

Growing Entrepreneurial Talent-A Challenge For Ghana's Educational Systems



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ABSTRACT

This article is written with my personal conviction as a corporate and financial services industry player and the unabated sheer quantum of unemployment in Ghana.

The teeming youth unemployment which culminated in the formation of 'the association of unemployed graduates' a couple of years ago, can be traced to the poor formulation of educational policies with particular reference to lack of introducing entrepreneurship education from primary/junior high schools.

Skills and knowledge derived from the teaching of entrepreneurship education from primary/junior high schools is likely to engender indelible imprint in the memories of these pupils and at the same time generate passion at a very tender age.

The knowledge acquisition would enable the pupils to carry through to senior high school and tertiary institutions. They would then have made up their minds on the courses of study they would pursue to becoming entrepreneurs.

Challenges, such as dearth of qualified teachers and lack of teaching facilities are apparent deterrents. However, with deliberate training and retraining of teachers, will equip them to pass on the necessary knowledge to the pupils.

The long-term benefits of introducing entrepreneurship education in primary/junior high schools cannot be quantified, as it would have positive effect in transforming the industrial development of Ghana.



Introduction

Prior to the introduction of formal education in Ghana, our forebears were engaged in entrepreneurship in their own right, in petty trading, merchandising and farming. With regards to farming, even though this was on subsistence level just enough to feed the family, there were others who always had excess production to sell in the local markets, especially during market days.

With persistence and focus, some of these petty traders succeeded to become retail store owners as well as representatives of large trading outfits, such as the erstwhile United African Company (UAC) and United Trading Company (UTC), from which tremendous wealth was generated.

Likewise, others who were merchants got involved in importation as well as establishing manufacturing companies.

The advent of formal education brought about its attendant enlightenment to society as well as acquisition of higher educational qualifications. However, the type of schooling system passed on to us was pure academic, where we were encouraged to study hard, acquire good grades and higher qualifications to enable us get good paying jobs and secure the future.

As much as this is good and to a large extent put food on the table, it cannot secure the future. This type of education is tailored made to subjugate us as perpetual job seekers, hence servants, depriving us of exercising our God-given potentials and initiatives to be job creators and entrepreneurs.

In recent times, the word Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship has been on the lips of many Ghanaians. An Entrepreneur is defined by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as 'a person who makes money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks'. It is derived from the French word 'entreprendre', meaning to 'undertake or start a venture'- the emphasis being on the start-up and growth of a business in

order to create economic and social prosperity.

The introduction of entrepreneurship as a course of study in our tertiary institutions at the graduate and post graduate levels is a welcome resolve. However, I may borrow from the Ewe adage which says 'a tree that will dowel and be reckoned with when it grows up is seen and identified in its infancy'. To put it mildly in the words of Robert T. Kiyosaki, 'gone are the days when you are asked to study hard in school, get good grades and look for good paying job to secure the future'. This is all that pure academic education can offer. In modern times, the rules of the game of being an employee for life till you retire have changed. It is a statement of fact that there is no job that can secure the future, except it is self-owned. The future can only be secured if you have financial independence. Even though tertiary institutions have taken the lead in teaching entrepreneurship at the graduate and postgraduate levels, it is my contention that there is an urgent need to begin the teaching of entrepreneurship from primary/junior high schools. The foundation of every structure is paramount in its long term sustenance, hence the teaching of entrepreneurship at the primary/junior high school levels will imbibe the culture and ethics of entrepreneurship in them at an early age.

This will offer them the opportunity to understand the concept and fundamental knowledge and skills to equip them for the future. Additionally, the confidence required to generate passion would have been planted and established as they get through to senior high school and then to the tertiary level. By so doing, Ghana would have departed from most countries that lay emphasis on entrepreneurial education in their tertiary institutions.

Ghana being a developing economy where industrialization is key for competitive global economy, the teaching of entrepreneurial development is required at the formative years of our children during which time the entrepreneurial 'seed' would have been planted at a tender age.

Importance of introducing entrepreneurship in primary/junior high school.

Hermann Frank, Christian Korunka, Manfred Lueger and Josef Mugler(2005) in investigating factors that influence entrepreneurial thinking and attitudes towards entrepreneurship in vocational and general secondary education in Austria, averred that the entrepreneurial orientation as well as inclinations to start up a new business can indeed be influenced considerably with potential targeted influences at the personality level in the education process and in the pupils immediate and general environment. It will therefore be a welcome idea to introduce entrepreneurship education at both primary and junior high schools to begin the building of the capacity process. It is said that in Japan, primary schools concentrate on teaching start-ups.

