

Lecturer Perspectives on the Relevance of Skills and Credentials in the Teaching of Entrepreneurship

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Keywords

Business-school, Credentials, Entrepreneurship, Lecturer, Skills

Abstract

This paper analyses lecturer perspectives about skills and credentials relevant in the teaching of entrepreneurship in a university-based business school/department. The theoretical approach of this paper observes Myles Mace's profile dating from 1947 at Harvard Business School as one of the first pioneers in the teaching entrepreneurship at university. In addition, other profiles, and theoretical frames of teaching entrepreneurship in business schools are engaged. The research employs a case study design to answer a research question: What skills and credentials are relevant in teaching entrepreneurship, successfully, in an unequal society and within a business school? Seven (7) in-depth semi-structured interviews with academics at a university-based business-school and in the business management department were conducted. Different perspectives were documented. These fresh perspectives depart from the externalist agency views that tend to apply in determining the desirable skills and credentials of an entrepreneurship lecturer. The findings in this study show that experience in years of teaching plays a key role in the lecturers' abilities to teach the subject dynamically, confidently, and critically. The study concludes that the lecturer's academic qualification and experience enhance the relevance of their teaching and enable them to explore societal issues such as inequality in relation to entrepreneurship. The range of qualifications amongst interviewees in this study show no evidence that specific qualifications and credentials are more relevant than others, rather displays that lecturers in entrepreneurship find their unique voice and areas of interest. This research contributes to scholarly debates about what it takes to be a credible "teacher" in entrepreneurship. The practical implications of this study propose better support for entrepreneurship lecturers through focused development programmes, affiliation in progressive entrepreneurship networks and capacity building beyond KPIs. Future research must tackle lecturer capabilities to teach entrepreneurship in a context of an increasingly inequitable society.

Introduction

Teaching entrepreneurship in changing economic times and holding lecturer credibility in a constantly restructuring economy is motivation for this paper. The paper draws on the historic understanding that entrepreneurship was first taught at Harvard Business School in 1947 at Harvard Business School by Myles Mace. This was came after improvements made to a module called the Management of New Enterprise (Harvard Business School, 2000). Furthermore, this paper builds on the view that entrepreneurship and management as subjects taught in business schools evolved from Schumpeter's "Theory of Economic Development" published in 1934 (Katz, 2003). This study contributes to the body of research that is concerned with progress in the teaching of entrepreneurship beyond Myles Mace and Schumpeter as well as the Euro-American view of the subject. This paper then argues that entrepreneurship lecturers must hold professional qualifications and have the pre-requisite experience to teach entrepreneurship. This study moves away from using the term 'lecture' as this is not the scope of focus but rather teaching of entrepreneurship in a business school.

Business Schools and teaching of entrepreneurship

Business schools teach and conduct academic research on entrepreneurship (Lerner, 2018). Professors in the entrepreneurship discipline are salaried on average 164 thousand USD per annum in about 120 business schools in the world (AACSB International, 2014). This is an indication that entrepreneurship education has gained momentum in the top university-based business schools. As such the teaching of entrepreneurship happens in business schools beyond the formal degree studies. Short learning programmes are also offered and these enable the transfer of entrepreneurial skills to students not part of a business school (Fulgence, 2015). This shows that business schools are essential in the delivery of entrepreneurship education; a subject that has become important for societies around the world.

Contextualising Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is described as “teaching and learning about techniques, traits, attitudes, science and art of assessing and using economic opportunities to deliver new valuable solutions” (Fayolle, 2013). This paper is a case study of a Business School based in a university in South Africa. Pomerantz, (2019) explains that South Africa is expansively unequal and continues to find ways to deal with this challenge. The Worldbank, (2022) confirms that the country has desperate levels of inequality with escalation in poverty amongst the poor and gini coefficient of 67 placing it amongst the most unequal countries in the world. Whilst entrepreneurship is cited as a solution very little focus is given to the availability of skills and credible teaching of entrepreneurship with a view to restructure South Africa’s economic opportunities in response to the escalating levels of inequality. This paper then addresses the relevance of lecturer skills and credence in teaching entrepreneurship within the context of inequality.

