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The Spirit of Entrepreneurial Education in Namibia – An Exploratory Study

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is viewed as the driving force for economic growth in countries around the world. Entrepreneurs have the ability to spot opportunities in the market where some people will see issues or problems. This in turn helps individuals with a high entrepreneurial propensity to transform and change their communities and economies (Makura, 2008). One of the most interesting places where an untapped potential of entrepreneurial spirit exists is in Africa, and Southern Africa in particular, which is blessed with an untamed nature and abundant natural resources. Namibia, the country on which this chapter is based, amazes the author through the incredible energy, determination and perseverance coming from the people when talking about entrepreneurship. The best way to harness and make use of these abundant resources is through entrepreneurial education – in particular our youth, who are regarded as the leaders of tomorrow. A massive opportunity lies ahead in Namibia for young people and those who are willing and able to follow their footsteps. Entrepreneurship should not be just about making money or acquiring wealth, but should be seen as a unique opportunity to uplift the nation and communities at a grassroots level. This brings us to the definition of entrepreneurship:

In the international literature 'entrepreneurship' is derived from the French verb 'entreprendre' which means to take your bare hands and do something. Each person has the ability to make something from nothing, and the education aspect of entrepreneurship can be both formal and informal.

Entrepreneurship in the Namibian context can be defined as the efforts made by a particular individual in a community or a society in accumulating the necessary resources to benefit the community (April, 2009).

This chapter will first give an account of the background of the Republic of Namibia. A detailed analysis of the before and after independence education systems in Namibia will be outlined, followed by a look into the spirit of entrepreneurial education in Namibia. This chapter will highlight some key initiatives and directives that Namibia has in terms of the nation's Vision 2030. In addition, the research methods will be discussed and an account will be given on conclusions and future research recommendations.

2. Background on the Republic of Namibia

The Republic of Namibia is situated on the southwestern coast of Africa, and was formally known as Sud West Africa. The Namib Desert is one of the oldest deserts in the world, running across the coastline, except for the northernmost Kaokoveld. Namibia, which borders the north with Angola, South Africa to the south and Botswana to the east. Namibia is home to the most ancient nations on Earth, the !Khung (!- Indicates the click sound), members of the Khoisan people (H. Witbooi, personal communication, 15 August 2008). The Europeans used to call these people Bushmen (meaning people who reside or live in the Bush). Very few of these people are still alive today, except in the far northern parts of Namibia and in the Kalahari Desert. The traditional or informal education of these people is largely oral tradition. These communities have deeply rooted cultural values, mostly in terms of honesty, and nobody will use water or food that another person has stored in ostrich eggshells and buried in the sand. These people have deeply embedded entrepreneurial skills, as they are risk takers and use the limited resources at their disposal to make a living.

By around 1000 A.D. the indigenous people of Namibia gave way to the various Migrating Bantu speaking people who later made Namibia their home. By the 1800s a reasonable number of Herero and Owambo people moved southwards to Namibia. The mid-1800s witnessed the arrival of the missionaries and soldiers, who settled mostly in the coastal regions. The 'Iron Chancellor' Otto von Bismarck declared 'My Map of Africa lies in Europe' when he convened the Berlin conference at which European powers were searching for new markets and coveting the riches of Africa. The continent was divided into regions and national boundaries. Together with Togo, Kamerun (which with Togo was split between Britain and France after World War I and is today known as Cameroon), German East Africa (after World War I, Tanganyika, known since independence as Tanzania, was mandated to Britain and Ruanda- Urundi to Belgium) and German South West Africa (today known as Namibia) became German property (See Figure:1 for colonies). This colonial past has an impact on the way in which education, both formal and informal, is perceived in Namibia.

In 1915, during World War I, South Africa allied with the British and took over South West Africa. The initial intention of South Africa was to annex the country, but this was prevented by the League of Nations, which gave South Africa the authority to manage Namibia's government and affairs. In 1945, after World War II, the United Nations, which replaced the League of Nations, requested that South West Africa be placed under United Nations trusteeship. South Africa refused, and guerrilla warfare led to the establishment of the South West



Figure 1. Map of Africa illustrating some colonies (Cameroon, Tanzania and Namibia)

Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). On March 21, 1990 Namibia became an independent nation. The next section of the chapter will look at Namibia's education systems before and after independence.

3. Namibia's pre-post independence education systems

Education for Africans in Namibia went through three successive phases prior to independence, and the fourth stage took shape after independence in 1990. In this section of this chapter we will have a closer look at the three phases prior to independence and the fourth phase after

independence. These phases are pre-Bantu education before 1962, Bantu education from 1962-1976, and post-Bantu education from 1977 onwards. All of these phases were accompanied by a general pattern of political and social economic changes of the inhabitants of this country. Each phase was clearly influenced by the political situation in Namibia at that particular point in time.

