

Non-business students' Perceptions and Experiences of Learning Entrepreneurship: Implications for Curriculum Developers and Lecturers in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Non-business students pursuing business-related degrees have increased in number at one selected public university in Zimbabwe. Entrepreneurship, which is commonly thought to be a subject for business discipline students, is being studied by non-business-oriented students as part of the curriculum. The purpose of this study was to learn about non-business students' perceptions and experiences while taking the Entrepreneurship course. To collect data for a case study design based on the interpretive paradigm, semi structured questionnaires were emailed to sixteen non-business Master's students who were purposively chosen as key informants. Thematic analysis of the findings revealed that non-business students perceived entrepreneurship to be a relevant subject, particularly in these days of depressed economies where people must be job creators rather than job seekers, and where even those in employment must generate extra income. Further research revealed Entrepreneurship to be an interesting and beneficial course that imparts entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. The study concluded that entrepreneurship is a necessary course regardless of discipline and thus recommended that it be made a mandatory course across all faculties.

KEYWORDS

entrepreneurship; experiences; learning; perceptions; non-business students

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s, there has been a surge in global interest in entrepreneurship. The main contributing factor has been the suffering of industrialised countries as a result of economic recession, high unemployment rates, and fluctuations in international trade cycles, which most of the countries had not previously experienced (Klofsten (2000), cited by Ahmad, Baharun, and Rahman, 2004). Job losses have necessitated a shift toward self-employment, which is and will continue to be an increasingly important component of economic growth and development. Graduates in many disciplines must become self-employed or develop a portfolio career that includes self-employment as a significant component. To deal with increased uncertainty and complexity caused by fundamental changes in the labour market, current and future graduates must be enterprising (Grecu and Denes, 2017).

Zimbabwe is currently experiencing massive job losses as the labour market continues to contract. As a result, the Zimbabwean government has demonstrated its full commitment to the development of entrepreneurship through deliberate policies aimed at creating self-employed citizens (Nani & Mpofu, 2015). The university under consideration has also seen

an increase in non-business students pursuing business-related degrees. These students come from a variety of fields, including engineering, law, medicine, veterinary sciences, and mining. One would think that their academic and professional qualifications would be sufficient for them, but the continued increase in the number of such students suggests otherwise. With the trend toward creating self-sufficient citizens, this study sought to discover non-business students' perceptions and experiences of learning Entrepreneurship, a course outside their areas of specialisation. According to Ahmad et al. (2004), research on entrepreneurship education in non-business programmes is still in its early stages, particularly in developing countries. Holienka, Holienkova, and Gel (2019) agree that research on entrepreneurship among non-business students is still limited, even in Slovakia. In Zimbabwe, the majority of entrepreneurship research studies in universities have been devoted to business students. There is a scarcity of research on non-business, particularly scientific disciplines, which is why this study was conducted. This is one of the few studies that has investigated non-business students' perceptions and experiences in order to make informed recommendations to curriculum developers and lecturers at the university under study.

Entrepreneurship is frequently thought to be a likely subject for students of business disciplines but not for technical students (Ahmad et al., 2004). However, recent trends indicate an increase in the number of non-business studies students pursuing business-related degrees, such as Entrepreneurship. According to Ahmad et al. (2004), non-business-oriented students interested in starting their own businesses appear to face difficulties, despite the fact that they are often the originators of product ideas. As a result, the purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions and experiences of non-business studies students in learning business studies modules, specifically Entrepreneurship, in order to provide them with entrepreneurship knowledge and the necessary skills to convert their ideas into viable businesses, as well as to provide business lecturers and policymakers with insights into how to handle students without a business background.

The study was guided by the following research objectives.

- To identify factors that encourage non-business students to pursue business-related degrees.
- To learn about the perceptions and experiences of non-business students in learning Entrepreneurship.
- To determine the entrepreneurial benefits that non-business students have gained from learning the Entrepreneurship module.

Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a significant role within an economy and as an activity that can lead to economic growth (Ahmad et al., 2004). According to the same authors, many studies have shown that students who majored in Entrepreneurship have a stronger desire to become entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these students take on the challenge of starting new businesses with greater zeal than other students.

Nieuwenhuizen (2014:9) in Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen (2014), defines entrepreneurship as the formation and growth of new businesses with the goal of profit. It is the process by which individuals respond to market opportunities and create value for themselves and society, causing changes in the economic system. According to Holienka et al. (2019), there is a clear lack of systematic attention to non-business entrepreneurship education, training, and support. According to the findings of a 2016 Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS), only 10% of interviewed business students, but as many as 64.9 percent of humanities students, 69.7% of natural sciences students, and 58.9% of social sciences students, had not taken any entrepreneurship

courses. According to the GUESSS results, business students outperformed engineering, agriculture, sports, and arts and sciences students in terms of active entrepreneurship involvement. However, non-business students were frequently underprepared to use these assets through an entrepreneurial path due to a lack of entrepreneurship education or training, so their entrepreneurial potential remained untapped.

Ahmad et al. (2004) described entrepreneurship as education that provides the necessary skills for establishing new businesses; a formalised programme to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to recognise business opportunities, search for customer insights, understand market needs, and environmental issues. Many studies have shown that entrepreneurship education plays an important role in cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit among graduates.

According to Grecu and Denes (2017), the increasingly globalised world economy forces organisations to improve their competitiveness, productivity, flexibility, and knowledge, all of which are closely related to entrepreneurship. As a result, some institutions take the approach of bringing students from non-business fields closer to the business school in order to educate students in a diverse entrepreneurship classroom. Entrepreneurship education and training equips people with the ability to recognise commercial opportunities, as well as the self-esteem, knowledge, and skills to capitalise on them. Individuals must constantly improve their knowledge and skills in order to keep up with today's rapid pace of change; otherwise, economic stagnation will prevail.

According to Wilson (2012), as cited by Cummins (2016), the United Kingdom Government emphasised the importance of providing more enterprise education and entrepreneurship opportunities for students in higher education, particularly those in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Similarly, Cooney and Murray (2008) assert that the Irish Government's Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal specifically pledged to advance the provision of entrepreneurship and management training to students from non-business disciplines, indicating that entrepreneurship should not be limited to the business domain.

In Malaysia, there was growing concern that technical students lacked the necessary entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Such students were perceived as having limited business perspectives and less flexibility to branch out into other areas of work. As a result, they became job seekers rather than job creators, necessitating the need for universities to introduce entrepreneurship subjects to non-business disciplines. A study conducted in Oman by Sibayan, Jocson, and Halibas (2016) revealed that, despite government efforts, there was still a growing concern for non-business students who lacked the necessary entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses. The issue with a non-business degree is that it focuses on technical lectures.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted using the interpretivist research paradigm. According to Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, et al. (2017:14), interpretivism refers to the viewpoints of writers who are critical of the scientific model's application to the study of the social world. According to the aforementioned authors, the social world necessitates a different research logic, one that reflects the uniqueness of humans. As a result, the focus of this research was on natural forms of human communication. The qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it allowed the researcher to understand the participants' interpretations of Entrepreneurship and their experiences (Merriam, 2015 & Creswell, 2022).

The study used a case study design to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The population consisted of 16 non-business Masters' students from a single public university who were chosen purposively. Purposive sampling was used because the researcher was familiar with the population, its components, and the nature of the research objectives (Babbie and Mouton, 2011). The non-business Master's students who took part came from a variety of disciplines where Entrepreneurship was a component of their programme. Non-business Master's students were chosen because their tertiary education, maturity, and experience would provide more critical and informed responses. To address the research objectives, semi structured questionnaires sent via e-mail were used to collect data, which was coded, transcribed, and thematically analysed. To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, research participants were validated (Creswell, 2022). All ethical issues concerning the study's permission, informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality were observed (Willig, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's goal was to find out non-business students' perceptions and experiences with learning Entrepreneurship. The study included non-business postgraduate students from various disciplines, as shown in Table 1, who were pursuing a business-related postgraduate qualification at the chosen university. To ensure that the targeted participants were the correct ones, the researcher first established the participants' undergraduate qualifications. To conceal their identities, participants were coded as P1 through P16.

