

From ivory tower to entrepreneurial university: Agenda for sustainable job creation among university graduates in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This paper stresses the importance of entrepreneurial university towards improving sustainable job creation and improvement in Uganda. The dilemmas the country is facing ranges from excessive poverty, graduate unemployment; over dependence on overseas items and technology; as well as low economic growth and development. These dilemmas are partly triggered by using improper education system especially at the university level. Many people argue that university education in Uganda is principally for its very own sake – to impart knowledge and a love of getting to know with greater paper qualifications. University training is for academic superiority disconnected from day-to-day realities, a closed environment in which information and intellect is the sanctuary of the self-selecting, privileged few – no grasp of what is vital for ordinary people. Yet the fact of university schooling is about helping humans grow in their lives by supporting them to live better life. This paper hence contends that change of universities in Uganda, from ivory tower to entrepreneurial universities, will prepare the students with the conduct, states of mind and attitudes with which to be self-reliant and contribute to job creation and advancement. The paper starts by highlighting the concept of university as an ivory tower. The objectives and framework for designing entrepreneurial university is presented next. The paper suggests that university programmes at all levels of instruction ought to be made significant to the community so as to supply the youth with the required entrepreneurial aptitude.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Universities in Uganda have embraced the teaching of entrepreneurship either as a standalone programme or a course unit along with other courses. The reason behind this development is to build entrepreneurial spirit in the students so that they may become more of job creators and less of job seekers. Unfortunately the outcome of this effort is not being realized. There are persistent issues facing the country starting from high rate of impoverishment, youth and graduate unemployment; overdependence on foreign product and technology; and low economic growth and development partially caused by the education system particularly at the university level. University education system in Uganda still focuses on the standard teaching and research that hardly address the issues of the community.

As such, many believe that university education in Uganda is primarily for its own sake – to impart information and a love of learning with higher paper qualifications. University education is for academic

superiority disconnected from every day realities, a closed system within which information and intellect is the preserve of the self-selecting, privileged few – no understanding of what is necessary for normal life. Uganda being a developing country is missing out on an enormous engine for sustainable job creation to assist tackle impoverishment and improve livelihoods. The truth of university education is serving and supporting the community progress within their lives.

Universities must transform to uncover new ways to catalyse job creation among the university graduates as a primary driver for sustainable economic growth and employment. The contribution of this paper is its emphasis upon transformation of universities in Uganda from the ‘ivory tower’ syndrome to entrepreneurial universities.

2. THE CONCEPT OF IVORY TOWER

The term "ivory tower" refers to the situation where university community work in isolation from the wider community to some extent. The professors, researchers, and the university community do not answer to the local community when it comes to what they research or to some degree, even teach. To live or be in an ivory tower is not to know about or prefer to avoid the regular and disagreeable matters that show up in ordinary people's lives. It is quite handy to find examples of universities being portrayed as ivory towers, implying that the university is characterised via isolation from society and of being engaged in inappropriate activities [1]. Academics sitting in ivory towers have no understanding of what is important or relevant for ordinary people. They operate in a kind of closed environment. This can be seen by the perimeter wall-fence to keep out the outside world. They regard themselves as thinkers and not doers. The entrepreneurial university views the ivory tower as producer of promising scientific knowledge that remain unused on the shelves of university libraries [2]. Because of this barricade, there is little interaction with the environment/community. The universities remain isolated and graduates become strangers in their own environment/community and hence remain irrelevant to the community.

Because of being detached from the community, many people believe that university education is primarily for its own sake – to impart knowledge and a love of learning with higher paper qualifications. The universities produce thinkers who cannot do anything for the community. The reality of university education is about supporting people to advance in their lives by getting better job and position in life. Hence the need for thinkers who can do and serve and doers who can think and serve. What you do with what you know is more important than what you know [3]. The interplay between thinking, doing and serving can only be possible in an entrepreneurial university.

