

Entrepreneurship Curriculum Development In Open And Distance Learning The Real Solution To Unemployment Challenges

Dominic Uzhenyu, Johannes Marisa

¹Senior lecturer, Faculty of Commerce and Law, Zimbabwe Open University

²Medical practitioner, Windview Hospitals

Abstract: This study sought to establish why the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) was not taking entrepreneurship as a pivotal course for all its programmes that should avert the high unemployment levels in Zimbabwe since there was a sizeable number of Open and distance learners (ODL) who were jobless even after graduating. Formal employment has been 'severely' affected in Zimbabwe over the past decade as evidenced by a number of companies which have been liquidated or have downsized their operations, largely due to economic challenges bedeviling the country. There have been numerous cases of retrenchments. The study was qualitative and targeted ZOU faculties particularly academics and students. Unstructured interviews were used to generate data. Data analysis was done using the content analysis method. Major findings were that; despite awareness of entrepreneurship through Ministries of Primary and Secondary education, Small and Medium Enterprises and Youth, Indigenization and Economic development, civic society and the corporate world, universities such as ZOU had not done much to promote entrepreneurship which was not even covered by majority of its programmes. There was still a strong culture among Zimbabweans especially university graduates, to look for formal employment in established companies. ZOU used to feed the formal sector but it seems there has not been any thrust to review its curricular in light of limited employment opportunities in Zimbabwe and the changing world of work. A culture paradigm shift was needed by having entrepreneurship as a mandatory course for ODL so that those who are not formally employed will be prepared to start new projects and business ventures through sustainable entrepreneurship in order to earn a decent living. Support from government, local authorities and financial sector to fund prospective viable business ventures was also needed.

Key words: Curriculum Development, Entrepreneurship, Open and Distance Learning, Unemployment. Solution

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I. Introduction and background to the study

Curriculum development is a planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process in order to create positive improvements in the educational system (Alvior, 2015; Bilbao et al, 2008). Every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school (university) curricular are affected. There is a need to update them in order to address the society's needs (Emans, 2014). There must be a chain of developmental process to develop a society. First, the school curriculum particularly in higher education must be developed to preserve the country's national identity and to ensure its economy's growth and stability. Thus, the president of a country must have a clear vision for his people and for the country as well and that the country's economy can improve the people's way of life through curriculum development (Chapel, 2005). And in order to develop it, curriculum experts or specialists should work hand in hand with the lawmakers (senators and members of parliament), the local government officials, such as governors, mayors, and others; the business communities and industries; and stakeholders to set implementing rules and policies for educational reforms.

Entrepreneurship is the capacity and willingness to develop, organize and manage a business venture along with any of its risks in order to make a profit (Hardy, 2013, Napoleon, 2016). The most obvious example of entrepreneurship is the starting of new businesses. In economics, entrepreneurship combined with land, labor, natural resources and capital can produce profit (Hardy, 2013). Entrepreneurial spirit is characterized by innovation and risk-taking, and is an essential part of a nation's ability to succeed in an ever changing and increasingly competitive global marketplace including employment creation.

Contemporary Entrepreneurship in the Zimbabwean context cannot be studied or discussed outside the economic operational framework, ZIMASSET (Zimtreasury, 2014). ZIMASSET is the economic blue print running from 2013-2018, which is supposed to create a conducive framework to resuscitate Zimbabwe's ailing economy. ZIMASSET is hinged on **four clusters** which are Food security and nutrition, Value addition and

beneficiation, Infrastructure and utilities and Poverty reduction (Zimtreasury, 2014). It is supposed to promote business performance and economic growth of 7,2% during its period as well as improving the livelihoods and the welfare of all Zimbabweans. It promised among other things; empowerment of the youths, rehabilitation of roads, schools, provision of health services to all the citizens, shelter and creation of employment.

Unemployment in Zimbabwe has been exacerbated by a landmark Supreme Court ruling of 17 July 2015 which empowered employers to dismiss employees based on common law, by giving them 3 months' notice without need to give reason(s) for such actions (Uzhenyu, 2015). This has resulted in many thousands of workers losing formal employment since that ruling.