Research Question and Objectives

The research question in this study is: What skills and credentials are relevant in teaching entrepreneurship, successfully, in an unequal society and within a business school?

The study’s objectives are to establish the skills and credentials of lecturers teaching entrepreneurship in a university-based business school, to contextualise the relevance of thereof and to explore parts of the teaching practice with reference to inequality. All these objectives advance the study’s main contribution to literature concerned about the teaching of entrepreneurship at university and in developing country contexts.

This paper comprises a literature review, research methodology, findings, discussion and conclusions.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) is the teaching and learning of enterprising, the process of envisioning, recognizing opportunities and the associated risks when setting up a new venture (Sirelkhatim and Gangi, 2015a). Another definition of entrepreneurship education provides that it is the essence of teaching and learning about the founding of a new venture in response to opportunities (Neck and Corbett, 2018a). This definition echoes (Sirelkhatim and Gangi, 2015a) and (Kuratko, 2005) by giving an understanding that entrepreneurship can be learnt, a concern that dominates research in entrepreneurship (Ruskovaara, Hämäläinen and Pihkala, 2016). Sirelkhatim and Gangi (2015b) and Neck and Corbett, (2018b) agree that in essence lecturing of entrepreneurship is to help students build new ventures.

Academics are educators, lecturers, scholars and professors tasked with the responsibility of transferring skills and knowledge through lessons (Walter and Block, 2016). Academics conduct research and they implement the teaching programmes of institutions in which they affiliate unless their role is solely research (Fayolle, Verzat and Wapshott, 2016). On the contrary academics are also advocates for change in their respective fields and they use research to influence new thinking about industry, climate change, sciences and business (Maresch *et al.*, 2016). Globally renowned expert scholars in EE are Alain Fayolle, Donald Kuratko, Mwasaliba and others who continue to explain EE as well as the role of academics in the field of entrepreneurship education. Below are contributions which these scholars have made about the role of academia and academics in EE.

EE academics are faculty members who provide instruction in entrepreneurship courses and they also do research in the field (Lin and Xu, 2013), often they are affiliated with business schools where they design and teach entrepreneurship courses (Bridge, 2017). However, the other group of people that plays a key role in supporting academics in business schools are the administrators that coordinate activities including managing collaborations with external stakeholders (Yarnall, Tennant and Stites, 2016). Business schools play a critical role in ensuring that quality EE is delivered through allocation of resources, leadership support of EE and EE strategy (Cao and Jiang, 2017).

Skills and Credibility through the Lens of the Characteristics of Lecturers

The sought-after entrepreneurship and business school lecturers’ characteristics are discussed and reviewed on this section. These play a role in understanding the lecturing context and the person who does the lecturing. First is, *Gender*: both male and female lecturers are perceived somewhat differently by

different groups of students. According to (Batten *et al.*, 2014) male students expected a lecturer to have clarity in their voice and female students expect a lecturer to have good class control. Second is, *Personal capability*: refers to lecturer authenticity, attitudes, attributes and actual teacher actions which students perceive as essential for their learning (Kreber and Klampfleitner, 2013). Third is, *Work experience*: addresses the concern of the lack of technical skills among students when they graduate from a university programme (Bennett, 2006). Lecturers with prior industry experience or those that are entrepreneurs are believed to help students better understand realities of a subject such as entrepreneurship and they help student overcome some barriers to launching new ventures (Lim *et al.*, 2016). Fourth characteristic is, *Business interest(s)*: academics with business interests although their commitment to teaching entrepreneurship leaves them with little time to run business ventures they portray traits of being futuristic, being tolerant for ambiguity, proactiveness, internal locus of control and confidence (Izedonmi and Okafor, 2005). A lecturer's experience in business had no direct impact on the success of teaching entrepreneurship although it is believed by many that lecturer's industry experience is more beneficial; it is not the case with entrepreneurship (Carey and Matlay, 2007). Fifth is, *Participation in EE courses*: the involvement of lecturers in teaching EE courses provides them with an understanding of student expectations, employability prospects and to have a clear overview of those elements that increase students' entrepreneurial intention (Morrison, 2014). Sixth is the, *Participation in EE curricula development*: lecturers that are authentic to EE and whose interest is to see university wide EE, they tend to participate in the design and development of university-wide and cross-discipline EE focused curricula (Kalimasi and Herman, 2016). Seventh is, *Participation in (business) school EE plans*: this is essential for senior members of business schools to participate in EE planning and curricula implementation (Kuratko, 2005), professors in EE within a business school should be able to provide compelling rationale for resource allocations towards EE and further EE plans to empower staff members delivering entrepreneurship courses (Martinez-pecino and Melero, 2011). Finally is, *Participation in EE regional plans*: this means taking part as an academic in shaping the context of entrepreneurship which plays a massive role in new venture start-up behaviour among youths and EE graduates interested in bringing their ideas to implementation (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017).

