

# Accelerating Sustainable Development through Flexible Learning: Re-Orienting Entrepreneurship Education

Agnes J. Rono, Edwin Tarno, Abdi Tiony K.  
Rift Valley Technical Training Institute, Eldoret, Kenya  
[ronoagnesj@gmail.com](mailto:ronoagnesj@gmail.com)

## Abstract

One approach to enhancing entrepreneurial activity and enterprise growth in developing countries is to create an 'enterprise culture'. To achieve a widespread enterprise culture in the long run, education and training programs in Kenya and in other developing countries need to integrate business, technology, self-employment, and entrepreneurship into the curriculum on the youth of the country. Also, given the widely accepted notion that entrepreneurial ventures are the key to innovation, productivity, and effective competition; the question of whether entrepreneurship can be taught is obsolete. The teeming mass of unemployed youths in the country and the global economic crisis has increased the urgency for countries to identify new sources of growth and develop a sustainable path to economic success. This urgent need for re-orientation calls for a revolution in the system of education that we run as a nation. This study used a qualitative approach using secondary data to examine how flexible learning can be applied in entrepreneurship education. This paper argues that flexible and open learning is the perspective the entrepreneurship educators should adopt to not only leverage on constant, flexible and student-fit digital content and learning, but also life-long availability of content for nascent and practicing entrepreneurs to learn and relearn relevant skills for creation, management, growth and innovation of competitive business ventures in a digital economy. Along with this, it recommends strong governmental commitment to information and communication technology (ICT) as one of several critical elements needed to help accelerate entrepreneurship and innovation. We also address both benefits and challenges to anticipate when using flexible learning in entrepreneurship education and training.

## Introduction

Sustainable development as posited by Kalam & Singh (2011) is viewed along six sustainability dimensions, namely, economic, technological, social, environmental, value and learning sustainability. They argue that sustainability related to learning and adaptability refers to the availability of infrastructure, opportunity and incentives for continuous learning from each other, facilitating innovations. According to ILO (2004), approximately 74 million young men and women worldwide are unemployed and youth unemployment rate is three times higher than its adult counterpart despite the global educational improvement trend (Schoof, 2006). Further, the challenges of youth employment are particularly pronounced for the developing countries like Kenya. As a panacea to this problem, entrepreneurship has been identified by ILO (2004) and Session Paper (GoK, 2005), as a means of providing employment and generating income.

A look at the Kenya's socio-economic situation shows unemployment rate of 67% with over one million youth entering into the labour market annually without any skills, some having either dropped out of school or completed school and not enrolled in any college (Mutua & Muriithi, 2015). Despite the sustained economic growth in the last few years, Kenya is still faced with acute socio-economic challenges including unemployment and poverty that is threatening to derail its efforts to achieve national as well as the development goals. The youth bear the brunt of these challenges with limited livelihood opportunities.

A major approach to increase entrepreneurial activity and enterprise growth in Kenya is to create an entrepreneurial culture among the youth (Nelson & Mburugu, 1991). These authors also posit that by focusing on youth while they are still in school may provide a long term solution to the problem of unemployment by creating jobs in Kenya. To achieve a wide spread enterprise culture in the long run, entrepreneurship education and training must result in self employment. Access to Education is not enough to ensure employability and economic inclusion; it must integrate entrepreneurship into the curriculum at all levels of learning. In their research on Entrepreneurship Education in TVET institutions, Ayuo & Rono (2012) argue that EE should not end at the formal school levels but

entrepreneurial courses should be available for the critical mass that drive the economy who are already in the business and industry.

#### *The Concept of Entrepreneurship Education (EE)*

Katz (2007) defined entrepreneurship as the capability of an individual possessing a range of essential skills and attributes, to make a unique, innovative and creative contribution in the world of work, whether in employment or self-employment. He further explained that EE focuses on the development and application of an enterprising mindset and skills in the specific contexts of setting up a new venture, developing and growing an existing business, or designing an entrepreneurial organization. Entrepreneurship education therefore can influence an individual's motivation to strive for something that might otherwise seem impossible or too risky (Ayuo & Rono, 2012).

### **Methodology**

This study used extant literature reviews and actual observations. Data was collected from public records, the media as well as education through experience in the field. The study analyzed information in a systematic way in order to come to conclusions and recommendations. The study obtained detailed information about entrepreneurship education and training in Kenya and then examined the flexible learning and teaching approaches giving recommendations on policy priorities.

#### *Why Flexible Entrepreneurship Education?*

According to Nwazor (2012), entrepreneurship education is a functional education offered to the youth that will enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant. A report by World Bank (2005) showed that in many European nations, Universities and technical colleges train students of various disciplines in skills that help to build more sustainable societies. These 'entrepreneurial skills' should be given particular attention, since they not only help to achieve concrete entrepreneurial activity, but also enhance the employability of young people.

