

Facilitating Entrepreneurial Competence for Informal Sector Development: Challenges and Insight into the Cameroon Tertiary Sector

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Abstract

Although human capital development and sustainable labor is a critical source of competitive advantage for indigenous private sectors, workforce preparation strategies by Cameroon public Universities has been accused of deficiency in relevance and quality assurance. With the current squeeze in public sector employment, school to work transition is anxiety-provoking due to ineptitude in priming entrepreneurial mindsets and supplying energetic workforce- the driver of the informal sector. It is a paradox that while most graduates suffer from job-seeking syndrome, non-graduates and apprentices skilled in the informal sector dominate the entrepreneurial world. This has often been attributed to maladaptive Eurocentric and homegrown strategies that promote uncritical education offerings, which instead reinforce dormant entrepreneurial culture and endemic graduate dependence on white-collar positions. Despite policy drive towards professionalisation of academics, and the recent adoption of Bachelors-Masters-Doctorate (BMD) system as a panacea to job-seeking syndrome some analysts are still very skeptical. The major worry is whether traditional apprenticeship through informal occupational socialization is more effective in developing entrepreneurial and generic competence than the academic systems.

This paper builds on the premise that sustainable informal sector development can be achieved through the development of productive entrepreneurial capacities, which starts with individual competence to organizational and societal capacities. Within context, competence has been conceptualized in terms of information, attitudes, drive, job creation dispositions and entrepreneurial ventures. Some exploratory studies have recognized University-wide Entrepreneurship Education (Streeter, Jaquette & Hovis, 2002); going beyond traditional management discipline as a viable response to creating job creators. The resuscitation of African Indigenous Vocational Knowledge and native pedagogy has equally been advocated as utilitarian, self-actualizing and culturally sensitive to informal sector growth and sustainability. The paper therefore attempts two fundamental questions: can University-wide Entrepreneurship Education facilitate the development of entrepreneurial mindsets? Can system-wide entrepreneurial education programs be nurtured by transformative indigenous vocational values?

The work is part of a broad based study exploring entrepreneurial education provisions and entrepreneurial competence in Cameroon Higher Education, but current analysis is based on data from the National Institute of Statistics, National Employment Fund and the Ministry of Higher Education. The questions of the study are examined through a comparative analysis of training offerings in the informal sector vis-à-vis Higher Education provisions. Geared towards the production of entrepreneurial and generic competence for graduates' labor market entry, insights into entrepreneurial personality development will catalyze strategies in mainstreaming productive capacities based on labor market forecast, general economic conditions and private sector development. Discussion is based on current theories, higher education vocationalisation strategies and culture-fit training values within the context of changing labor market demands.

Keywords: Tertiary sector; Entrepreneurial education; Generic competence; Informal sector.