Prior to Namibian independence, education in Africa existed in both formal and informal manners. Informal learning usually took place through observation: the younger generations observed what the elders, older siblings or older members within a community were doing. In terms of informal learning we draw upon the great works of Paul Freire, a Brazilian educationist who has contributed significant thought on progressive practice. Freire's thought was more on informal thinking and education, and he viewed informal learning as conversational rather than curricular. Informal learning, especially in terms of business, will allow people to work together rather than working against one another. This could allow people to see entrepreneurship as a partnership in the 21st century. Although it might be controversial, Freire argued too much formal education to be like a banking deposit. It could be argued that the educationist is making banking deposits to the educatee. It was also the notion of Freire that dialogue can be viewed as a means of creating a deeper understanding and difference in the world. The views of Freire support the notion that, for entrepreneurial education to foster and grow in developing economies like Namibia, a dialogue is critical as it can enhance the community and build social capital. An informal educator, according to the work of Freire, is about action. This does not imply that the formal educational aspect does not take action into consideration. The formal aspect, on the other hand, is institutionalized education, and carefully planned education programmes. It is important to highlight in this chapter that, prior to the introduction of Western educational philosophies, education in Africa (Namibia) existed in one form or another. It would be wrong to argue that the early formal pioneers moved in a complete educational vacuum. Every society is believed to have their own education system, if only to the extent that it is its concern and beliefs that give it an identity and preserve its existence (Amukugo, 1993).

It is the general assumption and belief of some scholars that education was not solely introduced through colonization (Amukugo, 1993). In 1980, the National Education Act No. 30 replaced the South African Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953. The primary aim of the Namibian Education Act was to create three more bodies. The National Examination Board for South West Africa was then created to prescribe the minimum standards for courses and syllabi to oversee examinations. It is important to highlight that the education systems had race-based examinations administered under different departments (Bantu, coloured and white). The apartheid system played an instrumental role in maintaining social stratification. During the colonial period certain subjects in schools were only available for whites, such as computer studies and mathematics. The coloureds were fortunate to take accountancy and typing, while the blacks were only allowed to take home economics and needlework. In many instances during the apartheid era, educational and occupational roles usually corresponded to one's economic, and then social status, in society. Thus, by virtue of the level of education the disadvantaged black majority in Namibia could receive, it was clear that the type of jobs

they held caused them to remain members of the lowest class (J. Rodrickson, personal communication, 15 July 2014).

After independence, the Republic of Namibia introduced entrepreneurial education in primary and secondary schools, with the primary aim of helping to reduce unemployment in Namibia. The intention was to ensure that Namibians were well equipped with the essential skills and knowledge of how to start a business, if they desired, once they completed school. All young pupils in primary schools in Namibia are required to study social science courses that have a strong entrepreneurial component. Entrepreneurship is taught as a module from grade 8 to 12 and all students are introduced to basic entrepreneurial skills and principles. Another role of entrepreneurial education is to give Namibians access to the labour market and to enable communities to survive. The Republic of Namibia has definitely made progress in terms of entrepreneurial education after independence. Particularly in terms of quantity, Namibia has to improve a lot and a number of entrepreneurial centres where citizens, young and old, can learn how to start a business of their own have been introduced in Namibia. The next section of this chapter will look at the spirit of entrepreneurial education in Namibia.

4. The spirit of entrepreneurial education in Namibia with reference to Vision 2030

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up an important part of the Namibian economy. SMEs contribute 12% to the Namibian GDP and employ an estimated one fifth of the workforce. To ensure that Namibia reached its goals of Vision 2030 a number of entrepreneurial programmes have been introduced in the country. These programmes are catered for in both formal and informal ways. The formal programmes constitute the official introduction of entrepreneurship at a secondary school level, where students can bridge to start or set up a business of their own after their high school career. There are also vocational training centres where Namibians get a first-hand opportunity to upgrade their entrepreneurial skills to start a business venture of their own.

