ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS' DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCING THROUGH NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS USING STUDENTS' FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the behaviour of young people in relation to choosing entrepreneurship as a career particularly at university level. Previous studies show that, interplay between formal, non-formal and informal environments influences and shapes individual's career development. In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education is one of the priority areas of the current administration aimed to foster economic growth, stability and employment generation. The study employed qualitative research design using case study approach. The study utilizes focus group among students of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria undergraduate students of entrepreneurship programme. The finding of study revealed that, family background exhibits a positive association with learning of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship behaviour. Also found a significant positive relationship between education and studies (formal environment with students' entrepreneurship behavior). However, free time and hobbies were found to have insignificant influence on the students' entrepreneurship behaviour Thus, the result of the study indicates that entrepreneurship behaviour is significantly influenced by environmental and educational background. This study contributes to existing literature on the influence of entrepreneurship behaviour by family background, education and studies and free time and hobbies. Future study should extend the investigation to informal environment.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Skill and Behaviour; Free-Time and Hobbies; Focus Group; New Learning Environment; Environmental Background; Education and Studies; National Growth: Nigeria

Introduction

Economic stability and national growth to some extent depend on entrepreneurial activities. Nigeria, like many other countries, has join the queue in promoting entrepreneurship education in its institutions of higher learning. Entrepreneurship education has been included not only in degree programmes with the aim of relieving graduates of the burden of going through the search for unavailable employment for years after graduation. However, despite the increasing number of activities and courses in entrepreneurship education and training, amazingly, few students are attracted to entrepreneurship studies and even fewer are interested in actually becoming entrepreneurs.

To inspire and develop entrepreneurial mind-set of young people, proper care must be given to understand the way they think

and how they go about choosing a career (Henderson & Robertson 2000; Römer-Paakkanen & Rauhala, 2007). Adopting entrepreneurship, as a career option, depends on individual's knowledge as well as on attitudes and the willingness in accepting it as a way of life. This view considers learning as a process that takes place in all places, at home, at free time activities and hobbies (Kyrö & Carrier, 2005).

European Commission (2006) asserts that, entrepreneurship competence is developed in both formal and non-formal settings (e.g. through youthful activities and various forms of participation in a society). Therefore, learning is an interactive process between formal, non-formal and informal learning in which students' ideas and actions are in focus. Entrepreneurship research on understanding this interplay is not common. Many universities have their curriculum structures organized by disciplines (Kickul & Fayolle, 2007), which poses considerable challenges to the educational system, and to the higher education in particular. There is certainly no one best methods or training, but education should embrace talent spotting, advising, counseling, training, mentoring and coaching (Thompson, 2006).

Learning entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behavior, therefore, will include developing new ideas and actions in new pedagogical environments. The current study is, therefore, aimed at understanding the way young people think, and how they go about choosing entrepreneurship as a career. The objective is to understand how the interplay between formal learning, non-formal and informal learning (in family and in hobbies) taking place in the process of entrepreneurial learning of students in the Nigerian Universities.

Literature Review
Approach to the Interplay Between Home, School and Outside World in Entrepreneurship Education

Education or learning has no one generally accepted definition. Boundaries between formal, non-formal, and informal learning can only be significantly drawn in relation to particular contexts and for particular purposes (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2003). Colardy and Bjørnåvold (2004) support the formulation in which (a) formal stands for learning that occurs within an organized and structured context, (b) non-formal is learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, and (c) informal learning is the result of daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. However, boundaries are not intended between the different types of learning but the inter-relationships between dimensions of formality or informality in particular situations (Colley, et al, 2003).

Theories for understanding entrepreneurship education, as the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning, are hardly ever available. Some ideas, however, can be found in family business research. Kirkwood (2007) points out that, family business research clearly indicates that, parents who own businesses certainly play a role in their children's decision of becoming entrepreneurs. According to Erikson (2003), entrepreneurial learning develops and strengthens those competencies which originate from three sources: (1) Mastery – as we learn from our experiences, (2) Observation – we can learn from events (like studying successes and failures of others, who may be strangers, but acting as indirect mentors), and (3) Socializing – networking and learning directly from the

experiences of others who may be acting as mentors or coaches.