However, there seems to be a serious negative attitude towards entrepreneurship by students and even institutions of higher learning such as ZOU as they see the formal sector especially large companies as the only meaningful source of sustainable employment, yet there are a lot of successful African entrepreneurs such as Strive Masiyiwa (the most successful Zimbabwe entrepreneur) and Dangote of Nigeria whose net worth was estimated at an astonishing 12,1 billion dollars (Mfonobong, 2013). Therefore, Zimbabwean graduates including those unemployed who went through ODL should get inspiration from such successful fellow Africans. This shows that entrepreneurship can improve the lives of Africans as demonstrated by just these two sampled successful entrepreneurs.

II. Statement of the problem

Not much has been done by ZOU which is the largest ODL state university with campuses in all the 10 provinces across the country, to promote entrepreneurship which should solve the country's ballooning unemployment rate and enhance sustainable enterprises to innovate, adopt appropriate environmentally friendly technologies, develop human resources, and enhance productivity to remain competitive. Existing curricular is aligned towards employment in largely established companies by university graduates yet these companies are restructuring, retrenching or facing serious viability problems and a number have already been liquidated.

III. Research Questions (Sub-problems)

1. What is the attitude of ZOU towards entrepreneurship?
2. Which are the challenges affecting the teaching of entrepreneurship by ODL institutions?
3. How can ODL promote entrepreneurship to address unemployment challenges facing Zimbabwe?

IV. Literature Review

4.1 The Theoretical framework

The **ADDIE model** (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation phases). This is a systematic instructional design process (Alvior, 2015) which can be used by ZOU faculties in developing curriculum in their departments including entrepreneurship as a course which can have general or common principles and then specific aspects tailor made to suit each programme. A synopsis of its 5 phases as presented by Alvior (2015) is given below

1. Analysis

Prior to course development, a thorough analysis of the state of the graduates' requirements, school or board requests, and competitive positioning is completed. Feedback on current courses from student academic performance, user feedback, usability reviews, and national standards should be incorporated into the analysis.

2. Design

Within the design phase, the curriculum team attends to the set of standards around which the course is written, instructional strategies, content, visual and technical design of the course. Attention is focused on the course's purpose and audience (ODL students), as well as the organization's instructional approach and instructional resources. Consideration is also given to the role of technology, the level of student engagement and student learning styles.

3. Development

Beginning with a course map which focuses on standards alignment and the identification of the enduring knowledge present in the course, the development lifecycle incorporates unit by unit course development and revision, content analysis and review, editorial review and revision, and a detailed quality assurance appraisal. Procedures for ensuring internal consistency, bias-free content and assessments, instructional effectiveness, and the appropriate use of intellectual property are implemented throughout this development phase. When courses are completed before implementation, they are presented to students, academics (tutors and senate) and other key stakeholders such as employers and even the responsible authority (in the case of ZOU, it is the Ministry of higher and tertiary education, science and technology development, preferably its quality assurance unit, the Zimbabwe council for higher education, ZIMCHE).

4. Implementation

Each academic year should bring the implementation of newly developed programmes and courses. Before full release, demonstration or pilot courses are created, evaluated by tutors and suggestions should be implemented. Learning and effective implementation is supported by updated and ongoing training for all.

5. Evaluation

The intent of the evaluation phase is to determine the level of student success, and the impact of the course design on student performance and industry impact. Evaluation occurs throughout the delivery of the course and includes student performance, internal lesson and assessment analysis, and feedback from students, tutors, employers etc. Essential user feedback can be gained through surveys e.g. for ZOU taking seriously course evaluation forms.

4.2 The Conceptual Framework

4.2.1 The 7 key issues in the designing of the curriculum content.

According to Bilbao et al (2008) it is critical to ensure that the following are observed

1 Self-sufficiency

To help learners attain maximum self-sufficiency at the most economical manner is the main guiding principle for subject matter or content selection. Economy of learning refers to less teaching effort and less use of educational resources; but students gain more results. They are able to cope up with the learning outcomes effectively. This means that students should be given chance to experiment, observe, and do field study. This allows them to learn independently.