It is common knowledge that every university performs three functions – building capacity for teaching, research and collaboration with the community. The difference in carrying out these functions is what we teach, the kind of research we conduct and what kind of services we provide to the community, if any. For the purpose of job creation and sustainable development, the universities must get out of the ivory tower and take entrepreneurial turn as the fourth mission of their existence.

3. WHY UNIVERSITIES SHOULD TAKE ENTREPRENEURIAL TURN

Entrepreneurial university is that university which is able to outlive and adjust in profoundly complex and dubious conditions of the environment in which it functions [4]. The entrepreneurial university has the capacity to generate a structured strategic meaning [5], whether in the formulation of academic goals or translating the knowledge produced within university into knowledge of utilization to the economy and society [6] as a whole. In this way, it is an alternative response to the need to restructure the university to adapt to the competitive environments of the 21st century, including the creation of new organizational structures focused upon strengthening networks, carrying out franchising, commercializing the results of research, which often result in patent or new venture creation. On the other hand, entrepreneurial universities link universities with other organizations or industries. This implies that entrepreneurial universities has two actors. The former are classified as ‘academic entrepreneurs’ and the latter as ‘entrepreneurial academic’ [7].

After appreciating what entrepreneurial university is, it is important to justify why there is need for entrepreneurial universities. There are many arguments from different stakeholders for creating entrepreneurial university. The following are key in the quest for entrepreneurial university:

3.1. The demand from the government

The Government of Uganda, like other governments, recognizes that entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic development. Entrepreneurship is a source of creativity, innovation and hence job creation. The creativity and innovation can be acquired by the youth while still at the university. Both the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development as well as the Ministry of Education and Sports have

constantly called for universities to produce more enterprising graduates. Government also expects entrepreneurial universities to engage through its teaching, research and community services in promoting economic development. In order to promote entrepreneurship education, the government has liberalized the economy of Uganda including education. Liberalization policy yielded many other policies which favour development of entrepreneurial universities in Uganda. However, Blenker, *et al.* and Clark observed that governments cannot carry out university reform, nor it is their job [8, 4]. In order to improve and turn them into entrepreneurial institutions, universities alone have to take steps and activities

3.2. The demand from the stakeholders

The students and parents expect value for money from their investment in university education. The negative comments from employers on the lack of skills of the university graduates, which calls for employable skills more than just academic knowledge to succeed in the job market. With employers preferring graduates who can exhibit entrepreneurial behaviour, universities need to embrace the thinking of employability by being entrepreneurial. The emphasis should be on the development of entrepreneurial capabilities and mind-sets of the students. There is a clear connection between development of entrepreneurial mind-set and employability [9]. Another force in favour of entrepreneurial university is the changes in labour market. The number of university graduates demanding for jobs exceed the supply of the jobs at any one time. There are few jobs in the public sector. Despite the shortage of jobs, there are rapid changes in the business environment hence requiring companies to be entrepreneurial which in turn would need to recruit entrepreneurial graduates. The changing environment means learning to cope with risk, spotting opportunities and innovation are essential life skill which graduate students want [10].

In many workplaces today, graduates are expected to be entrepreneurial in the sense of using their initiative, identify opportunities for the company and generally be part of making things happen. Those graduates who are given the opportunity at university to develop entrepreneurial skills will be expected to survive better in the changing environment. The demand for entrepreneurial university is also the result of the current generation of students who want freedom and flexibility. This new trend has created positive attitude to entrepreneurship with the desire to start their own businesses. An entrepreneurial university is part of the answer to this call. Universities have to embrace entrepreneurship in all its programmes to help students to take entrepreneurship as a viable career choice and emphasising its importance in sustainable employment.