The capabilities and characteristics of entrepreneurship lecturers or academics include negotiation skills, application of entrepreneurship program design framework (EPDF) and being able to implement best practices in EE (Gedeon, 2014). Faculty members require the above stated skills (Kuratko, 2005); these are people who are often referred to as academics these terms are interchangeable they refer to those with accredited qualifications and capacities to deliver university education (Song Lin). Lecturer or faculty member credibility and authentic in their teaching has an impact on students development of passion for a subject (Kreber and Klampfleitner, 2013).

Credentials refer to the obtained third-party reports (e.g. qualifications) of an academic occupying a role in an institution (Batten *et al.*, 2014) and also their ability to balance a teaching methodology and personality characteristics (Oregbeyen, 2010). Credentials of lecturers influence the perceptions about their credibility and how they are viewed by their students (Batten *et al.*, 2014). Five factors influence the credentials of academics in a context of teaching at a university. First one is appearance (APP) which refers to the lecturers' ability to cope with pressure, emotional stability and presenting themselves as conscientious (Chamorro-premuzic *et al.*, 2008). According to students general attractiveness, age and gender also played a role on how they perceived a lecturer's credibility as a matter of first impression (Batten *et al.*, 2014). The second set are accessories (ACC) which are the physical resources used by a professional worker such as dress code items which are used by a clientele (students) to form their perception about one's personality and credibility (Kokkinos, Kargiotidis and Markos, 2015).

In cases where lecturers are unable to demonstrate their credentials, mentorship and support framework may be used to improve their credibility profiles (Turner *et al.*, 2016). The lecturers' skills and credentials influence their understanding of entrepreneurship as well as their philosophical approaches in teaching the subject (Bennett, 2006). The capabilities approach theory by Amartya Sen is an example that echoes a developmental approach to supporting individuals to excel in their responsibilities by equipping them with skills, resources and capabilities they need (Dang, 2014).

Research Methodology: Data Collection and Research Design

This research employs a qualitative research method to study the application of lecturer skills and credentials in teaching entrepreneurship in a business school based in South Africa. The qualitative research approach used here has proven useful in studying this growing field of entrepreneurship through

interviews and feedback from experts (Smith and McElwee, 2015). This paper presents a case study of a South African university business school.

The Case Study

Johannesburg is labelled as South Africa's economic hub boasting two public universities with business schools. This study focuses on one of the business schools in the city that attracts youth and senior professionals. The business school also contracts lecturers from other departments to deliver the teaching of entrepreneurship within the school. The school is about 10-12 kilometres away from Sandton, the Africa richest square mile also next to one of Africa's poorest townships, Alexandra.