Despite the financial support by the government, it is evident that not all youth may have the proper mindset to become a successful entrepreneur and businessperson, predisposing some youth to fail. Hence, education is critical to success in every walk of life; entrepreneurship is no exception. Although education play an important role in employment and hence economic growth, recent studies have revealed a high number of youth who drop out of school at different levels, with the consequent social and economic problems. Therefore, entrepreneurship education (EE) should be integrated at different levels of education structures (primary, secondary, tertiary and university levels). Also, different approaches should be adopted in teaching entrepreneurship programmes so as to make EE accessible and flexible for all. Furthermore, out of school training programmes should be embraced so as to reach out to many school dropout youth. This paper argues that flexible and open learning is the perspective the entrepreneurship educators should adopt to not only leverage on constant, flexible and student-fit digital content and learning, but also life-long availability of content for nascent and practicing entrepreneurs to learn and relearn relevant skills for creation, management, growth and innovation of competitive business ventures in a digital economy. This should then ensure the disadvantaged and those who are already in the employment and running their own enterprises can access entrepreneurship skills through flexible learning.

#### *Entrepreneurship Training for Youth Outside School and Nascent Entrepreneurs (ETN)*

One of the myths of entrepreneurship is that all human beings are inherently entrepreneurial but there is need for entrepreneurship education. Another feature of entrepreneurship education is the ad hoc approach in its delivery to rehabilitate those who have missed an opportunity (e.g., school dropouts) or to refocus retirees or restive youths. Entrepreneurship training for potential entrepreneurs, (ETN), programs target a range of participants, who include vulnerable, unemployed, inactive individual's often necessity-driven potential entrepreneurs in addition to innovation-led or opportunistic potential entrepreneurs. Such programs are founded to improve lives of learners who are at risk of exclusion, to empower the young from low-income communities by improving academic, entrepreneurial skills, business management skills etc.

In Kenyan context, research shows that up to 40% of those who leave primary school fail to proceed to secondary schools, while only about 10% of their secondary school counterparts are able to continue up to university level. VNAF is an entrepreneurship education training that was started in 2012 in Nairobi to directly benefit 10,000 economically disadvantaged youth over a five-year period (Salami, 2011). The programmed targeted 17 to 25 out-of-school youth it describes as school dropouts, unemployed secondary school graduates, homeless (street) youth,

retrenched workers, and youth who come from the poorest sections of Kenya's population. The program finally succeeded in economically empowering youth by equipping them with basic skills in life skills, financial literacy (saving and borrowing education), entrepreneurship, and technical skills.

### *Entrepreneurship Training for Entrepreneurs*

Entrepreneurship training for practicing entrepreneurs comprises Programs that target a range of practicing entrepreneurs, including individuals running informal, micro- and small enterprises as well as high-growth potential enterprises. Given the nature of their target group, these programs are primarily concerned with how they can help entrepreneurs survive and succeed, regardless of their type of enterprise. These programs in Kenya are often tailored to supporting certain groups of entrepreneurs. This includes programs that provide training for microfinance clients, programs focused on supporting entrepreneurs in specific sectors such as agriculture and information and communication technology, and programs supporting proximate groups of entrepreneurs, such as those running informal enterprises. According to World Bank (2005) survey on program targeting informal entrepreneurs in Kenya indicated the training contributed to improved profits and safes of and investment in a significant proportion of trainees.

### *Entrepreneurship Education in Elementary Schools*

Basically, primary education is given in institutions for children between six to eleven years since the rest of the education system is built on it, therefore this level fundamental to the success or otherwise of the entire system. Entrepreneurship education should essentially start from this level with the content adapted to the readiness of the learners. In a study by Nelson and Mburugu (1991) explained that at early grade levels the goal is for all children to understand the components of business, society, and government that are in their home towns. The study further elaborated that experiences in how a business works and practice in creating a business idea that solves a customer problem are often introduced at this level. In addition, the earlier in childhood the foundation for the development of entrepreneurship skills is laid, the earlier the child begins to acquire the requisite skills for job creation and self-employment.

### *Entrepreneurship Education in Secondary School*

Secondary education according to a report by World Bank (2005) is the articulation node between the primary and the tertiary levels of formal education as well as between education and the labor market. According to the views its entrepreneurship education at this level should be continued with deeper emphasis so as to broaden the students' knowledge and outlook. The study further elaborated that the content should include the tasks necessary for a person to be successful in an entrepreneurial activity.

Furthermore, a study by Salami (2011) showed that established entrepreneurs should periodically visit the secondary schools and meaningfully interact with students on such aspects of entrepreneurship as owning a business; risk taking, and, of course, risk avoidance; innovation, investment, and enterprise expansion; provision of products and services; and related concepts. The study further showed that enhanced learning experiences should incorporate the use of computers and software development and information and communications technology.