Koiranen (2000) suggests that the growth to entrepreneurship stems from a long process of learning in a range of environments (e.g. home and family background, school and the outside world). An entrepreneurial family background tends to influence attitudes positively and increase the potential of offspring adopting entrepreneurial behaviour. Similarly, if school and society as a whole encourage and support active and innovative behaviour of young people, it will, in turn, create space for entrepreneurship. Home, school and the outside world are clearly interrelated (Koiranen, 2004). These three environments (systems) can also be seen as an arena for the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning.
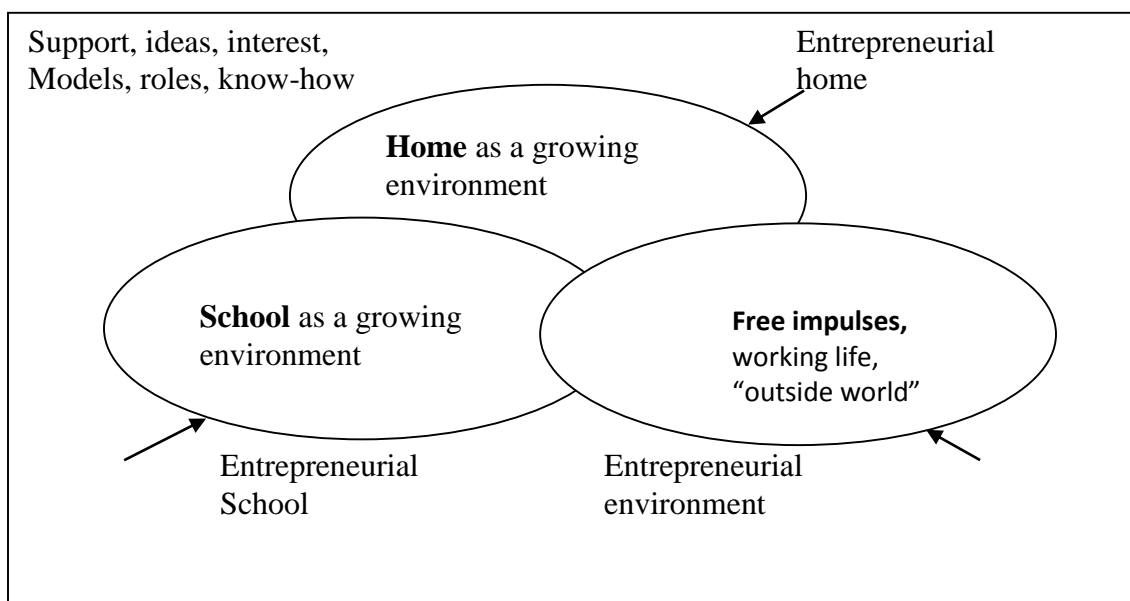

Figure 1 Different environments (or systems) fostering entrepreneurial spirit (adapted from Koiranen, 2004).

Parsons and Bales (1955) claim that the two basic family functions are the primary socialization of children, and the stabilization of adult personalities in the society. Family system, in this study, refers to family backgrounds of business and their connection with the process of becoming an entrepreneur. In business families, the children grow up with parents who have accepted an entrepreneurial way of life and it may reflect to the future career options of the offspring.

In this study, experiences in informal and non-formal systems point to free time activities and hobbies, i.e. activities done when not working or studying. Hobbies are practised for interest and enjoyment, rather than for a financial reward. Engaging in a hobby can lead to acquiring substantial skills, knowledge, and experiences. The aim is personal fulfillment.

Home, school and free-time activities are the core components that influence students' pre understanding as they start their entrepreneurship studies and training at the Universities. Theoretical studies and practical exercises with teachers, entrepreneurs and other experts form a process in which their understanding increases. The objective of the training

process is a deep understanding of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. This process can lead to internal entrepreneurship, external entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation (Römer-Paakkanen, 2001).

This study is interested in the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning process particularly in the context of Ahmadu Bello University. The aim is to understand how the interplay between family backgrounds, free-time activities and hobbies, and education influence students' entrepreneurial behavioural development. Thus, the research problem consists of how:

1) Family (family environment) background influence students' entrepreneurship behaviour.
2) Free-time activities and hobbies (non-formal and informal environment) influence students' entrepreneurship behaviour.
3) Education and studies (formal environment) influence students' entrepreneurship behaviour.

Our objective is to look into this interplay between the environments and to explore qualitatively how the interplay is appraised and shaped on the basis of the experiences of the informants.