2 Significance

The subject matter or content is significant if it is selected and organized for the development of learning activities, skills, processes, and attitude. It also develops the three domains of learning namely the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills, and considers the cultural aspects of the learners. Particularly, if students come from different cultural backgrounds and races, the subject matter must be culture-sensitive.

3 Validity

Validity refers to the authenticity of the subject matter or content selected. Topics should not be obsolete. For example, it is not proper to include typewriting as a skill to be learned by ZOU students but should be about the computer or Information Technology (IT). There is a need to check regularly the subject matter or contents of the curriculum, and replace it if necessary. Modern curriculum experts are after current trends, relevance and authenticity of the curriculum; otherwise the university or country will be left behind.

4 Interest

This criterion is true to learner-centred curriculum. Students learn best if the subject matter is meaningful to them. It becomes meaningful if they are interested in it. But if the curriculum is subject-centred, tutors have no choice but to finish the syllabi and teach only what is in the learning material e.g. a module in the case of ZOU. This may somehow explain why many fail certain courses.

5 Utility

Another criterion is the usefulness of the content or subject matter. Students think that a subject matter or some subjects are not important to them. They may view that as meaningless or useless. As a result, they don't study seriously. Students often ask these common questions: Will I need the subject in my job? Will it give meaning to my life? Will it develop my potentials? Will it solve my problem? Will it be part of the test? Will I have a passing mark if I learn it? Students only value the subject matter or content if it is useful to them.

6 Learnability

The subject matter or content must be within the schema of the learners. It should be within their experiences. Teachers should apply theories on psychology of learning in order to know how subjects are presented, sequenced, and organized to maximize the learning capacity of the students.

7 Feasibility

It means that the subject matter can be fully implemented. It should consider the real situation of the university (school), the government, industry and commerce and the society, in general. Students must learn within the allowable time and the use of resources available. Further, feasibility means that there should be teachers who are experts in that area. For example, it is not proper to offer English for Business Communication if there is no tutor to handle it. Also, there is a need to consider the nature of the learners. The organization and design of the subject matter or content must be appropriate to the nature of students.

4.2.2 The 8 characteristics of successful entrepreneurship

Khan (2014) supported by Ynkamat (2014) give the characteristics that should guide one to be a successful entrepreneur as follows

1 Self-Awareness

2 Self-Belief

3 Adaptability

4 Calmness and composure

5 Unwavering passion

6 Open mindedness

7 A forward looking approach

8 A content flow of ideas

These above skills need to be the desired outcomes of a student who will have done entrepreneurship as a course at ZOU which should help one to start a business for job creation and survival.

V. Research Methodology

The study was *qualitative* and used *research questions* (Leedy & Omrod, 2016, Khothari, 2014). This was meant to obtain different participant (individual) opinions and comments on the subject matter of entrepreneurship curriculum at ZOU. The study was premised on a **survey design** which allowed the researcher to get firsthand information from experienced participants (informants) so that data collected was not obsolete (Khothari, 2014). The target population comprised ZOU senate, other academics and students. The **non-random quota sampling** technique was used to identify the sample as there was need for the researcher to use his discretion in order to accommodate the different stakeholders in order to have a balanced view. The ultimate sample size was based on the data saturation technique (Cresswell, 2003). The ideal instrument used for the study was the **unstructured interview** in order to get individual responses freely (Kennedy, 2009). The **Research ethics** observed during the entire process of planning, collection and analysis of data, included getting informed consent of participants, confidentiality, integrity and verification of statements (Naagarazan, 2006). Since the study was qualitative and used unstructured interviews, the **findings were analyzed** using the **content analysis method** which involved the categorization of data, classification and summarization as well as providing narrative statements to reflect what exactly was said by some of the participants (Cresswell, 2003).

VI. Findings

Based on the Content analysis, the findings were put into thematic forms, collated and summarized and in some cases, actual sentiments of participants were given in verbatim.

6.1 Attitude of ZOU towards entrepreneurship

There was a clear indication that students had a problem with the way they were being socialized or groomed by the entire education system even up to tertiary level. One ODL student said, *'our mindset is only focused on getting employment from already established businesses'*.

