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# Examining the Challenges that hinder the development of entrepreneurship skills among secondary school students in Zimbabwe: A Case of Mashonaland West Province

Tabeth Chinokopota, Grace Portia Kuda Ngorora-Madzimure, Nothando Msipa, Thomas Brighton Bhebhe

Chinhoyi University of Technology, Graduate Business School

Corresponding Author: [tchinokopota@cut.ac.zw](mailto:tchinokopota@cut.ac.zw)

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that are faced by schools in developing entrepreneurship skills among learners in order to achieve a sustainable education system in Zimbabwe with special focus on secondary schools in Mashonaland West Province.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions as this study was qualitative in nature. Teachers and 'A' level students were the respondents while School Heads and Education Officers were the key informants. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyse and present data.

**Findings:** The study established that various challenges are encountered by secondary schools in attempting to develop entrepreneurial skills among students. Most such challenges emanate from lack of entrepreneurially qualified teachers to deliver practical entrepreneurship skills to secondary school students, lack of financial and material resources to start entrepreneurial projects and the curricula not favouring entrepreneurship skills development. The study further noted that lack of electricity in rural areas and general negative attitudes by students who think that buying, selling and producing are a sign of desperation are some of the challenges that hinder entrepreneurial skills development.

**Practical implications:** The study recommended that financial and material resources be made available to construct physical infrastructure for start-up entrepreneurial projects. The study further recommends installation of electricity in all rural secondary schools as an enabler for students and teachers to widen their choices of entrepreneurial projects and help them access internet. Entrepreneurship training of both students and teachers and career guidance so that students change their mind-sets, attitudes and negative perceptions of entrepreneurship is also a necessity.

**Paper type:** Research paper.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship Skills Development, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Education System.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The most prominent goal of many governments is to make entrepreneurial activities a solution to the challenges and situations that are encountered by nations worldwide (Onajite & Aina, 2017). Bhebhe, Bhebhe & Nikisi (2015) noted that lack of entrepreneurial skills among school leavers is the main driver of youth unemployment which has reached astronomical levels in Zimbabwe. Secondary Schools have often faced many challenges in attempting to develop entrepreneurship skills in learners in a bid to increase sustainability of the education system as numerous learners are seen searching for jobs after leaving school. The rate of unemployment continues to rise and educated school leavers continue to roam the streets. The unemployed school-leavers are now turning to drug and substance abuse and other vices and debauchery including social ills such as prostitution

and theft to mention but just a few. This study was conducted to establish underlying hindrances towards entrepreneurship skills development in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe.

Entrepreneurship skills development is recognised as an essential tool for equipping youths with basic business skills that enable them to engage in productive livelihoods after leaving school. Entrepreneurship skills development is seen as the foundation for economic development as it creates employment opportunities (Kissi, Ahadzie, Debrah, & Adjei-Kumi, 2020). Entrepreneurship skills development in students aims to help them become self-sufficient so that, upon graduating from high schools, they can use their creativity to start something of their own in a competitive world where unemployment has emerged as the number one enemy (Joseph & Tranos, 2020).

However, Maina (2014) claims that some challenges militating against the development of entrepreneurship skills development emanate from the government, parents or certain volatile external environmental forces. Unless these challenges are addressed, they negatively affect the realization of the goal of imparting entrepreneurship skills among students.

## **A. Literature Review**

### **1. Theoretical framework**

#### **a. Economic Entrepreneurship theory**

In 1755, Richard Cantillon came up with the economic entrepreneurship theory which states that entrepreneurs are influenced by their economic gains. In this context, the theory assumes that entrepreneurial skills development is influenced by economic gains which the students will benefit if they are well trained. Economic gains are the motivating factors which entrepreneurs leverage on to extract economic values using means of production namely; capital, land, raw materials, labour and physical assets or infrastructure. The theory states that the entrepreneur is the one who is responsible for bringing together materials, resources, labour and assets to increase their value at the same time introducing creativity, innovations and the new order. However, Carson (1995) contends that this theory lacks necessary human skills intervention because without skills, availability of capital, land, raw materials, labour and physical assets or infrastructure will come to zero, hence the need to focus more on entrepreneurship skills development to help school leavers to be job creators and not job seekers.