Methodology

To study the process of students' entrepreneurship behavioural development, we employed a qualitative research design. The data were collected by a focus group discussion with the students who are taking part in the entrepreneurship programme. According to flick (1998), a focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people (six to eight) on a specific topic, typically lasting for one and a half to two hours. Focus-groups are useful when the research topic is new or when the aim is to find out new ideas. The physical context of this study is the Ahmadu Bello University

Zaria entrepreneurship education programme. The objective of this study is to assess the students' possibilities and desire to become entrepreneurs.

Our six informants, of which two were females and three males, are a special group of students, all studying business, taking part in the entrepreneurship programme, had a business family background and wanted to create their own businesses. As entrepreneurship students, they were well acquainted with searching for business opportunities, researching the market potential of their business ideas and products and learning about the process of business building. Even though, all our informants have entrepreneurial backgrounds they are not (for the time being) planning to continue their family businesses. We chose those informants because they were interested in discussing the topic and developing the content of their studies.

The research approach is inductive which means that, we move from the observed facts to generalizations. We conducted the focus-group interviews, interpreted the data and reflected it against our research questions and previous literature. Using the inductive approach means that, the goal is to explore the data, find out a phenomenon or pattern and suggest a claim.

After identifying the informants, we conceptualized the main research questions and designed the focus-group interview. In the interview, we let the students discuss the topics and themes quite freely, mainly making sure that all the themes were covered but also letting the informants bring in their topics to the discussion. The students reflected on the most important reasons in their entrepreneurial processes and careers and considered the best educational ways for enhancing students to become entrepreneurs. To obtain background information, we

collected informants' personal information by personal discussions

The work consisted of planning and conducting the focus group interviews, reading the transcripts and notes from the sessions, organizing and analyzing the data, and creating a summary of the findings. As we read the transcripts, we were seeking for major quotes, key points, and themes that might emerge. We identified some themes in the discussions, and in addition to the topics that gave answers to our research questions, we focused on the question why some of the students are planning their own businesses on the basis of their hobby but not on the basis of their family businesses. In addition to the background information, we were interested in the students' motives to participate in entrepreneurial studies, their perceptions on the teaching methods (e.g. applicability), as well as their learning processes.

We organized the data using the conceptual ordering method which means organizing the data into discrete categories according to their properties and dimensions and then using descriptions to elucidate those categories (Straus & Corbin ,1998). Dudley and Phillips (2008) suggest that when reviewing data, researchers should also ask following questions: what was known and then confirmed or challenged by the focus group data? What was suspected and then confirmed or challenged by the focus group data? What was new that wasn't previously suspected? The categories that we used in analysis were: (a) why students study at the ABU, entrepreneurship programme (b) family relations, family support; (c) other supporting people; (d) hobbies, activities and passions; (e) future plans.

Results and Discussions

After organizing the data, we interpreted the discussions, qualitatively analyzed the data against our research questions. The descriptive quotations used in the analysis can be seen in figure 2. The language of focus-group interviews and the descriptive quotations is English.

HOW IS THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN FAMILY BACKGROUND, FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES, AND EDUCATION? INFLUENCES STUDENTS' GROWTH INTO ENTREPRENEUR?

Family system Main concepts	Informal and non-formal systems	Education system Main concepts
Socialization Family business family Mentoring	**Main concepts**	Entrepreneurship education
	Free-time activities and	Entrepreneurship studies
	Hobbies Coaching	Counseling
"I think that the conversations are	*"I have so much to do on different*	*"The best teachers have had entrepreneurial habits and attitudes... they have some experience in working in SME's and also know what entrepreneurship*
most important. It is fine to have	*areas and it is very hard to make*	
the possibility to tell my ideas to	*Choices; the real difficulty is making choices."*	
someone who understands		*is in the real life."*
entrepreneurship and knows my	*"I feel that to be active in my*	*"... learning by doing..."*
	hobby means active in other	

situation and doesn't leave me alone with my "silly" idea. I sell my idea to at least three family members allowing them to evaluate it."

"I really need to do many things in

my life"

" It is true that my family members

encourage me even though people

say that entrepreneurship is not the way to become rich…"

"… My father has always given me financial advice and he has also helped me financially."

fields as well - like other hobbies, studies and working."

"In the future I would like to have a job in which I can use the competencies that I have learned

in my hobby. I wish for job in which creativity and self-realization are possible. I want to make my ideas come true."

"… to take small steps…"

"Would it not be fun if my hobby could be my profession?"