The case study's data was collected through interviews. The interviews were face-to-face with seven (7) lecturers contracted by the business school in Johannesburg, and a set of questions was prepared and used to guide the interview process. The lecturers have varied experience in teaching entrepreneurship and differing qualification levels, and backgrounds. A research interview process can go out of hand if the interviewer is under prepared and does not have systematic way of running the research interview process (Mojtahed *et al.*, 2014)

The sample selection focused on both those teaching in an entrepreneurship programme and the faculty members teaching entrepreneurship as an additional subject to students outside of the business studies field. In deciding the sample size of this study was dependent on the accessibility of the target group and confirmations to participate in the interviews (Emmel, 2015). The sampling strategy applied in this study was by means of snowball sampling where the first interviewees nominated other entrepreneurship lecturers to be contacted for interviewing (Rager, 2005).

The participation of interviewees was based on agreed principles of academic research and a written consent to conduct the research was signed by interviewees before interviews could start. Pilot interviews play a key role in establishing time taken to do an interview, revision of language or terms used where necessary and revising the length of questions, as necessary. Two pilot interviews were done and suited this study and the number of questions asked on this study. Revisions were made to question one where the question about skills for teaching entrepreneurship was expanded to include methods used in teaching entrepreneurship.

Results and Findings

The findings of this study show that lecturers drive the teaching of entrepreneurship in business schools, and they bring with their societal experience when applying their skills. Below are profiles of the seven (7) lecturer participants of the study and some key data about their qualifications, the level of teaching, number of students and years of experience.

Table 1 Interviewee Profiles

Highest Qualification(s)	Level of teaching Entrepreneurship	Average number of students taught per year	Experience in years.
MBL, PhD	UG and PG	40	20
M. Tech	UG	90	2
B. Com Hons, M. Com	UG and PG	35	6
PhD	UG	70	13
MBL	UG and PG	200	10
PhD	UG and PG	40	3
MBA, PhD	UG	40	2

The academic qualifications of the interviewees are a demonstration of their credentials. This means that all the interviewees had the necessary basic skills and knowledge to teach entrepreneurship. However, not all have done their post-graduate (PG) studies in the field of entrepreneurship they had to adapt their knowledge of commercial subjects to teach entrepreneurship is one of their subjects.

These lecturers reflected on their own experiences and approaches of teaching entrepreneurship in response to the interview questions of this study. They were asked questions to which they provided their own accounts and answers. The first question was what skills and methods do you use in teaching entrepreneurship? The second question was an opinion and an experience-based question, is a university-based business school one of the best-suitable places to teach entrepreneurship? The third question, focused on how to (the entrepreneurship lecturer) develop the skills of teaching the subject? The final question was about the ways they use to enhance their credentials? These questions are based on the main research

question, objectives of this study, which is what, are the fundamental skills, and an entrepreneurship lecturer in a formal requires credentials and university-based business school. The training of entrepreneurs who are already in business and others whose primary focus is to start a business enriches the lecturer with practical knowledge of doing entrepreneurship in the real world.

"These people are not necessarily students but are already out there." (Interview Excerpt 1)

However, other entrepreneurs who are in practice have never had entrepreneurship education and do not see a need for it, which can be hard for any entrepreneurship lecturer to function if dependent on drawing intelligence from lecturing seasoned entrepreneurs (Lubango and Pouris, 2007). Findings of this study show that another one of the key elements of teaching entrepreneurship an experiential learning approach which focuses enriching student experiences with focus on the end goal of becoming entrepreneurs. Experiential learning is demonstrated as a way of building student entrepreneurs' confidence and this form of learning supports one's entrepreneurial intention.

"My philosophy entails having the students experience what they must be in the end. I am trying to produce an entrepreneur and at the end of day." (Interview Excerpt 1)

The downside to the kind of philosophy stated above is that not all students join an entrepreneurship course because they want to be entrepreneurs. To further this argument is that are different reasons why students enrol in university programmes some of these include an aim to achieve a career goal or just engaging in a journey of discovering their life ambitions. Based on this, the teaching of entrepreneurship cannot be exclusive to only those students who want to become entrepreneurs and hence entrepreneurship educators should have an open mind about this.