#### **b. High achievement theory**

According to McClelland's high achievement theory, normal people possess a strong drive for achievement, and if they do, small achievements bring more achievements until big achievements become a life habit among entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed and win as entrepreneurs because entrepreneurship is all about competition, gaining competitive advantage over competitors through innovation and doing things differently because in the business world it is survival of the fittest. The need for achievement is what drives and encourages entrepreneurship, therefore those who have a strong drive for success are most likely to succeed as entrepreneurs. Individuals with a strong drive for success assume personal responsibility for problem-solving, innovation and always strive to outperform others. However, in a normal population distribution, there exist natural laggards who will not care to compete nor to bother about how others are doing things. Others are just hesitant to try and such attitudes if present in students, may affect the uptake of entrepreneurship.

#### **c. Innovation theory**

Schumpeter's 1949 Innovation Theory assumes that humans have innate (in-born) aspirations to establish things of their own to prove themselves. Such individuals are more likely to succeed if they are entrepreneurs. They are naturally inspired to start something new and also a desire to be creative and earn experiences and skills by doing various tasks. Schumpeter emphasized that entrepreneurship skills development is related to entrepreneurial behaviour. The behaviour prompts the individual to be able to introduce new goods, new methods of production, opening of new markets, search of new sources of supply of raw materials and creation of new ventures in an industry.

## **2. Challenges faced by secondary schools in the development of entrepreneurship skills among students**

### **a. Lack of adequate teachers with entrepreneurial training**

The major challenge encountered by schools in the development of entrepreneurship skills is lack of teachers qualified to teach entrepreneurial skills. It goes without saying that the teachers who train the students must themselves possess entrepreneurial skills and must be trained to deliver the same (Gibb, 2018). Hasan, Khan, and Nabi (2017) as supported by Radebe (2019), argue that while the traditional educational system prepares students for the corporate world of employment, it does not foster the development of entrepreneurship skills. Most teachers left teacher training colleges without being exposed to the techniques of imparting entrepreneurship skills (Rosário, Raimundo & Cruz, 2022).

**b. Capital constrains to entrepreneurship skills development**

Lack of access to funding hampers the development of entrepreneurship skills in students (Jindal and Bhardwaj, 2016; Agwu *et al.*, 2018). According to Novejarque -Civera *et al.* (2021), entrepreneurs and schools need to be financially sustainable to survive. Survival only on government subsidies and philanthropic donations cannot be considered enough for entrepreneurial development.

**c. Physical infrastructure constrains**

Okolie and Ogbaekirigwe (2014) noted that facilities that are available in rural secondary schools presently are inadequate, quantitatively and qualitatively, apart from being obsolete. The students now depend only on the theoretical aspects of the training programme. Lack of practical work by the students during training due to lack of modern equipment leaves the students in a state of confusion. Entrepreneurship skills development according to (Lawal *et al.*, 2016) depends on the sufficiency and adequacy of infrastructure. Infrastructure includes power, transportation, water, land and buildings (Murray, 2014). However, according to Mataka, Bhila & Mukurunge (2021), physical infrastructure includes classrooms, libraries, laboratories and space.

**d. Modern technology constraints**

Success of schools and entrepreneurs is based on exposure to modern technology (Akande, 2017). Technological developments that are taking place worldwide are rendering some methods and techniques of making goods and services obsolete. Modern machinery is perceived as a basic requirement for the production of goods (Khan (2014). Currently, most schools carry the burden of having inadequate modern technological facilities both quantitative and qualitatively apart from them being obsolete (Okolie & Ogbaekirigwe, 2014).

**e. Lack of Government Support and Policies**

Inconsistent government policies have been blamed as the main obstacle to the development of entrepreneurship skills. Obaji *et al.* (2014) highlighted that policy behaviours of any nation determine entrepreneurial success. Research by Olokundun *et al.* (2014) emphasized that government policies oppose firms' involvement in entrepreneurship education. Development is hampered by the government's rigid and complicated policies and regulations. Mataka *et al.* (2021) pointed out that it is the responsibility of the government to provide textbooks, qualified teachers, classrooms, water, electricity, internet, toilets with running water and food to feed the vulnerable as these are necessities for educational success.

**f. Lack of networks**

Networking activities have an impact on the performance, growth and success of initiatives. These activities include exchanging experiences, knowledge, support, motivation and availability of role models (Majukwa, 2019). The Times Commission (2022) noted that in order to foster relationships, there is need for more communication between secondary schools and nearby businesses and teachers should be allowed to spend time in the business sector during school holidays as a way to up-skill them and help them gain contemporary knowledge in this fast-changing business world. This will turn them into competent teachers of entrepreneurship. Networks and institutions have an impact on the development of entrepreneurial talents as it is a truism that no entrepreneur can win if he/she works in isolation (Aidis and Estrin, 2006).

