substantiates the correlation analysis findings.

Figure 2: Rating of entrepreneurship training by students (in % of sample).

As depicted above, of the 54 finalist students who had received entrepreneurship training, only 16.7 per cent of the respondents said that the entrepreneurship training was excellent, 29.6 per cent considered it as good, and 9.3 per cent said it was poor. The negatives of the entrepreneurship course centred around comments such as: lecturers lack necessary skills and experience to teach the subject; inappropriate teaching methods; a focus that was too exam oriented and a lack of emphasis on the practical side of entrepreneurship.

Figure 3: Desired delivery methods (in absolute number of respondents)

According to the record depicted below, the group projects and written examinations given to students seem to be the least appropriate in assessing students taking the entrepreneurship course. Instead, large numbers of students are eager to take up entrepreneurship tasks individually (43), to be tested on coming up with bankable business plans (41) and to make oral presentations (37) as part of their assessment. The current research findings therefore almost nullify the current assessment methods used for the course.

Figure 4: Desired assessment methods (in absolute number of respondents)

The current study identified nine aspects of entrepreneurship which were considered essential for any aggressive entrepreneur who can contribute to national growth in the Zimbabwean economy. The respondents were asked to rate themselves in respect of the extent to which they agreed with the depth of the knowledge in the nine areas of entrepreneurship both before and after taking the entrepreneurship course. The responses were rated as strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). These responses therefore gave a theoretical mean of 2.5, against which the computed means for each area of entrepreneurship were compared. Any mean below the theoretical mean implies a disagreement, whereas any mean above the theoretical mean implies an agreement. This is notwithstanding however that...
the deviation from the theoretical mean depicts the levels of agreement or disagreement. Figure 5 below indicates the computed mean values before and after entrepreneurship training.

**Figure 5: Mean values of entrepreneurship aspects**

![Image of Figure 5](image)

From figure 5 above, it is evident that the teaching of entrepreneurship improved students in respect of all the areas of entrepreneurship, though in most cases the improvement was insignificant. This study notes that before training, only one out of the nine areas had a mean above the theoretical mean, thus the start up basics whose deviation stood at only 0.4. After training, two other areas, business planning and responsibilities of an entrepreneur improved significantly and scored mean values well above the theoretical mean.

3. **Entrepreneurial knowledge among students**

Though more than 72 percent of the 54 finalist students claimed that they knew what entrepreneurship is, there is still a significant number of respondents (28 percent) who, after taking an entrepreneurship course, expressed lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship. The 38 respondents who claimed to understand the term “entrepreneurship” offered various definitions of entrepreneurial education ranging from: exploiting new business opportunities (48.1 percent); to business management (31.5 percent); and risk management (20.4 percent). The findings reveal that the level of knowledge and understanding on the meaning and purpose of entrepreneurial education among students is not very high, though reasonably fair.

4. **Entrepreneurial intentions, perceptions and attitudes**

The current study had anticipated that students majoring in entrepreneurship would resemble more aggressiveness in terms of fighting job seeking and in favour of job creation. However, it is evident that those who take entrepreneurship as a once off course and those majoring in entrepreneurship are generally of the same entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions. The average percentage of first semester students who intended to start their own businesses stood at 30.8 percent, while that of finalist students was 37 percent. The seemingly insignificant rise promptly suggests that on average, entrepreneurs are born and hard to make.

4. **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings of the current study show the ineffectiveness of entrepreneurial education in Zimbabwe in matching students’ skill expectations with their skill acquisition. Chinhoyi University of Technology and any other educational institutions which will pursue the entrepreneurial thrust need to revise the existing curriculum and come up with a more appropriate curriculum to develop effective entrepreneurship courses and enterprising individuals who are highly innovative. The results further reveal that the level of understanding on “what is entrepreneurship” is still low among the two categories of students chosen to respond in the current study. The present study is limited in scope, as it only addressed students from one school (Business Sciences and Management) at one institution (CUT). There is therefore need to conduct more comprehensive research on the actual outcomes of entrepreneurial education, especially in the context of CUT in Zimbabwe. This requires a critical study involving the monitoring of participants in all faculties before, during and after the completion of their studies. Further research is also necessary to investigate the impact of entrepreneurial education upon individuals who already have their own businesses. As noted earlier, various studies conducted in other parts of the world have suggested that the investment in entrepreneurial education can bring important returns to graduates and to the society. In this century when technology is dynamic and when university graduates need to be proficient in seeking and implementing new products and new technologies; entrepreneurial education can be an important instrument for unlocking Zimbabwe’s global competitiveness. Entrepreneurial education also provides spill over effects to the broader society by making it more responsive to new technology and more supportive of risk taking and technology transfer. Recognising the benefits of entrepreneurial education, more efforts should be taken to provide effective entrepreneurship courses and programmes in Zimbabwe. This paper has highlighted the deficiency of the current entrepreneurship training at CUT in creating enterprising individuals. Currently, the focus of entrepreneurial education at CUT seems to be too mechanistic and appears to do little to promote entrepreneurial behaviour. The government should consider revising the existing education system and processes from the grassroots. Unless the government takes an urgent action to improve the current education system to impart entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, the country may struggle to meet the upcoming new challenges brought by the ever changing political, economic, social and technological environment in today’s global economy.

The present study proposes the following measures to contribute towards an integrated model for
sustainable compulsory entrepreneurial education across the Zimbabwean education system.
1. Institutions of higher learning should start to focus on high-growth-oriented entrepreneurship: how to build, finance and grow companies.
2. The Zimbabwe Government, through the ministry of Education has to integrate entrepreneurship into the curriculum at early stages of education and build towards a multidisciplinary learning environment.
3. Institutions of higher learning have to be mandated to make entrepreneurship a required course, in the same way CUT did it.
4. Projects and programmes have to be built across disciplines at colleges and universities offering entrepreneurship training to promote the application of “learning by doing”.
5. Trainers now need to focus research and teaching on all of the entrepreneurial growth phases, not just the start-up phase.
6. Academic institutions have to look into recruiting professors who also have practical entrepreneurship experience.
7. The government has to look into providing tax incentives to encourage donations to universities to support entrepreneurship programmes.
8. Entrepreneurship and innovation programmes should be inter-locking.
9. Stronger links need to be established between academia, business and entrepreneurs.
10. Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs) have to be established across the country on an open access basis for both students and non-students.

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