"My hobby is my passion … If I can make my living from it … what could be better?"

"…opportunity to show creativity and to do things by yourself"

"… possibility of trying harder and thus increase persistence…"

"…ability to organize, lead and learn responsibility…"

"… personal timing…"

"…Different ways to carry out the studies and self-orientation…"

"…transferring existing ideas into new opportunities and task,

"… possibility of showing own

Thinking and business idea…"

"…doing tasks that directly benefit

oneself"

"…increased know-how…"

"…in pre-incubator people are using

"the same language" and you can

reflect your ideas with the others and get support from them – they form a supporting network…"

Figure 2 *Quotations used in reviewing the data.*

The informal and non-formal systems i.e. the free-time activities and hobbies proved to be the core that were closely related to the other two systems i.e. to family and education, and it is not useful to examine them separately. For our informants the entrepreneurial career of creating their own businesses was a likely career choice: They chose business studies since they wanted to learn how to run a business, and they chose their entrepreneurship studies as they wanted to develop their ideas further. They also reflected their ideas and decisions with their parents.

This process develops in different environments or systems – in family (system), school (education system) and in free-time activities and hobbies (informal and non-formal systems). Counseling, coaching and mentoring form a supporting system, functioning as catalysts in the process. Counseling focuses on an individual, producing self-directive actions, and its aim is to highlight competent learning and self-management. Tunkkari-

Eskelinen (2005) argues that, it is difficult to make clear distinctions between mentoring and coaching or parenting. However, she, nevertheless, proposes that, parenting should not be used as a synonym to mentoring. Mentoring means a one-to-one relationship established between a more experienced person and a less experienced one.

Briefly present below are the results divided according to our research questions, and finally conclude the discussion.

Family system – socialization

Becoming an entrepreneur or starting a new venture is a complex decision, but previous research supports our finding that parents appear to be a strong influencing factor in this process (Kirkwood 2007; Heck et al, 2008). According to our informants, family members are often assisting in the process, and sometimes they also help with finding the capital needed for starting a new venture.

It is true that my family members encourage me even though people say that entrepreneurship is not the way to become rich. My father has always given me financial advice and he has also helped me financially.

The nature of family influence is not thoroughly known (Kirkwood, 2007), but our study indicates that family values, adopting an active life-style and a proactive attitude towards work are the main factors that matters when students start thinking about their career options. Our informants had grown up in environments in which doing, working and acting were highly appreciated.*"I really need to do many things in my life".* An informant remarked.

Business families often have a mutual dream of a successful family business, leading to the (financial) well-being of the family. But when we carefully examine personal needs and goal-settings, it often seems to be the personal needs of the

founder of the firm on which these mutual dreams are ultimately based. When the offsprings start planning their future and careers, they also have to make the decision whether to continue the family firm or not. if the mutual dream still is "mutual", the offsprings may be interested in continuing the business, but there may also be a number of reasons why they may not be interested in the family business or in entrepreneurial career in the first place (Römer-Paakkanen and Rauhala, 2007). A family business is a family matter, but it is also a personal matter when children make decisions whether to continue. An entrepreneurial career is very much influenced by other circumstances, related to both personal life and family circles. In one sense, the offsprings start their "incubation processes" as early as in childhood. Parents, other relatives and entrepreneurs within the social neighbourhood may support and reflect the ideas of the following generation (i.e. our student informants): family businesses offer counseling and mentoring to the younger generations.

I think that the conversations are most important. It is fine to have the possibility to tell my ideas to someone who understands entrepreneurship and knows my situation and doesn't leave me alone with my "silly" idea. I sell my idea to at least three family members allowing them to evaluate it.

Our results indicate that, those students who come from business families tend to have tacit knowledge, and they also utilize it when developing their business ideas. Also, Westerholm (2007) argues that entrepreneurial expertise could be explained through tacit knowledge.

Informal and non-formal systems – free time activities and hobbies

The students, having created their business ideas from their activities and

hobbies, are enthusiastic and highly motivated in what they do. In many cases, they are also relatively active and effective in their studies as they search for different ways of completing the courses and they also take part in many special courses.

I have so much to do on different areas and it is very hard to make choices; the real difficulty is making choices.

I feel that to be active in my hobby means activity in other fields as well - like other hobbies, studies and working.

