

Youth Employability: An Entrepreneurial Curriculum to Surface a New Economy

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In the years 2015 and 2016, students pursuing further studies in institutions of higher learning took to the streets to protest against the exorbitant costs associated with accessing higher education. This student revolution was coined as the ‘fees must fall’ campaign. This action emphasised the pressing matters of the financialisation of higher education and the anti-poor social approaches and norms that the university system tends to reproduce.

This student action unearthed alternative economic questions in academia. In the main, campus-related matters, such as student hunger and the dysfunctionality of state bursaries, for example, the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), to provide cash allowances on time to students, brought forth the question of student entrepreneurship as one of the mechanisms that the university environment should explore to alleviate the current plight of disadvantaged youth students.

According to Pouris and Inglesi-Lotz (2014), universities are domains of knowledge and in their character, they are critical catalysts for employment, social mobility and economic growth. In order to align the universities’ output of human capital with the country’s socio-economic demands, universities must also become a breeding ground for innovative thinking and must manufacture a timber of entrepreneurially inclined graduates. Student entrepreneurship stands at a unique position of being viewed as a surfacing space that can be used by the university stakeholders to secure the social capital that the disadvantaged students desperately need.

It becomes very strategic and this current conjecture is to develop a synchronised approach of entrepreneurially inclusive teaching and learning curricula that could help our state improve its entrepreneurship development efforts among the youth. Statistics South Africa (2018) reveals that the youth unemployment rate averaged 51.93% from 2013 to 2018. In addition, there are an estimated 9.3 million unemployed citizens in South Africa today while six million citizens of that figure are under the age of 35.

The need for South African universities to become entrepreneurial universities should be considered as a primary priority in order to use the quantitative potential of the new graduates entering the economy with capable tools on their hands to make their own living, supported by a progressive state that avails start-up capital for the disadvantaged and the unemployed, in particular. This is no longer an option but a fundamental, socio-economic and national obligation that a government is supposed to carry out.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (2012) highlights key ways to achieve economic prosperity for the youth as follows: (1) there must be a focus on leadership and governance, capacity-building of staff, entrepreneurship development in teaching and learning, pathways for entrepreneurs, and (2) universities must forge partnerships between businesses and academics to share knowledge and skills with a global focal point.

Therefore, South African universities, in partnership with student leaders, cannot ignore their own local responsibility of positioning student entrepreneurship along its other programmatic priorities of the democratic state.

A university must be encouraged to provide the necessary support to its student entrepreneurs such as infrastructure, seed funding for ideas, mentorship, access to markets, pitching dens, and opportunities, business leadership master classes, and business development support.

Over time these young business owners may become household names and big brands that employ thousands of the unemployed group for the sake of our *fiscus* potential and the socio-political responsibility we have on the generations that come after us.

References

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