In the document published by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA P9 Eurydice and Policy Support), March 2012, under the title, Entrepreneurship Education at Schools in Europe, National Strategies, Curricula and Learning Outcome, Chapter 2, it was stated that about two thirds of the region or regions within countries recognize entrepreneurship education in primary education, either as a subject or integrated into others subjects. In addition, entrepreneurship education is also taught in general lower secondary education through to general upper secondary education.

Challenges to introducing Entrepreneurship education in primary/ junior high school.

The major challenge that may likely be encountered in entrepreneurship education in primary/junior high school is the availability of teachers and teaching facilities.

The only way we can derive maximum benefit from entrepreneurial education is to provide adequate

training for teachers who would transfer same knowledge to the pupils. That also means the provision of adequate teaching facilities and creating the appropriate environment suitable for teaching.

Perception and Public Attitude

This is a fundamental issue which I will refer to as the ‘Ghanaian Factor’, where parents literally force their children to pursue specific courses that lead to becoming professionals, such as Medical Doctors, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants and the like.

Being a professional does not give you the absolute guarantee for safe landing in the future. This is what I call Industrial-Age thinking.

The whole world have moved away from Industrial-Age thinking, where the thinking is that your job can guarantee your future. The truth is that, even the government cannot guarantee your job and neither can your savings, pensions, retirement benefits, social security or provident fund protect your future.

These are all attributes of the Industrial Age thinking. The world has now moved into the Information Age thinking where rapid changes and information processing are taking place per second, per second.

There is a poor perception founded on ignorance, which suggests that entrepreneurial education belongs to people of low intelligence quotient. This is a fallacy, because there are many successful entrepreneurs who are mentally sharp and have highest of education.

All that’s actually required to be a successful entrepreneur is to operate by gut instinct, however entrepreneurs in the high-tech and bio-tech fields are often highly educated, sometimes to PhD level to provide opportunity in research work.

Conclusion

Economic prosperity of every nation comes from developing the entrepreneurial talent. It is a statement of fact that, entrepreneurs are not born but are made by developing and nurturing hidden potentials.

Due to economic grievances all over the world, compounded by global slowdown as a result of inflation and political cronyism, former President Obama in the first six months of his presidency, made entrepreneurship in America his priority. No doubt, in the 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Summit held in Silicon Valley in Stanford, President Obama was physically present as a moderator in one of the sessions represented by more than 170 countries, among which was a 10 year entrepreneur who received several prizes.

This buttresses the potency and importance of entrepreneurship being the spark-plug in the engine of any economic activity. There is an urgent need therefore, to encourage entrepreneurship education and not only pure academic education.

It is now time to train strategically, the mind and the hand to work together. It is time to train to become an employer than being an employee. No employee and by extension, no salaried worker can ever become rich. No salaried worker depending on monthly paid cheque can ever become wealthy. No matter how long you work, you will retire broke and die broke.

Many young school leavers entering the labour market do not seem to have the entrepreneurial skill-set needed by most employers. This is because, traditional academic education has its focus on teaching 'content' but not 'context'.

Content connotes mainly skills in reading and writing, while context refers to developing the potential and talent of the student. Most often, it is the content that is taught in the mainstream education, by encouraging to study hard, have good grades and get good job to secure your

future. It has never been the context, which actually teaches you to study hard, obtain good grades and create a job and become your own boss.

A person's context includes philosophies, beliefs, values, attitude, choices, and remember, it is the context that holds the content. Context, when taught in schools would expose students to developing their entrepreneurial abilities to create jobs and own businesses.

A poor man cannot be taught to be rich until his context is changed because the poor focuses on working for ordinary income.

Entrepreneurial education will teach you how your money can work for you even while you are sleeping, instead of working for money. There is hardly anyone who works for money and becomes rich.

Our schools should be the vehicles that teach investment, intellectual property, and assets that put money in the pocket, month after month, year after year, creating successful entrepreneurs and not only becoming successful corporate leaders. Let us develop and unlock the hidden entrepreneurial potential and talent in our students, let us make them to understand that entrepreneurship is the means to owning your own business and becoming your own boss.

Entrepreneurs are risk takers and at the same time, solution providers. Entrepreneurship is the way out of poverty, solution to corruption, key to job creation, pathway to wealth creation and financial freedom.

To unlock the entrepreneurial potential and talent, we need to teach it from primary / junior high schools. Traditional business courses equip students with valuable theoretical business knowledge, but there is urgent need for consistent provision of enterprise education as economic growth is driven by entrepreneurial drive.

Entrepreneurship education benefits students from all socioeconomic backgrounds because it teaches kids to think outside the box and nurtures unconventional talents and skills. In the words of Albert Einstein, 'education is what remains after one has forgotten what is learned in school'.

Therefore, the need to overhaul the entirety of our school curricula cannot be over emphasized, while prominence is given to entrepreneurship education, culminating in the development of entrepreneurial talent and financial prosperity.

References

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