Fostering entrepreneurial education in any economy is critical as it will lead to creative manpower and a successful workforce with better skills to meet the demand of the economy. It is the argument of the author that the major obstacle for growth in developing economies such as the Republic of Namibia is a lack of educated entrepreneurs who are able to mobilize and coordinate production inputs. Financial institutions cannot afford to lend money to uneducated or uninformed entrepreneurs as it will seem as if they are throwing money away or making a negative investment. It is the viewpoint of the author that it is not only financial skills which are lacking, but also general knowledge, ability and skills that entrepreneurs need to possess in today's competitive global market. This can also take us back to the scholarly argument as to whether entrepreneurs are born or bred – with genetic and environmental conditions that could make them destined for entrepreneurship. However, Kent (1990) has put succinctly that education can make a difference to the supply of entrepreneurs in developing

economies such as Namibia. This view is slightly different from the views of Freire (1997) when we look at informal education.

The study of entrepreneurial education around the world is still in its infancy (Brazael and Herbert 1999). In a similar view, Namibia as a nation has only recently started to introduce entrepreneurial education across the various sectors of the economy. However, if Namibia as an economy aspires to become competitive in the African market and around the globe, entrepreneurship is a viable option. Brockhaus (2001) noted that the first course in entrepreneurship was introduced in 1957 at the Harvard Business School. Drucker also taught another course at New York University in 1953. Surprisingly it was only during the last two decades that entrepreneurship has been formally introduced in academia for example, the Babson School of Entrepreneurship in Babson, Massachusetts. The first doctor of philosophy graduates in entrepreneurship emerged in 1981 in the USA at Babson. It is possible to agree with Timmons (1988) that entrepreneurship is also about the ability to create something from nothing. It is also about initiating, doing and achieving, and goes beyond just watching the creation of a new venture by establishing a business in the practical sense. Entrepreneurship education can have a strong bearing on the development of entrepreneurs in Namibia. Namibia has set up various centres such as the Namibian Business and Innovation Centre to help with the grooming of entrepreneurs in Namibia. The University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia offers entrepreneurship as a course, but have not established standalone degree programmes. There are also entrepreneurial training courses offered at accredited smaller training institutions in Namibia. The teaching of entrepreneurship in Namibian tertiary institutions is critical as it can be seen as a response to overcome the legacy and educational systems of the colonial past. It is also a move to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking amongst Namibian citizens.

A number of activities have recently been undertaken in order to stimulate the growth of the SMEs in Namibia. This support is usually in managerial and financial form to train people to become entrepreneurs. Namibia has a policy on small business development. In the early 2000s it appeared that the net growth by jobs created and lost was more positive in the economic clusters of body care, healthcare, hospitality, tourism and crafts, and much less in the electronics, manufacturing and consulting sectors. After being trained in the entrepreneurial sectors, most entrepreneurs prefer to work in hospitality and tourism. They prefer this because these businesses are relatively easy to enter and they try to avoid risks. This reveals that some Namibians are moderate risk takers. However, these jobs require less innovation. Some of the core reasons as to why entrepreneurs do this are a result of their personal characteristics. A lack of psychological success factors and a lack of desire to take initiative in the decision-making process is also a hindrance to some Namibian entrepreneurs. When the author looks at Namibian people, entrepreneurial development can be predicted on three levels. Entrepreneurial education in Namibia should enable the citizens of the country to develop certain technical skills that they would like to exploit as self-sustaining entrepreneurs, but might not have the entrepreneurial skills and they might develop a sense and an aspiration for entrepreneurship. Some of them might develop an entrepreneurial attitude and behave accordingly. In Namibia most entrepreneurs have to be trained in crafts, and more so in entrepreneurial

skills such as marketing, record keeping, and employee personnel, among others. All organizations in Namibia play different roles in the development of the economy; for example the Centre of Entrepreneurial Development (CED) at the Polytechnic of Namibia. A major challenge for upcoming entrepreneurs in Namibia is the change of mindset from having skills to becoming a competent entrepreneur. This will require a lot of input from all stakeholders. In addition, local banks in Namibia such as Bank Windhoek are providing mentor skills training this regard, and there are a number of consulting firms providing similar services. Training mentors enables help people to become self-reliant and independent entrepreneurs and self-sustaining business people who might eventually start their own businesses. According to the NIED Report (2006) some educational institutions such as the Polytechnic of Namibia realized the national aim of the Republic of Namibia to increase the number of SMEs; thereby, Namibians are encouraged to play a part and inspire young people at an earlier stage of their careers to change their mindsets and consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option. Primary school learners should also be encouraged, and should be informally exposed to entrepreneurial activities within their respective communities. It is also very important to highlight in this chapter that the informal sector in Namibia booms with entrepreneurial initiatives under a local bridge at Wernhill Park shopping. People make an effort to sell whatever they are able to in order to sustain their livelihoods and family. The next section of this chapter deals with entrepreneurial challenges in Namibia.