Carrier (2005) complains that, many business ideas proposed by management students tend to involve copying and imitating what other people are already doing. According to our informants, learning from what others do is an important way of learning, but when becoming an entrepreneur, one should find one's own path in the process of discovering opportunities.

The possibility of using skills and competencies they possess, the self-esteem and the creativity, and the joy of work seem to be the most important motives to create one's own business.

...opportunity to show creativity and to do things by yourself

... possibility of trying harder and thus increase persistence...

...ability to organize, lead and learn responsibility...

Younger generations want to build something for themselves and not just follow their parents' way of life and decisions. This tendency is also obvious in our informants and it indicates that they really have got entrepreneurial spirits and passion for finding their way in life.

Instead of growing their businesses while studying, our informants are satisfied if they can finance their own hobbies using the profits generated through their businesses. Alternatively, they might even be more noble-minded and just want to get more participants into their hobby circles. Our results show that work content produces a greater joy for our informants than the money earned. Koiranen and Karlsson (2002), studying the joy of work, found that ideal work consists of the following features: it varies and offers challenges within one's limits; its contents are considered pleasant; it is meaningful; there exists opportunities for independent action; feedback is offered; and it provides good relationships to be experienced and a pleasant work environment.

Berret, Burton and Slack (1993) stress that entrepreneurs often have a number of common features: firstly, they want to provide quality products and services. A second common characteristic for most business owners seems to be that they want to be their own bosses. The third feature is that entrepreneurs do not expect to realize substantial financial rewards while operating the business. The main target is activity, such as sports and leisure activities, rather than making money.

Would it not be fun if my hobby could be my profession?

My hobby is my passion ... If I can make my living from it ... what could be better?

...opportunity to show creativity and to do things by yourself

In our study, these features appear to be present as the students reported that they want to be their own bosses and not to join family businesses at this point of their lives.

Education System – Entrepreneurship Education and Training

According to Thompson (2006), entrepreneurs do not necessarily learn in classrooms but clearly prefer experimental learning. Training programmes, even though they might sometimes be useful, are not the

main learning vehicles, but the so-called on-the-job experiences are preferred. Current and future entrepreneurs learn from other successful people (as well as failed entrepreneurs and revered role models), but yet again the trick lies in making sense of the information and the stories that are around. We all can benefit from the help and support of others, but only if they are the "right others".

> *The best teachers have had entrepreneurial habits and attitudes... they have some experience in working in SME's and also know what entrepreneurship is in the real life.*

Our informants also pointed out that, entrepreneurship cannot be learned in classrooms exclusively, but by doing it yourself. They also would like to get acquainted with "real, positive and realistic" entrepreneural stories. Such "success and survival stories" encourage our students to continue their own businesses so that they do not feel discouraged when they face their first setbacks in the future.

Our study supports the idea that it is important that, the entrepreneurship education or training programmes are perceived concrete and practical enough by those who participate in them. Student entrepreneurs seek for studies and courses which serve their needs and which give them support that they need when developing their ideas.

> *...transferring existing ideas into new opportunities and task,*
> *... possibility of showing own thinking and business idea…*

Our results indicate that, students learn entrepreneurship by applying things into practice, by doing and experimenting, using examples and making mistakes – by doing things themselves. Learning outcomes are created in a process in which a potential entrepreneur experiments, and then applies theoretical knowledge into real-life situations.

> *… learning by doing…*
> *… personal timing…*
> *…Different ways to carry out the studies and self-orientation…*
> *…there is a curriculum but we can make our own study–plan… we must find the interesting courses – for instance the entrepreneurship studies – ourselves ...*

Information on courses exists but it seems that, only the active and enthusiastic students find and take advantage of them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are a number of factors that influence individual growth path towards entrepreneurship: family members and other entrepreneurs, teachers at school, and coaches in hobbies. Social values provided in family circles, the educational system and studies provide the structure that supports the growth to entrepreneurship and hobbies develop self-esteem and passion for action.

Based on our analysis, we suggest that, people with entrepreneurial characteristics are active in many fields. The student entrepreneurs we interviewed had three main processes of commitment going on at the same time: their studies, hobbies and running their own businesses. The passion and spirit in hobbies had encouraged them to find out their way of studying and learning. They are enthusiastic in finding their personal way of self–actualization, both in studies and in creating business ideas.

Our conclusion from the finding indicated that, family provides students with values, the ABU offers the formal structures for learning, and the spirit and passion for action come from hobbies.

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