Most of the lecturers (academics) lacked hands on approach as majority did not own any businesses and could not 'walk the talk'. One academic had this to say

'My brother, I do not even dream of running a personal business because I do not want to have BP (blood pressure). That is why in our curricular, not much covers entrepreneurship because we were brought up on the condition that if I excelled at school and college, I would be guaranteed formal employment. So there is need for paradigm shift and whilst we have mixed feelings on the new curriculum being introduced by the Ministry of primary and secondary school, I think that is the best way forward for entrepreneurship to create sustainable development''

However, a senior faculty member sang a different tune.

'Entrepreneurship is here to stay. Recently our minister called all Vice chancellors emphasizing the need to conduct practical research which could benefit universities as they could sell patent rights on new discoveries, or enter into strategic partnerships with industry, or offer research consultancy services to augment government insufficient funding. That is why our ministry (Higher and tertiary education, science and technology development) is taking bold measures on the implementation of STEM (teaching Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). So definitely we have to change our delivery approach so that we move in line with ZIMASSET to promote entrepreneurship''

6.2 Major challenges affecting teaching of entrepreneurship by ZOU

The following were the reasons given for the low reinforcement of teaching entrepreneurship at ZOU;

(i) Original ZOU mandate and target group had changed

ZOU became a fully-fledged (established) university in 1999 to cater mainly for those who had been disadvantaged from attaining university degree since there were few universities by then. Most universities offered conventional training targeting especially Form six school leavers. ZOU was then supposed to make university education accessible to all corners of the country, that's why it is found in all the 10 provinces as well as an additional virtual region to cater for those mostly outside Zimbabwe. The target group was largely those employed who could do their studies without having to take study leave since tutorials were conducted during

weekends only (Saturdays and Sundays). They could still continue to fulfill other obligations in society or to still stay with their families. The other objective was to empower entrepreneurs or business people so that they could improve their business skills. However, this seems to have changed according to a senior ZOU official who said;

“Over the past 7 years or so, conventional universities have turned most of their programmes into ODL mode of delivery such as the popular block release. This was worsened by the government’s move to remove students’ grants at these conventional universities and that has caused a ‘scramble’ to target those employed who can easily fund their education. A lot of conventional universities have already established a lot of satellite centers in other towns which used to be a preserve or only served by ZOU. As of now, ZOU is now getting a sizeable number of its students directly from schools and is vigorously pursuing outreach programmes targeting ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels. The level of competition has changed everything and some universities are making programmes shorter to lure students so that they do not part with a lot of their hard earned money through more tuition fees if semesters are many like in our case, ZOU”

(ii) Lack of trained academics in entrepreneurship

ZOU had hardly any academics with degrees or other professional qualifications with a strong bias in entrepreneurship. So there were already challenges in mooted the idea of entrepreneurship as a course in many programmes across faculties. Most qualifications of academics were largely theoretical with majority having had no ‘hands on skills’ during their studies, so that could be the reason why even establishing a department was difficult despite government thrust to promote entrepreneurship as enshrined in ZIMASSET document.

(iii) Recycling curricular in tertiary education

Most academics were not technocrats and had not been trained in curriculum development. That is why most programmes were being recycled and used by most universities including ZOU without regular reviewing to take into account changing global trends or even the economic situation in Zimbabwe such as the taking into account the goals of the mainstream economic programme, ZIMASSET.

(iv) Lack of availability of industrial attachment places

Entrepreneurship requires blending both theory and practice. The economic situation was making it difficult for attaching students in industry and commerce because a number of businesses have been liquidated or have been downsizing their operations. This has made opportunities for industrial exposure limited.