3.3. Accrual benefits to the entrepreneurial university itself and the community

The formation and growth of new businesses by graduates contribute to steady stream of new young entrepreneurs. The greatest economic impact of entrepreneurial universities comes from the businesses founded by their graduates. The graduates, as alumni, will always contribute to the development of the university. Successful graduates, as entrepreneurs, are the main source of donations to their former universities. The alumni can be engaged by the university to give talks, interact with students and provide mentorship, and by enhancing the quality of entrepreneurship support in these ways, a feasible job creation for sustainable employment is guaranteed. It is also a competitive strategy for universities. For those universities that are entrepreneurial, it is a source of differentiation and distinctiveness in an increasingly competitive market place, creating positive branding image. Students get attracted to entrepreneurial universities more than the traditional ones. Entrepreneurial university does not benefit alone but the entire community through job creation.

With majority of youth going through university education, it is clear that universities must transform since they have a responsibility to encourage and support the growing of entrepreneurial spirit.

3.4. The internal and external influence

Universities are no longer "enlightenment" by the role in society they once played; their role is to move into a position for the communication of information in society [11]. Universities must be restructured to adapt to changes that arise in society. The strategic challenge facing university education today is not whether to deal with the changes that characterize modern society today, but how to deal with them.

The emergence of an entrepreneurial university, combined with the growing role of knowledge in society and knowledge-based innovation, is a consequence of the internal growth of the university and external influences on the university. In order to meet the needs of its own community and to contribute to regional and national economic development, the university should become entrepreneurial, so as to strengthen its own financial situation and the position of its employees [12].

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY

The characteristics of entrepreneurial university cited in this paper is largely from the work of [13] in which he describes entrepreneurial university as an institution with the following characteristics:

An environment for encouraging entrepreneurial behaviours, thinking and opportunity; cross-campus approach creating access to all students; multi-disciplinary working across academic faculties and departments; engages external stakeholders in the design and delivery of entrepreneurship provision; has strong institutional leadership and support; student/ staff rewards and incentives; takes a broad approach to entrepreneurship to be more than starting a business; teaching is for entrepreneurship rather than about entrepreneurship; and above all less bureaucratic. There are five components [14] most of which are similar to that of [13]. One striking characteristic [14] brings out is an integrated entrepreneurial culture defined in terms of common commitment to change. Capitalization of knowledge and the hybrid in managing the tension between independence and interdependence of the different units of the university and the wider community is yet another important characteristic [15]. The characteristics given can serve as guide or checklists for the transformation required of universities. The next section presents the transformation required.

5. TRANSFORMATION AGENDA

Universities will no longer be considered to be part of the national education system, to be protected by the state and to be responsible for teaching and study programmes. The need for transformation of universities is underlined, indicating that universities should boost their social significance and become more entrepreneurial [4]. Universities need to compete for students, study and support in a highly competitive environment, and devote more time to improving connections with external stakeholders. It calls for a total improvement in their existing management, funding, internal structure and external relations processes, as well as in the methods of carrying out activities. While it is not possible to come up with a comprehensive model of transformation, [16] university survival and development depends on the degree to which it tries to integrate the concepts of efficiency (internal performance) and effectiveness into its functioning (external performance).

The ivory tower syndrome of the university system which uses efficiency solely as a measure of the quality of its activities (using partial indicators: grades, number of students and length of study) and does not take into account efficiency (by contributing to the process of transforming society for the better, by reducing unemployment), contributes to the formation of a gap between the two systems. The university system's ivory tower syndrome, which primarily uses efficiency as a measure of the quality of its operations (using partial indicators: grades, number of students and period of study) and not the capacity of the university to respond to those requirements [17]. The move to an entrepreneurial university does not mean that universities are less study-oriented, but that research and educational activities are seen as money, and universities expect professional growth via ventures with the business community [18] in particular. The key outcome of this initiative, summarized as a changed "mind set" of the university, is to improve the reputation of the university by increasing employability, enterprising thought and behaviour of students [19].

There is however, no single approach to the transition from a university to an entrepreneurial university. Each university must discover its own mode of transformation that best suits the university's situation, resources and environment [20]. In order to fulfill its mission in an economy that must increase wealth and create jobs by integrating new knowledge into innovative goods, universities must turn into evolutionary entrepreneurial organizations [21].