Table 1. Participants' undergraduate degree qualifications

Participant	Undergraduate qualification
1	Bachelor of Science in Optometry
2	Bachelor of Engineering Honours, Degree in Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering
3	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Applied Chemistry
4.	Bachelor of Engineering Honours Degree in Electronic Engineering
5.	Bachelor of Science in Geography
6	Bachelor of Laws
7	Bachelor of Engineering Honours Degree in Chemical Engineering
8	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Computer Science
9	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Veterinary Science
10	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Chemical Technology
11	Bachelor of Engineering Honours Degree in Civil and Water Engineering
12	Bachelor of Laws (b)
13	Bachelor of Medicine (MBCH) MCS (ECSA)
14	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Journalism and Media Studies
15	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Fuels and Energy Engineering
16	Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Nursing and Psychology

Participants were drawn from a variety of non-business disciplines, as previously stated. The presentation of results follows the order of the objectives and is based on identified themes.

Objective 1. To find out the factors that motivate non-business students to pursue business oriented degrees

Broaden managerial scope and business knowledge

When asked what factors motivated non-business students to pursue business-related degrees, some participants stated that taking business-related courses would broaden their managerial scope outside of the technical area and provide them with business knowledge. As reflected in the verbatim statements below, having business knowledge would allow for informed decision making when evaluating business ideas.

P1: I enrolled in this degree programme in order to broaden my thinking beyond technical subjects. I wanted to be eligible for managerial positions and to obtain a qualification that would allow me to advance to higher levels of management where cross-sectional business knowledge is required.

P2: To gain an understanding of business and determine whether a career as an entrepreneur is a viable option. It is difficult for a technical person to lead in managerial and executive roles without extensive business knowledge.

P3: While technical expertise is useful, as one advances in the organization, basic business knowledge is required in order to appreciate the organisation as a business.

P4: As we advance in our careers as technical professionals, we realise the importance of equating everything to monetary value. Technical managers must make sound decisions while considering all costs associated with technical departments and how decisions affect the business.

P5: I am currently in charge of a high school, and business literacy is required. A business degree will help me broaden my knowledge and improve my management skills.

Acquire entrepreneurial skills

Another motivating factor revealed by the findings was the need to acquire entrepreneurial and business-related skills; knowledge on how to set up and run a profitable and efficient business; and administrative skills that were not taught in the first degree. This is demonstrated by the responses that follow.

P6: To gain an understanding of how a business is set up and run because, at the end of the day, any profession, such as a law firm, is a business. To acquire entrepreneurial and business-related skills.

P7: To gain a broad business perspective. Non-technical aspects of the business must be learned and understood.

P8: What drives me is the desire to succeed in running my own business. In an economy like ours, I also wanted to learn how to start my own business and not rely on a salary. I also needed to learn how to balance technical skills while improving service delivery and business management efficiencies.

P9: My first degree did not provide me with the entrepreneurship skills I needed to manage the commercial aspects of running my own business. I'm studying business administration to fill a skill gap that I identified as a barrier to my potential in the business world.

P10: The need to understand how a business works and the principles involved. The ultimate goal, at the end of the day, is to maximise shareholder wealth. Business degrees broaden people's perspectives if they want to start their own business successfully.

P11: To pursue my own business by leveraging technical skills and skills gained in the Master's Programme.

P12: As a member of management in my organisation, I've realised that understanding business is critical. It provides a thorough understanding of issues, allowing me to provide appropriate advice to my organisation.

P13: It was after realising that the majority of doctors are poor managers (both financially and practically).