**g. Social and cultural constrains to entrepreneurship sills development**

Azim (2008) and Radović-Marković and Achakpa (2018) assert that socio-cultural factors force individuals or make it desirable to choose entrepreneurship as a career option. These challenges are grouped into two, the internal challenges and external challenges (Mohammadali and Fallah *et al.*, 2018). They include lack of interest and motivation among students regarding entrepreneurship as a field of study, deficits in curriculum planning, lack of expertise in entrepreneurship teachers, weakness in the use of technology, lack of development in research and lack of networks in the domain of entrepreneurship education.

## II. METHODS

This study was anchored on Interpretivism. Collins and Hussey (2009) argued in support of Interpretivism when they noted that it is a philosophy rooted in social sciences and grounded in the belief that social reality is subjective because it is socially constructed. Interpretivism seeks to measure social phenomena by exploring its complexity with a view to gaining interpretive (inductive) understanding. Central to this approach is the acknowledgement that it produces rich subjective qualitative data and findings with high validity. Saunders *et al.* (2009) as supported by Robson (2011) agree that Interpretivism also allows findings to be generalised from one

setting to another similar setting. Saunders & Thornhill (2009) also supported Interpretivism when they noted that it is a research philosophy that has the ability to understand subjective viewpoints, opinions, feelings, and values, that is; the things that cannot be immediately observed or quantified.

Data were collected using face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and A' level students. School Heads and Education Officers were the key informants. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyse and present data. Purposive sampling made it necessary to specifically approach variables or individuals who were relevant to the study, who had been at the institution for at least five years, since they possessed greater insight into the developments occurring at the relevant school. Purposive sampling, according to Saunders *et al* (2012), is a non-probability technique that relies on the researcher's judgment to choose which components to include in the study. 20 interview sessions and 4 focus group discussions were held with A' level students and teachers. These were stopped after reaching a point of saturation; that is the point which data yields no fresh information during data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The information collected from interviews and focus groups was further subjected to validation and clarification using face-to-face interviews with key informants (School Heads and Education Officers).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. Factors that affect entrepreneurship skills development in secondary schools

Below is a word cloud output which shows various themes or issues which emerged from the interviewees' verbatim response. Respondents identified the factors that affect entrepreneurship skills development in secondary schools as the curriculum which needs to be aligned, lack of skills, teachers who have no knowledge, lack of resources, need for practical work to mention but just a few. Figure 1. shows the themes that emerged during interviews and focus group discussions.



Figure 1: Word cloud output showing various themes and how they were used in the Heads and students' responses

Source: (Author's own,2023)

The word tree output below shows how the same theme was responded to by Headmasters and Education Officers. A few of the mentioned themes were discussed as suggested below.

a. Entrepreneurship constrains

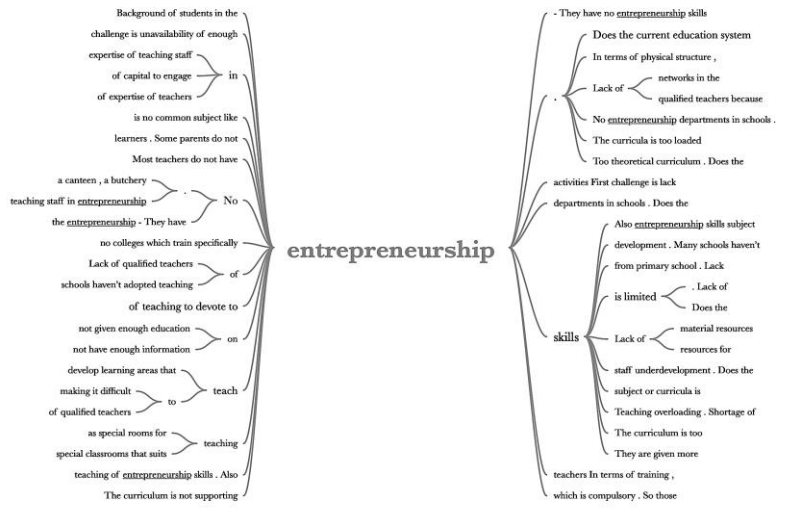


Figure:2 showing word tree output for the theme entrepreneurship

Source: (Author's own,2023)