Different factors are responsible for the transition and change of universities, such as government and funding constraints, shifts in culture, the massification of higher education, globalization, the rising number of private universities and rivalry. Therefore, the transformation agenda needs many actors, including:

5.1. Entrepreneurial leadership

Leadership is a crucial factor in creating an entrepreneurial university. The successful implementation of transformation agenda requires strong entrepreneurial leadership with emphasis on: creating a better world (making a difference), perceiving opportunities and not focusing on impossibilities, creativity and new thinking, innovation and leadership for change - not the administrator or manager of a set of rules [22]. The vision and mission are key elements for entrepreneurial leadership.

5.1.1. Vision

The university should transform its vision and mission to place enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation at the heart of the university. The entrepreneurial leader must have a clear vision in terms of direction and how to influence the followers towards that direction.

5.1.2. The Mission

Entrepreneurial leaders should be clear of the mission of the university – what the university stands for and be able to explain and convince other staff regarding the worth of transformation. The mission of the universities should be broadened beyond teaching and research to emphasize community service and commercialization of knowledge. Creation of entrepreneurial university should become the fourth mission.

Entrepreneurial leaders set up a creative work space to foster creativity and innovation; maintain an open dialogue between staff and top management; engage staff by encouraging them to share creative ideas; do not force staff to be innovative; remain flexible and forgiving; keep track of institution innovations; reward efforts through positive psychological reinforcement; foster different points of view through outside perspectives or environment.

5.2. Environment

A university becomes entrepreneurial in order to adapt to the changes in its surrounding and so as to develop, and improve its own financial position. It can be argued that entrepreneurial universities are managed in such a way that they become capable of responding flexibly, strategically and yet consistently take opportunities in the environment. University's need to transform and change is a result of various factors – political, economic, social, cultural, technological, legal and competition. The environmental factors and leadership are categorized as enablers in this paper. The enablers together with the internal processes aim at producing some results. The results being focused in this paper are the employability of students and the community service through commercialization of knowledge.

5.3. Student

The student is key element and is the reason for the existence of a university. The entrepreneurial university, through its processes, should transform the student mind set to embrace entrepreneurial culture in all that they do in the university and thereafter. The university should equip the student with entrepreneurial and employability skills. The employability of the graduates is an important aspect that impact on the design of the university curriculum. Since entrepreneurship creates employment, it is not only linked but can also be seen as a special form of employment itself [23].

Together with students, two central players need to be distinguished within an entrepreneurial university: the academic entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial academic. Academic entrepreneur is one who engages commercialization activities which usually lead to patent creation, emergence of new ventures and spin-offs. In contrast, entrepreneurial academic participates in a wider range of activities which bring the university and other organizations together, particularly the industry [7]. Consequently, the entrepreneurial university is not just another form of business entity set to launch business start-ups. It is more of an organization that create attitude change which opens new opportunities to students and staff members for commercialization of their knowledge. Entrepreneurial university should not only generate knowledge but also equip the students and staff to transform that knowledge into product for the community. “We need thinkers who can do and serve and doers who can think and serve the community” [23].

5.4. Community Service

The motivation of entrepreneurial academics plays a particularly important role in connecting different stakeholders/community. Translating knowledge produced within universities into knowledge of utilization to the community. Entrepreneurial universities should emphasize community service for their social and economic benefits. After all community is the source of knowledge and user of knowledge. Universities should make business out of research for their growth and sustainable development and employment.

The views regarding transformation agenda can be conceptualized and summarized into a framework as in Figure 1. Such a proposed framework can be used to evaluate the progress of the development of entrepreneurial university.