P14: To be fully marketable in the media industry and to remain relevant, one must be unique and offer a diverse set of qualifications. The media industry is saturated, and a business degree will help you stand out by demonstrating that you have more to offer. The future need to develop managerial skills and start a business.

P15: From my experience in industry, there is a gap when companies produce but do so at a loss due to a lack of financial appreciation.

P16: To learn how to run a business in an efficient and productive manner.

The responses above demonstrate the importance that non-business students place on business-related degrees. The study discovered that participants believed that business related subjects would broaden their managerial scope outside of technical areas and help them acquire business knowledge when it came to factors that motivated non-business students to pursue business related degrees. Having business knowledge will allow them to make informed decisions when evaluating business ideas. These findings are consistent with the findings of Ahmad et al. (2004), who found that entrepreneurship education provides students with the necessary skills and knowledge to recognise business opportunities, search for customer insights, and understand market and environmental issues.

Objective 2: To get non-business students' perceptions and experiences in learning Entrepreneurship

As previously stated, the participants in this study were not business students. As a result, the purpose of this study was to find out what their perceptions and experiences were outside of their areas of specialisation. According to the responses given below, the participants found the module interesting, and it gave them confidence to take business risks. These perceptions and experiences are supported by the responses of the participants, as shown below.

Interesting module

P2 Learning Entrepreneurship has broadened my horizons and altered my perspective on life.

P4: I found the course difficult, especially when it required me to provide business-related examples.

P5: Entrepreneurship is a hands-on subject that is based on real-life experiences.

P6: Learning with business-minded students assisted me in networking for future interactions. They explained complicated ideas.

P7: I found the module interesting, but I believe it should be taught at the start of the programme, followed by deliberate challenging tasks that require us to apply our newly acquired knowledge.

P12: It was an interesting module because I now have a better understanding of business issues, and the knowledge I gained will help me make informed decisions.

P13: An intriguing module that teaches you that it is possible to think outside of the scientific realm and convert everything into business so that it all makes sense at the end of the day, thereby adding value to the economy.

The perspectives presented above give the impression that the participants enjoyed learning the Entrepreneurship course, even though it was outside of their areas of expertise. In addition to finding the course interesting, other participants, as shown below, stated that it instilled confidence in them.

Instilled confidence on how to run a business

P11: I enjoyed the module because it gave me the confidence to take risks and start my own business.

P15: The course has given me the confidence and strength to start my own business.

P14: With the skills I learned during the Entrepreneurship course, I can now start my own media company. My self-esteem has improved as well. It taught me how to prioritise projects and how to make the most of the limited resources available while maximising profits.

In response to how participants experienced the Entrepreneurship course, the study's findings revealed that participants found learning the Entrepreneurship course interesting, which is consistent with a study by Grecu and Denes (2017), which found that bringing students from non-business fields closer to the business school is one approach taken by some institutions aiming to educate students in an entrepreneurship classroom characterised by diversity.

Objective 3. To identify entrepreneurial benefits that non-business students have derived from learning the Entrepreneurship course

The participants were asked to respond to a question about the benefits of taking the Entrepreneurship course, and the following are their responses: they found the module beneficial because it taught them to be open-minded, acquired entrepreneurship knowledge and skills, enabled them to have a broader view of how a business is set up and run, and

gave them an appreciation of business principles and procedures. The benefits are affirmed by the verbatim statements in the highlighted themes below.

Taught me to be open minded

According to P1, I was appointed as a Product Quality Assurance manager, which meant that my business skills would be directly related to customer satisfaction in terms of the end product received. I had to step outside my comfort zone and start analysing what the market expects of the product in terms of product quality, convenience of our location as Optometry practices, pricing of the products, and creating a lasting-good brand image to the customer after being used to just examining the patient and handing over to the optical dispenses for retailing. This required business knowledge. Entrepreneurship classes provided me with the skills I needed to meet the demands of my portfolio as a quality assurance manager.