"A group's ability to work is assessed. Students are trained in a group setting to manage conflict, organising and producing the final document." (Interview Excerpt 2)

A further highlight on the skills-based methods that the interviews commented on was that they teach students to make decisions and the theory is irrelevant when students had been exposed to it during early years of their entrepreneurship programme. In further review of the field notes, it was emphasised that a lecturer requires business planning, critical thinking and decision-making skills to share this knowledge with students to whom he/she is teaching entrepreneurship. This statement is supported by (Lubango and Pouris, 2007) arguing that the industrial experience of academics it affects the inventiveness of their teaching.

"We plan the projects and give dates for reporting, working with entrepreneurs (beneficiaries) and giving presentations." (Interview Excerpt 5)

According to (Lubango and Pouris, 2007) industry experience affects a university's entrepreneurial character and its ability to be inventive.

"In Entrepreneurship modules Industry experience is important to apply the theory to practice."

"A work experience is essential since entrepreneurship is a practice."

I started a business – I am more aware about what is happening out here" (Interview Excerpt 3)

In addition, a few interviewees reported that they had to know the business world and have recent experience of it; otherwise, they would not have any insight about entrepreneurship, authentic learning and its trends.

"You need a recent experience not from long time ago, technology is fast changing and there are new ways to start a business, which you need to share with students as a mentor and coach." (4)

Several things inform the skills requirement of entrepreneurship lecturers. These include subject matter, taking students through the process of learning and making use of outside partnerships supported by the outcome's framework.

"I put my students through a process. I do not teach I put them through a learning process instead of me rushing through a content. I go through the learning content at a very high level. It takes me less time to get the principles across. They go do the research. They read before class. The test is to help them prepare and read up." (Interview Excerpt 5)

The research skills of a lecturer from a basic to an advanced academic level a role in students' learning experiences, using a research-based teaching method students are also taught basics of research and they do use such skills when they start businesses.

"They write a case study after interviewing an entrepreneur. It is a watered-down research project. The research helps my students build an analytical ability." (Interview Excerpt 4)

In selecting skills-based methods for teaching entrepreneurship, lecturers consider the calibre of students and level of those students in the course. Not all student that start university are ready and that those who are exiting are ready for the real world.

"I depend on my skills to collaborate, learn and project assessment where I connect the dots and I use other management skills to compile MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding)" (Interview Excerpt 5)

In the use of a practical approach to teaching entrepreneurship, there was a consensus from the interviewees. The consensus is that they found that their teaching skills more useful when teaching entrepreneurship to students that are in practice-based programmes for instance those in health, fashion and tourism. The viewed these students as having a high chance of using their knowledge to start businesses in their fields of expertise as opposed to those trained in entrepreneurship only.

"Unlike teaching the subject to general management students who still need to find themselves the students from FADA wanted to start interior design practices or a homeopath practice. But that is where the creative skill in teaching comes in." (Interview Excerpt 6)

The further feedback from this study is that the ability and skill to use teaching and learning technology was provided as a response to the question of skills in teaching entrepreneurship. This was clear demonstration that there are those basic teaching practices that apply across teaching and learning in a university or in a business school in this case. The skill identified was that of using technology to present content.

"I also use of videos – case study video. The videos I use are based on a case study.

The most important skill is to be able to present the content and to use practical examples." (Interview Excerpt 7)

Table 2 Developing Skills as an Entrepreneurship Lecturer

Interviewee	Question: how did you (the entrepreneurship lecturer) develop the skills of teaching the subject?
1	Through training practising entrepreneurs, from previous work experience as a Loans officer and training 60 potential entrepreneurs
2	By looking at research in teaching entrepreneurship, the regulatory book of the business school and from my experience as a business consultant
3	Using students' reflections and my experience in business
4	It is a result of academic freedom and by working with other colleagues
5	Using my experience having been a student in the same institution and exposing students to the community context
6	Made a deliberate attempt to move away from old practices to adopting the new skills set and engaging in collaborations
7	Lecturing exit level students and with limited support, I lecture and assess

The concepts of skills and credentials are expanded in this study to include and focus on networking, continuous professional development and being relevant as a lecturer of entrepreneurship. The respondents indicated several things they do to enhance their credentials, these include attending academic and industry conferences, running their own businesses, using support from guest lecturers, sharing insights from their own research and using business current affairs in their teaching.