### *Entrepreneurship Education at the Tertiary School Level*

According to Ayuo & Rono (2012), Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is an education which aim to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, knowhow and understanding, and necessary for employment in a particular occupation, trade or group of occupations. The researchers further explained that the role of TVET is to provide of skills, knowledge, attitude, and values needed for the place of work. In Kenyan context, entrepreneurship training is incorporated in all courses in TVET college curriculum with the objective of developing entrepreneurial culture. A study by Kiiru et al. (2009) showed that entrepreneurship education in TVET level is aimed to provide the youth with relevant and adequate supply of skills and competencies that will make them competitive in both the local and international labor markets. Furthermore, Nafukho and Muyia (2010) explained that all entrepreneurship education at this level is intended to develop positive attitudes among students toward self-employment and self-reliance.

### *Approaches to flexible Teaching and Learning Entrepreneurship*

There are various examples of flexible learning that have been used in entrepreneurship education which is accessing it in a responsive in pace, place and/or mode of delivery. As Bonk & Graham (2006) argued, we must

aspire to teaching models that encourage youth under all brackets to continue learning throughout their experience. In this context, there is need to introduce flexible and accessible approaches of entrepreneurship education. It is often supported by the use of credit accumulation and transfer. It can include: using technology to provide remote or online study, work-based learning, employer engagement, part-time learning, accelerated or decelerated programmes, distance or blended learning. It focuses on offering learners choices about when, where and how they learn. It can give valuable advantages in an increasingly competitive environment as greater flexibility can help meet the needs of a diverse range of learners.

*On-The-Job-Training* is approach whereby the entrepreneur or employee is given an opportunity to be trained on his own business operation. A trainer will be invited to monitor the entrepreneur's performance as long as the business activities are concerned. His performance will be further evaluated and analyzed by the trainer and correction will then be given if any deviation is recorded (Nwazor, 2012).

A second approach is *Off-The-Job Training* which According to Imhabekhai (1998), involves an employee released by the employer to attend refresher courses or granted training leave or sponsored to attend seminars, conferences and workshops in order to update their knowledge and skills in consonance with new development in his job. This helps him to update his knowledge and share ideas on current issues as far as the business is concerned. The duration of this kind of training can be from two weeks to one year.

The third approach is *E-learning*. The world is becoming a global village and one needs to meet up with the changes in his environment. It is often chosen to give learners flexibility and control over the content and schedule of training (Bonk & Graham, 2006). Learners can choose to pause to take a break or rewind confusing topics, choose to train at three in the morning, or in five-minute increments in between transactions; or choose to learn in a quiet library. By allowing learners to adapt training to their needs, entrepreneurship educators can create learner-centered training program customized to each trainee.

E-learning is experiencing major changes as a result of the fourth approach, *Mobile Learning*. This is a more recent approach as the result of the recent growth in popularity and presence of mobile computing devices including smart phones and tablets. Allen (2011), posits that learners using these technologies may more easily fit learning into their day schedules. Most importantly, in the case of practicing entrepreneurs and learners in isolated locations can be included in the training. As marketed in the form of mobile applications, these mobile learning programs allow for training content to be accessed on-demand with increased flexibility in delivery. This allows learners to get the necessary knowledge and skills presented in the training program at a time and location that is convenient for and adaptable to their needs.

The fifth approach is *Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)* for entrepreneurs, are free online courses mainly from learning institutions around the world (e.g. Stanford, Harvard, MIT Universities) that offered to anyone with an internet connection. MOOCs are designed for an online audience, teaching primarily through short (5-20 min.) prerecorded video lectures that learners watch on their own schedule when convenient for them. Further, MOOCs do not require face to face interaction and allow learners to choose exactly where they will attend the virtual lecture and when, where, and how they interact with other trainees (Levy, 2011; Mackness et al., 2010). Learners can potentially login on an indefinite basis, long after the course has ended. With a few hours a week in front of a computer screen, learners can glean lessons from top business school instructors and successful entrepreneurs.