This degree has taught me to "think in other terms," to think beyond my skill as an optometrist, but also to identify opportunities within my field and to spread my wings outside of the Optometry eye examination room; particularly in terms of backward integration and becoming a supplier of raw materials to spectacle production (amongst other visual aids), which is currently an uncharted territory in Zimbabwe because all Optometrists import.

Whereas in my previous degree, I only focused on growth in terms of Optometry Skill anchored on ensuring the patient considers me as the practitioner of choice in the next eye examination, I did not have a grasp on how to then incorporate other aspects of the business such as human capital management and exploitation of ever existing business opportunities that would lead to growth of the optometry practices.

Acquisition of entrepreneurship knowledge

According to the responses given below, participants benefited from the acquisition of entrepreneurship knowledge.

P1: Optometry is a two-sided coin that includes both the provision of eye health examinations and the retail sale of eye accessories. This brings the cycle of eye care services to a close. The knowledge I gained from the Optometry Degree was only comprehensive in the skill of eye examination and not in how to run an Optometry practice. My entrepreneurial skills have improved as a result of my studies in entrepreneurship.

P4: My first degree taught me how to develop technology and use it to solve community problems, but entrepreneurship taught me how to make money and build a business from my inventions. Learning about entrepreneurship has taught me to think outside the box and seize every opportunity that comes my way.

P5: I have learned how to start and manage a business. I can now make business decisions and interpret company accounts correctly.

P6: I have gained knowledge of business management and risk management, which is critical in the legal business environment. The course has opened my eyes to the realities of starting and running a business.

P7: Entrepreneurship instills spontaneity in how you handle out-of-the-ordinary situations. It also demonstrates that starting and growing a business necessitates skills, planning, and/or knowledge, rather than simply a desire to take risks. After completing the Entrepreneurship course, I was inspired to reconsider my options for earning extra money. Despite being in its early stages, I am well on my way to developing a business in an area that I had long assumed was oversubscribed. It took some challenges for me to think differently, and I was then willing to take the risk of starting.

P10: The course taught me to think critically and creatively. It taught me that being an entrepreneur requires passion and dedication, and that it is not solely dependent on capital. Entrepreneurial characteristics also contribute to the success of a business. It also answered the majority of my questions about entrepreneurship. Learning the Entrepreneurship course has opened my mind, and I am now able to identify opportunities in ways that I was previously unable to do because my first degree did not include the course.

P12: It has taught me principles that I am now putting into practice in my business.

P16: I have gained knowledge that will assist me in growing my business. Friends have also approached me about forming joint ventures. I am now well prepared to enter into such collaborations.

According to the opinions expressed above, participants gained entrepreneurship knowledge while taking the Entrepreneurship course. Other participants stated that they learned entrepreneurial skills in addition to gaining entrepreneurship knowledge.

Acquisition of entrepreneurial skills

The following are participants' comments on acquiring entrepreneurial skills.

P2: Most engineering students lack entrepreneurial skills. They go to school, excel, and get a job, whereas entrepreneurship encourages us to learn and provide employment while also reaping financial benefits. I can now start my own business and contribute to the reduction of Zimbabwe's unemployment rate.

P3: After working and expanding my network, I believe I am now ready to start my own business. I've been given entrepreneurial skills to help me succeed.

P14: My interactions with business-minded students reinforced what I had learned as my colleagues devised new strategies to deal with the current economic and unstable environment. It taught me how to prioritise projects and how to make the most of the limited resources available while maximising profits.

P15: The course fosters creativity and innovation skills.

P16 The course covered business startup strategies as well as how to spot warning signs of trouble.

As evidenced by the responses of participants, taking the Entrepreneurship course provides students with entrepreneurial skills.

Knowledge on how to identify opportunities

The following are some examples of responses to the identification of opportunities.