The study found out that lack of entrepreneurship skills was a challenge in the education system. The problem starts with the teacher training curriculum which does not have adequate focus on imparting entrepreneurial skills to the educators making them deficient. On the other hand, interviewees alleged that most students' background lacked entrepreneurship exposure. While students come from homes with agricultural land, gardens, dams etc, most of their families do not take farming or horticulture as a business. Often these are taken as subsistence, or pastime activities to get food for the family. This has resulted in students lacking information and basic knowledge and skills on entrepreneurship. Worse still, secondary school students went through primary school where basic entrepreneurship was neither practiced not taught.

b. Education system and curricula constraints

The study found that while Government had advocated for entrepreneurship to be part of the school curriculum, some secondary schools are yet to heed the call. In schools where it is taught, it is like an extra-curricular subject which is not examinable. Most teachers do not take non-examinable subjects seriously. When this happens, the subject is treated like any other voluntary club activity where students and teachers join out of interest. A male respondent who teaches A' levels noted that "The current treatment of entrepreneurship skills development makes us not to take it seriously. Moreover, we are over-loaded with huge classes and we are underpaid. How do you expect us to volunteer to take a non-examinable subject when I don't have enough time for examinable subjects?"

Existing literature shows that it is not the Zimbabwean curriculum only which does not support entrepreneurship skills development. Other education jurisdictions such as Egypt, Ukraine, Mozambique, Ghana, and Namibia do not support entrepreneurship skills development (Rashid, 2019). This is in stark contrast with the Asian Tigers (Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan) where students are taught scientific entrepreneurial skills in school. In India entrepreneurship is like a culture and learning how to run a family business is prioritised in schools. Students help in the family business every day after school and this makes them grow understanding that entrepreneurship is part of life (Obaji et al., 2014). Figure 3 shows a word cloud output showing the most emerging themes which emanated from the education system and curriculum.



Figure 3: Word cloud output showing the most emerging themes which emanated from education system and curricula constraints

Source: (Author's own, 2023)

**c. Lack of resources impeding entrepreneurship skills development.**

Respondents supported that lack of resources impede entrepreneurship skills development. Lack of resources has caused learners to study what they do not want as supported by one female student in a focus group discussion who said, "Resources are limited, we are learning what we don't want when it comes to practical subjects. This is leading us nowhere as our goals and choices are not catered for". Another interviewee indicated that lack of capital is a hindrance to entrepreneurship skills development in students. Participants from the 4 FGDs indicated that lack of funds and space to initiate projects was a hindrance, hence their lack of entrepreneurial experience. Participants from interviews also indicated lack of special infrastructure that is suitable for the teaching of entrepreneurship. Fig 3 shows a Word tree output showing the theme of resource constraints.

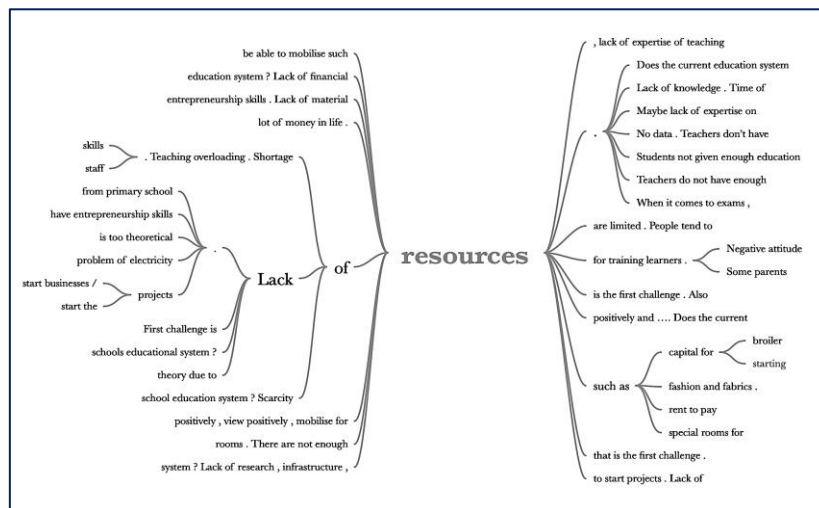


Figure 4: Word tree output showing resources constrains

Source: (Researcher's own, 2023)

**d. Lack of entrepreneurially trained and skilled teachers**

Interviewees indicated that teachers lack expertise or are not qualified to teach entrepreneurship skills. Apriana, Kristiawan and Wardiah (2019)'s study shows that there are relatively few teachers who are true experts

in the field of vocational expertise and the range of expertise is not balanced with learning support facilities. The results indicated that lots of teachers were trained long back, before changes were made in the education system.

Headmasters as key informants lamented that they do not have teachers trained to teach entrepreneurial skills. A few such teachers in the schools are being lured to better schools in urban areas and this is now resulting in low uptake of entrepreneurship skills training.