(v) Lack of funding worsened by difficulties in accessing bank loans

Zimbabwe is generally known to have restrictive conditions for entrepreneurs to access bank loans. This was supported by a student who said

“You become demoralized when you want seed money to start up a business from financial institutions in the country. Foremost they set difficult conditions, such as need for collateral security or if you want to recapitalize your business, they want audited financial reports/statements. Over and above, the interest rates are so high averaging between 18 -24%. So that is why one looks for formal employment in already established organizations even if you earn so little but there will be no option. Even the government efforts through the Agriculture bank (Agribank) and Small Enterprises Development Corporation (SEDCO) to assist with seed money even for emerging entrepreneurs has not been fruitful at all due to a struggling economy”

(vi) High overheads

This was one of the major reasons why entrepreneurship has not been so successful. To run a business has been risky owing to viability challenges and reduced profits as a result of a lot of costs incurred such as; high Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) taxes, high social protection or security costs to cover medical aid, insurance and pensions, prohibitive rentals especially in the Central Business District (CBD), high water and electricity bills despite frequent power and water cuts.

(vii) Lack of local authorities’ support

The local authorities were not supportive of entrepreneurship as they did not provide space, facilities or premises to be used by emerging entrepreneurs. Allocation of rental space in urban areas was usually based on corruption and political affiliation. The rentals were also high yet provision of ancillary services was almost non-existent. This is why in many urban areas there were lots of illegal vendors on the streets who usually fight running battles with the municipal police.

(viii) Attitudinal problem

Most students said that they are rather better off if employed in an already existing organization rather than starting their own ‘risky’ businesses. One had this to say after being asked if she could start her own business, *‘I fear risk associated with running a business given that even government owned businesses like ZUPCO and Willowvale Mazda Motor Industry and ZiscoSteel, to name just a few, are almost history. A lot of cheaper products from the Middle East especially China and even from neighboring South Africa will kick you out of business. You also need the political muscle to get support from those influential key stakeholders such as*

politicians in some cases. I would rather continue pursuing further studies hoping that one day I will get employment than seek a risky venture (business)''

Majority of these traditional beliefs and perceptions about employment were also raised as a major stumbling block to the teaching of entrepreneurship even in tertiary institutions (Mauchi et al, 2011).

VII. Conclusion

The study concluded that not much was being done by ZOU as the largest ODL institution in Zimbabwe to promote entrepreneurship as a strategic avenue to avert ever increasing unemployment rate in the country as there were a plethora of challenges that needed to be addressed first. However, no one can dispute the fact that entrepreneurship can play a pivotal role in promoting the industrialization of a free economy like Zimbabwe as well as addressing employment woes that she is facing. Tertiary institutions both conventional and ODL have not done much to promote entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe despite the country having been rated as the country with the highest literacy rate in Africa.

VIII. Recommendations

8.1 Curriculum review to incorporate entrepreneurship in all ZOU programmes

This was needed in order for ZOU to move in tandem with the government's thrust to empower Zimbabweans including those in rural areas who can be covered by ZOU because of its regional campuses found in all the country's provinces. This is also in line with the thrust of ZIMASSET policy framework (2013-2018).

8.2 Reinforcement of teaching STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) courses

ZOU falls under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development. The ministry was spearheading the teaching of STEM in colleges and universities, so ZOU was supposed to implement this policy initiative which was emphasizing for the need to inculcate a sense of value addition and beneficiation especially among college and university graduates, so that the country would have producers of final products. Such finished (manufactured) products can earn the country the much needed foreign currency rather than relying on expensive imports. In a way the initiative is also a drive towards sustainable entrepreneurship.

8.3 Resource mobilization

Entrepreneurship requires resources for it to be successful. This should begin by ZOU setting the department of entrepreneurship which should then feed other departments by providing expertise (tutors). Such a department needs government financial support through the parent ministry and these experts need to be in all the 10 regional campuses. In addition, the curriculum review or development in line with national goals and policies such as those enshrined in ZIMASSET, requires paying experts who should develop and produce the necessary learning materials such as modules. There is also need to provide seed money for those graduates with promising business ventures in order to kick start them by finding interested partners.

8.4 Training of MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) including those in the Informal sector

Another avenue would be to provide short courses geared to improve business operations and growth of MSMEs given that they have since become the largest employer in Zimbabwe. This can be done through ZOU partnering with the donor community or government ministries such as that of SMEs and Cooperative development and that of Youth, Indigenization and Economic empowerment since they are interested in entrepreneurship, employment creation, economic empowerment and sustainable development.

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