P8: Entrepreneurship sharpened my critical thinking skills and gave me a better understanding of assessing, establishing, and running a business. It made me realise that there are business opportunities even in the technical solutions we develop. It even helped to ensure that they are the best on the market and precisely tailored to the needs of the customers. I realised that starting a business isn't all that difficult.

Knowledge on how to set up a business

P9: The course provided me with the opportunity to discover and learn the characteristics of a successful entrepreneur, as well as the knowledge to recognise and capitalise on entrepreneurial opportunities. I was a risk-averse person, but the course taught me that every potential venture carries some level of risk, which the entrepreneur must accept and not be discouraged by failure. Life stories from people who are already running successful businesses gave me even more hope when I realised that the majority did not make it the first time. Furthermore, the course provides some insight into what constitutes a successful business plan, as well as the significance of such a plan in securing venture financing and evaluating its progress.

P11: My first degree was primarily concerned with employment and technical issues, but entrepreneurship has taught me that I can use my skills to start a business rather than looking for work. Following the programme, I established an engineering consultancy and laboratory. It also showed me that most people can succeed even in difficult circumstances.

P13: The first degree was focused on science. The second is a completely different world. My mind is now free. I'm now seeing all of the possibilities for earning money and living outside of the salary-based scheme. Instead of being an employee, I am now an employer.

P9: Interaction with people from different backgrounds than mine broadened my understanding of business operations. I found group activities to be especially beneficial because they allowed me to learn from the experiences of others. I had a narrow technical view of business in which survival was dependent on technical excellence.

P10: It was a useful module because it taught me to develop unique skills and to think outside the box.

The findings that the Entrepreneurship course was beneficial are consistent with the findings of a 2016 study by Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS), which showed that, in terms of involvement in active entrepreneurship,

business students were outperformed by students of engineering, agriculture, sports, and sciences of art. However, non-business students were frequently underprepared to use these assets through entrepreneurial paths due to a lack of entrepreneurship education or training, so their entrepreneurial potential was limited (Holienka et al., 2018). These findings confirm that non-business students were equipped with entrepreneurial skills that would help them use their business entities profitably.

Furthermore, participants' perspectives on learning Entrepreneurship as non-business students are similar to those of students in the United Kingdom who lacked business skills, whereby the government saw the need for greater enterprise education and entrepreneurship opportunities for students in higher education, particularly those students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (Wilson (2012), cited by Cummins) (2016). Participants in this study also stated that they were not exposed to entrepreneurship education in their STEM classes. Furthermore, the findings back up the Irish Government's Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal, which pledged specifically to advance the provision of entrepreneurship and management training students from non-business disciplines, indicating that entrepreneurship should not be limited to the business domain (Cooney and Murray, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The study looked at the factors that influenced non-business students to pursue degrees in business. The study concluded that the course broadened their knowledge base beyond their areas of specialisation. The study also found that non-business students found the Entrepreneurship course interesting and confidence instilling. The conclusions drawn regarding the benefits that non-business students derived from learning the Entrepreneurship course were that participants were taught open mindedness; acquired entrepreneurial knowledge and skills; knowledge to identify opportunities and how to set up businesses.

Implications for lecturers and policy makers

According to the study's findings, lecturers should involve non-business students in writing business plans so that they can go through the steps of starting a business. They practise accounting, product and service pricing, and marketing by writing business plans. Lecturers should also invite industry leaders to give business presentations. Integration of business and non-business students in lessons is critical because it allows non-business students to network and tackle activities together, as well as receive assistance from business students who are familiar with business concepts.

Non-business students should visit business premises to learn firsthand experiences from those who have run businesses and exchange ideas on business successes and failures. Curriculum developers should create multidisciplinary curricula that span multiple faculties to meet the needs of technically inclined subjects. There is also a need to incorporate practical sessions in which non-business students can be involved in real-life situations involving business planning, establishment, and operation so that they can gain experience with the risks associated with business establishment.

Because this study was conducted with non-business students, a comparative study with business studies students could be conducted to determine their perceptions and experiences of learning with non-business students.

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