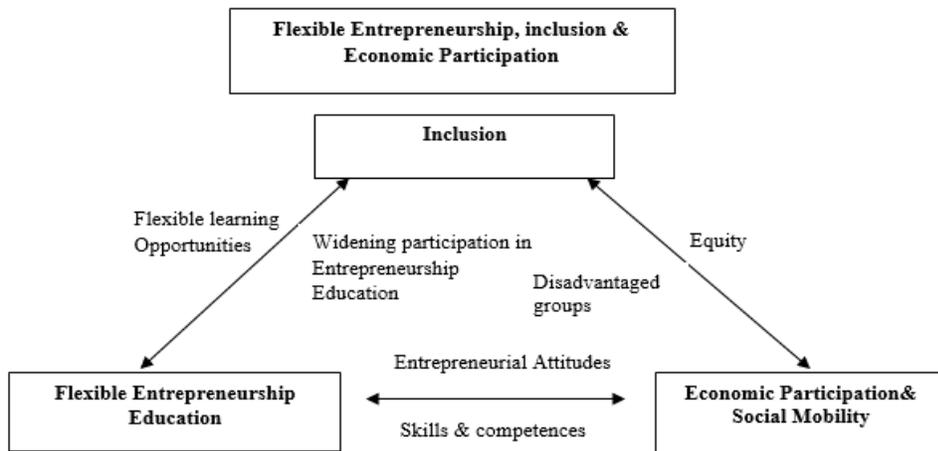
### ***Pedagogical Underpinnings***

An important feature of flexible learning for the present enterprise is that they are guided by "social constructionist pedagogy" (see Dalsgaard & Godsk 2007), which complements the active, concrete learning styles of typical entrepreneurs. Social constructivism maintains that people actively construct new knowledge as they interact with their environment. The flexible learning is based on the notion of constructing something for others to experience is an important way of acquiring knowledge and education. These epistemological positions privilege a focus on collaborative discourse (Bonk & Cunningham 1998). This extends into a social group constructing things for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings.

## **Flexible Entrepreneurship Education, Inclusion and Social Mobility: Strategic Direction**

With the above discussion on flexible learning, entrepreneurship education should be inclusive, encourage equity and provide for social mobility in the society. It should aim at providing equitable access in terms of costs and availability and flexible learning opportunities. As education acts as a driver towards more inclusion of the population, so is entrepreneurship education a driver towards inclusion in social mobility and economic participation for all population including the disadvantaged groups in terms of affordability, accessibility and costs.

In fig. 1 below, the model for strategy for government and institutions shows that flexible entrepreneurship is associated with the various potential ‘public good’ functions. It reflects that flexible entrepreneurship aims to provide for more equitable access in terms of costs, entry qualifications and flexible learning opportunities. Flexible learning acts as a driver towards more inclusion of the population. An inclusive entrepreneurship education strategy enables disadvantaged groups to improve their social mobility and enhance their economic status throughout their lives. The aim is to fully take part in and benefit from a successful economy and obtain a set of entrepreneurial skills and competences which act as foundation for further learning as part of lifelong learning. This connection provides delivery of flexible learning opportunities, widens participation in entrepreneurship education, inclusion of and equity for the disadvantaged groups. Simultaneously entrepreneurial attitudes will be attained and provide skills and competences that allows economic participation and social mobility for those who would otherwise be left out.



**Fig 1: Strategic Direction for Flexible Entrepreneurship**

Source: Authors' work

### ***Challenges Encountered***

Kenya like most developing nations of the world is faced with myriads of problems and harsh realities which include poverty, unemployment, conflicts and disease. Despite the many benefits of flexible EE it is still not utilized in Kenya. Some of the challenges that hinder the development of flexible EE in developing countries like Kenya include: Rampant political and bureaucratic corruption together with the absence of social consensus on important macroeconomic policy issues hinders flourishing of flexible EE. Poor adoption of technology (ICT) makes accessibility and affordability impossible for majority. There is little or no program design for entrepreneurship education having in mind that flexible learning requires flexible teaching. Moreover, more tailored training is more time and effort consuming in individualized designs. Learners may not be oriented towards learner choice and discipline, but instead expect course providers to be responsible for pre-specified decisions about course offering

### **Conclusion**

The issue of entrepreneurship education to any nation especially developing country like Kenya is no doubt of paramount importance. The paper has addressed the benefits and strategies for flexible and inclusive entrepreneurship education. Introducing EE at different levels and adoption of pedagogical approaches are key components for augmented entrepreneurship education for access and inclusion in the EE itself, economic participation and social mobility. Although EE is of significance to a country's economy in the long run, a number of challenges hinder access to EE.

## Recommendations

For flexible and inclusive entrepreneurship education in developing countries to flourish: Flexible EE has to be embedded in the mission of the national and institutional strategies that promotes a strong practical component, supported by a solid theoretical basis and, a constant concern to adapt the courses and taught to the needs of the individual learners, labour market and the new realities of today's world. This requires institutional commitment at the highest level. Flexible EE needs to be part of the institution's vision and strategy, and with clear objectives and outcomes. Government, policy makers and other stakeholders need to develop locally tailored but shared frameworks for supporting flexible entrepreneurship education. There is a strong desire for more effective flexible entrepreneurship education in all educational settings for both literate and non-literate learners. There should also be openness and linkages with systems globally. This calls for integration of ICT for EE to enhance distance learning. Also, there should be an appreciation of the potential for non-formal learning. For example, ICT mediated education in local languages.

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