Increasing evidence suggests that there is still a larger gap between knowledge generation and application (of entrepreneurship), which might be successfully closed by entrepreneurship skills development, as cited by Vaicekauskaite & Valackiene (2018).

#### **e. Research and network challenges**

Research and networking have been a challenge in secondary schools in Mashonaland West Province especially in rural areas. This was supported by students in focus group discussions that in most rural schools, internet is unheard of. One focus group discussant remarked, *'How do you carry out entrepreneurship when you have a cell phone but with no network. Imagine that you want to know if the market needs tomatoes and you try to phone and the call cannot go through because of network challenges'*. The FGDs revealed that unavailability of electricity also hinders access to internet gadgets.

#### **f. Social and cultural constraints**

An essential component for entrepreneurship skills development is to equip students with hands-on survival skills. The study found out that students in Mashonaland West Province are failing to acquire entrepreneurship skills due to various reasons that were established through the interviewed participants. Most of the students grew up in families that do not have businesses and were not exposed to the basics of entrepreneurship. The financial situation of their families affected their entrepreneurial behaviour. One key informant remarked that, *'Some students from affluent families in urban areas are cultured to think that selling something is a sign of desperation. Their parents are well-off such that they think allowing their children to partake in entrepreneurial activities is stooping low'*.

## **2. Strategies to improve entrepreneurship skills development**

### **a. Training of both teachers and learners in entrepreneurship skills,**

The study found out from key informants that young people shape a country's dreams and future. Giving young people especially secondary school students and school leavers the skills they need to become independent has a big impact on reducing unemployment. As remarked by a female key informant who is an Education Officer, *'Entrepreneurship is the surest game-changer to solve the problem of unemployment. Producing and selling should be a culture among all students. We should move from a culture of consumption to a culture of production'*. Participants of both focus groups discussions and interviews suggested that there is need to train both teachers and learners to improve and change their mind-sets towards entrepreneurship skills development. Training is a fundamental aspect for building entrepreneurial capacity (Cho, Robalino, & Watson, 2016)

### **b. Availing of resources to support entrepreneurship skills development**

The study suggested government intervention through financial support for training teachers and financial support for starting entrepreneurial activities for the development of entrepreneurship skills in students. This was supported by one of the participants who pointed out that, *'The education system is uneven and complicated; other schools can provide resources, others cannot, depending on their status. This will make the gap between the poor and the rich in society continue to widen.'*

### **c. Curricula amendment**

Participants of focus groups as supported by key informants advised that curriculum should be amended to suit the current situation prevailing in the country which calls for more focus on entrepreneurship. This suggests that if schools improve the level of teaching of entrepreneurial skills, sustainability will be enhanced in the education system. One participant mentioned the need to train teachers to equip students with entrepreneurial skills and also carry out continuous assessment of practical subjects up to A' level so that students take entrepreneurship seriously. Instead of written examinations, students could be given marks for forming an entrepreneurial project which helps to raise money for their fees.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that lack of entrepreneurially skilled teachers, lack of resources, poor network connectivity especially in rural areas, curricula and education system constraints, hinder entrepreneurship skills development in secondary schools. Largely, interviews and focus group discussions found that lack of training and lack of resources were major challenges followed by curricula misalignment. The study also found that there was need for awareness campaigns in the community for proper entrepreneurial training, supporting students before and after leaving school and availing of adequate resources, and this can promote entrepreneurship skills development. It was also a finding of this study that there are negative attitudes about entrepreneurship skills development because the subject is not examinable. There are no exams. In light of the above conclusions and findings, the following recommendations are proffered by this study:

1. 5.1 Responsible authorities of secondary schools should ensure that financial and material
2. resources are made available to construct physical infrastructures for start-up entrepreneurial projects.
3. 5.2 Secondary schools, especially those in rural areas, should be electrified because electricity is an enabler for students and teachers to widen their choices of entrepreneurial projects. Electricity also helps to access internet connectivity.
4. 5.3 Entrepreneurship skills training should be mandatory for all students.
5. 5.4 There is need for career guidance so that students change their mind-sets/ negative attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Most students still prefer employment in white-collar jobs which are not there.
6. 5.5 To achieve sustainability of the education system, there should be policies that enforce the teaching of entrepreneurial skills across the education curriculum from primary school as the adage goes 'Catch them young'.
7. 5.6 All practicing teachers should do a course in entrepreneurship and all student teachers should pass a course in entrepreneurship at their teacher training college before they graduate.

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