5. Challenges for Namibia in terms of entrepreneurial education

Although Namibia is working towards Vision 2030, the major challenge to get more people involved in the small and medium-sized business sector. When changing the mindset of people in Namibia, it requires full acceptance and incorporation (both at an individual and business sector level) of the business principles and fundamentals. This involves a paradigm shift of culture or attitude of taking up a job or any small business activity, even if it is only for subsistence reasons. This will require taking full ownership, exhibiting entrepreneurial behaviour and feeling challenged by one's own goals, rather than only having the desire to earn money. SMEs that fit in Namibia's economy would be of interest to new entrepreneurs if they have made a mind shift and have proven that they are competent before going into business. This will require aspiring entrepreneurs to become acquainted to business principles at a young age to take one step closer in a positive direction.

Other challenges for Namibian entrepreneurs include attaining collateral from banks to start their business. Most people find themselves at the bottom of the pyramid in terms of income and so simply being able to start a business is a challenge for most citizens. The Republic of Namibia is a country with 11 different ethnic groups, and each of these groups has their own cultures and traditional belief systems. According to April (2009) there are numerous cultural factors that prohibit even youth from entrepreneurial education. These are, amongst many others and not limited to young women usually being seen as housekeepers and having to get married and bear children for their husbands. Another critical challenge is that Namibian communities usually have large extended families, and even when people start an enterprise

they mostly fail to follow the basic business principles, as family values hold precedence over business values. This can usually lead to closure of the business within the first few years of being established. It is the notion of some communities that entrepreneurship interferes with their traditional system, and that there could be a better manner through which they can be incorporated into the national economy.

6. Research methodology

Being exploratory in nature, this chapter aims to explore the spirit of entrepreneurial education in Namibia. The author used a qualitative research approach to write up this chapter. Qualitative research enabled the author to capture rich meaning from the responses of the audience. The author interviewed 50 respondents for this study. The sample constitutes both respondents in school, out of school and members of the community (see table below for the breakdown of respondents).

| Description | Total |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Youth in school | 15 |
| Youth out of school | 15 |
| Members of the community | 20 |
| TOTAL OF THE RESPONDENTS | 50 |

Most youth in school are of the opinion that entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of the Namibian economy. For the Namibian economy to prosper, entrepreneurs will be needed now and in the future. The out-of-school youth felt entrepreneurship to have a very important role for the development of the Namibian economy while members of the community felt the same way. However, some respondents are of the opinion that the economy still faces many challenges and has a long way to go. The majority of the respondents felt that a change of mindset is not easy, while some of the young people were also struggling to come up with a perfect definition for entrepreneurial education. Some interviewees felt that entrepreneurship not only takes mindset into account, but that the right attitude is an essential quality for success. This could help the Namibian economy if those with the right attitude are guided to start their own businesses. Spotting academically gifted students and taking them through a rigorous mentorship programme could also foster a culture of entrepreneurship in Namibia. The interviewees also pointed out that the colonial past makes it difficult for them to live out entrepreneurship, especially those in rural remote Namibia. Some interviewees felt some business owners to lack motivation when starting up their own business. The majority of the respondents felt that entrepreneurship is not well promoted in Namibia. The way in which Namibians interpret entrepreneurship is different from the original perception of what entrepreneurship for a developing economy should entail, and many people in Namibia feel that starting a business is a viable option, but do not know how to start one. This will require a redesign of strategies and remedial ideas for future success. The next section of this chapter will look at conclusions, recommendations and the way forward for Namibia.

7. Conclusions, recommendations and the way forward

This chapter explored the role of entrepreneurial education in Namibia. It can be concluded that Namibians have a strong will in terms of entrepreneurial education, but the actual implementation of relevant programmes remains a challenge for the economy. It is clear from this chapter that entrepreneurship should be promoted on a much larger scale, and more extensively, in order to reach communities in Namibia. Youths should be exposed to business settings, to help them develop and foster the right attitude in order to develop entrepreneurial skills abilities and skills. A constant and deliberate effort should be made to educate Namibians more in entrepreneurship, and this can be done by taking the following points into consideration:

- Young pupils, starting from primary school, should be exposed to business concepts in order to develop the right mindset (skills and competencies to develop better).
- Successful integration of entrepreneurial education will also require patience and respect from the various ethnic groups who exist in Namibia.
- The theoretical components in the education curriculum should be balanced with practical work to develop competencies that will stimulate the entrepreneur.
- A Namibian who is already in business should be mentored to perform to the best of their ability and try to develop some competencies.
- Institutions of higher learning such as the University of Namibia, who offer courses in entrepreneurship, should help with convincing the nation that a mindset change is needed and the conditions need to be fulfilled.

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