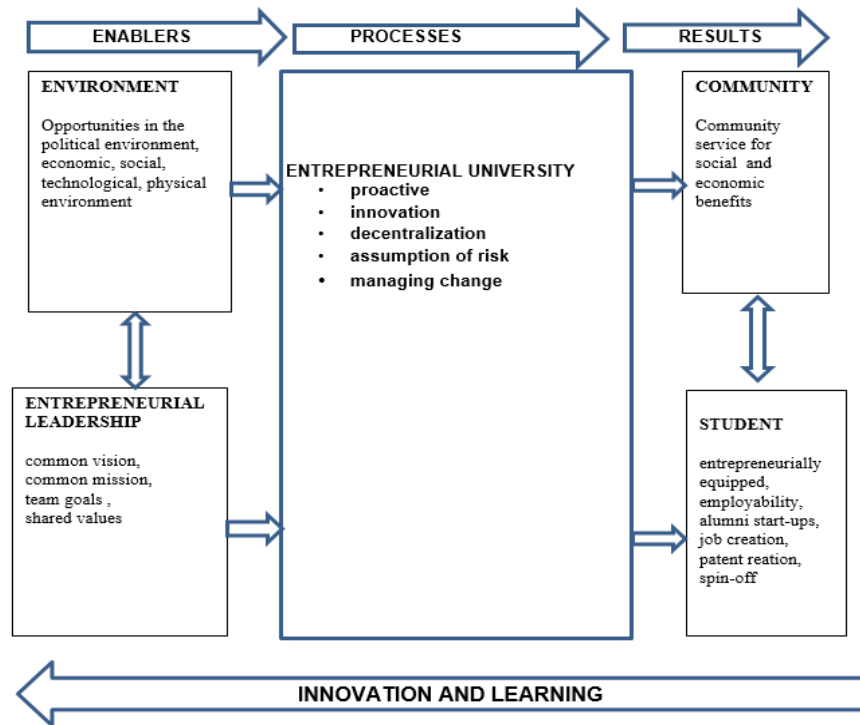


Figure 1. Entrepreneurial university framework matrix [24]

The proposed structure is based on a system approach, which suggests that all parts of a university are connected together. This implies that in every part of itself the university must integrate entrepreneurship and have a shared link between each aspect, from its leadership through its teaching, research and student and community effect.

The fundamental feature of this system is the organization of internal links on which the ability of universities to identify and transform opportunities in the environment depends. If we compare the model with the situation in Uganda, universities have all of the components in the model, but the relation between the various components is the missing link. There are some ties, but they are insufficiently defined and do not lead to the creation of entrepreneurial university in the real sense of the framework. Uganda's expectation of universities, in particular, is to provide all university graduates with entrepreneurial skills for gainful jobs. The society wants students trained out of university for their first work, while academics want students trained for lifetime and self-fulfillment [25].

The absence of team work and team building, unplanned policy shifts uncoordinated internal processes in the management of organizational structures and people [25] shows the difficulty of entrepreneurial leadership in universities in Uganda. Applying this perspective, how universities operate, collaborate, make decisions, perceive benefits, or radically change their roles is still a fascinating area for research. Many universities, especially in developing countries, like Uganda, do not understand the mechanism of this process. To find a way to become entrepreneurial, universities in Uganda will need to better understand the process and solve specific problems [26].

6. CONCLUSIONS

Entrepreneurial University is a university that watches closely what is happening in the community/world and reacts readily to changes and signals from that environment. It educates individuals on both global and personal levels who are able to deal with growing ambiguity and complexity, generates awareness that has practical application and leads to solving specific environmental/community problems. Because of its partnership with stakeholders and its concern for community growth (both internal and external), the entrepreneurial aspect of the university also contributes to establishing a positive picture and the development of the university. A good image brings more students, a greater number of ventures and, ultimately, a higher income, which is necessary for the normal functioning and growth of an entrepreneurial university.

The aim of building an entrepreneurial university is to produce achievements that will enable a sustainable university, a desirable partner for the business and government sectors, to be achieved. This can only be done on the basis that the university is integrated, but also subsidiary and separate, and accountable to the world in which it works. Depending on the position it is in, the resources and the atmosphere of the university, each university needs to find its own way of being an entrepreneurial university. Entrepreneurial universities should build business out of science, regardless of the circumstance, capital and climate. The 4th mission should be the commercialization of knowledge if sustainable job growth and development are to be achieved.

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