Build your network and invite entrepreneurs as guest lectures/ government.

Plant people from SEDA (Small Enterprise Development Agency), SARS (South African Revenue Service), government and entrepreneurs in your teaching schedule. Make them big part of your teaching.

'I have always been involved in business; the reason was for me to learn what my students are doing (setting up a start-up every year).

"When you tell people that you are teaching entrepreneurship, they show interest and ask why you don't come up with a project we can even fund you.

They want to know if you have practical side of entrepreneurship or not." (Interview Excerpt 2)

Table 3 Developing Skills as an Entrepreneurship Lecturer

Interviewee	Question: how do you enhance your credentials?
1	Using guest lectures, involving entrepreneurs in the teaching and learning. Understanding of current affairs.
2	Member of IBASA (professional body membership), workshops, events and sharing with people about my research findings
3	Participating in professional conferences (SAIMS), academic citizenship and from module teaching and learning evaluations
4	Doing research in my domain and with students, always involved in business, conferences, and government events on entrepreneurship
5	Through collaboration, being an entrepreneur, attending conferences and documenting my practices in teaching entrepreneurship

6	Using my 20 years of work experience, remaining connected to practices, reading Steve Blank.
7	Through research and postgraduate supervision

Discussion

Lecturer skills and credentials play a significant role in the teaching of entrepreneurship in the context of South Africa. The country is one of the most unequal countries in the world with the gini-coefficient of 0.63 in 2023. This means that the rich are getting richer, and poor are becoming poorer. Because of this and other reasons lecturers such as the ones interviewed here must contextualise entrepreneurship and think together with students on how they can pursue entrepreneurship in a society that is dominated by inequality. This takes experience, involvement with stakeholders external to the university and networking that exposes students to entrepreneurship resources that they otherwise would not have had access to. Although this burdens lecturers it can empower students and be a positive display of the credence and stakeholder management skills of a lecturer.

Practical Implications and Conclusions

Business school lecturers are reviewed from time to time by means of key performance indicators (KPI) like all other employees, but focus is given on the abilities and professional credits a lecturer accumulates over time (Manero^a and Prieto, 2014). Business schools aim for accreditation with external bodies, which pay attention to the calibre of staff and expertise in a business school. What the findings of this study contribute to this thought is that entrepreneurship lecturers should be supported in the development of their skills, teaching methods and credentials to perform their best in delivering the intended EE outcomes.

Some challenges brought forward by this study is the lack of staff synchronisation in the business school context presented here. Lecturers teaching entrepreneurship at different levels do not engage and share best practices about the subject. Another challenge is the inadequate support of entrepreneurship students who have business ideas but lack resources to explore those. Schmidt and Soper, (2013) address the need to have business school that embraces global interconnectedness, however, the concern raised in two of the interviews was that the benchmarking of entrepreneurship teaching practices with best institutions such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has not happened in the Johannesburg based business school context and it is a problem since it creates a limited exposure to best practices. The other area of concern was the recruitment process of students that did not intend to do an entrepreneurship course, these students were found to be wondering in a programme and not accepting of the challenging teaching methods of entrepreneurship.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research study is limited to a Johannesburg based business school which teaches entrepreneurship from undergraduate until a graduate level. Future research must review the question of how the skills of entrepreneurship lecturers are enriching students in an entrepreneurship programme and how lecturers can deal with the escalating inequality. Furthermore, future research in this area must consider a methodological approach that will allow a big number of participants from the field of entrepreneurship education. Such will improve research understandings of EE and business schools. This research was only limited to qualitative research within one business school context. A consideration of multiple business school contexts will improve research in this area.

Research Note

The study was conducted as part of an MSc Degree research (dissertation) at Oxford Brookes University and at the University of Johannesburg.

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