

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Investigating the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in developing entrepreneurial intentions among students in HEIs located in Blantyre District of Malawi**

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**This paper aims to investigate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in developing entrepreneurial intentions among students in HEIs in Blantyre District of Malawi. A mixed method approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. In total 60 participants were purposively sampled for the study of which 42 responded to the questionnaire that was administered. This represents a response rate of 70%. Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires to all respondents. The results indicate that there is a significant effect of educating students in entrepreneurship and this effect is on their intentions to become entrepreneurs in HEIs in Blantyre District. The length of an entrepreneurship education moderated this effect. The respondents who were self-employed after completing their entrepreneurship education and training had a lower entrepreneurial intention at the beginning of the programme compared to the respondents who had not become self-employed. An analysis of the development of entrepreneurial intention after the end of the entrepreneurship programme showed that after the end of the programme, entrepreneurial intentions had increased significantly. Thus, education and training in entrepreneurship is established to be a trigger that positively impacts entrepreneurial intention.**

**Key words:** Entrepreneur, entrepreneurship education, learning, entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial intention.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The country's economic policies determine the levels of self-employment and entrepreneurship thereby impacting the economic growth (Gohmann, 2012). Normally, increases in entrepreneurship also lead to increase in total employment levels. In order to increase the levels of

entrepreneurship, there must be deliberate efforts to educate or train people in entrepreneurship. Education and training in entrepreneurship should aim to give the students the additional entrepreneurial knowledge, attributes and capabilities that are needed for idea

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generation abilities in the context of setting up a new small business (Jones, 2010). The lack of entrepreneurship education and training should, therefore, manifest in increased small businesses' failure and increased levels of unemployment in an economy. As Nkirima (2010) has pointed, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should review their curricula to provide education that is more relevant and which is designed to promote the independence of the individual and responsible entrepreneurial capacity for job creation, development of the communities and increase in national development. It should help the students to acquire the new skills that enable them to identify new opportunities, become self-reliant and be job-creators and not job-seekers after graduation (Agbonlahor, 2016).

A high rate of unemployment among graduates in Malawi has negatively affected the economy. People tend to look for jobs after graduating but there are only a few opportunities and most of these job opportunities are snatched off by those in high positions where close relatives and friends with no qualifications at all are employed, leaving the deserving graduates out of the system. In addition, according to Malawi Government Secretary for Labour, Youth and Manpower Development, youths' unemployment is estimated to be 70% thereby reaching 'alarming levels in the country' (Ntchindi, 2016). The study will highlight the contribution of entrepreneurship programs in making students more entrepreneurial and enhancing their intentions to start new ventures leading to job and wealth creation in Malawi.

### **Problem statement of the study**

The paper examines the significance of education in entrepreneurship in the development of a knowledge-based economy, within Malawian context, with the aim of nurturing entrepreneurship at all levels of Malawi society. As a country, Malawi has embarked on small and medium enterprise (SME) promotion as a means of achieving sustainable economic growth and improving people's livelihood. As highlighted in the Malawi Government Development Strategy, improved enterprise creation and growth will significantly improve the social and economic welfare of most Malawians.

As established from the module aims of many entrepreneurship courses, entrepreneurship education is believed to be a step towards addressing the challenge of high unemployment rates in Malawi, by inspiring graduates to pursue initiation and growth of their own enterprises. This in turn is expected to create jobs and contribute to other economic challenges faced in our country Malawi. Unfortunately, in many instances this is not the case in Malawi. While the National Statistics Office has indicated that about 92% of the Malawi populations have some family business or something of a business nature only 7% of these survive (Baluku et al.,

2016).

The overall research question was, therefore, how entrepreneurship education affects the entrepreneurial intentions of HEIs students in Blantyre District. The research sought to answer the following specific research questions:

- (i) What is the impact of entrepreneurship education being offered at the Malawi College of Accountancy on entrepreneurial intentions among students?
- (ii) What is the effect of the time it takes to complete entrepreneurship education programme on the entrepreneurial intention of the students?
- (iii) What is the effect of the trigger-events that take place during the entrepreneurship education programme on the intention to become an entrepreneur?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Entrepreneurship historically began in 1732 with the Irish economist, Richard Cantillon who used the term to refer to individuals who had "willingness to carry out forms of arbitrage involving the financial risk of a new venture" (Lorz and Volery, 2011). Khuong and Am (2016) defined entrepreneurship as the process of creating new venture and new organization. However, Webb et al. (2014) state that entrepreneurship as a field has no clear boundaries and that it does not have a clear conceptual framework while some view entrepreneurship as both a research and educational subject. As a research subject it displays a variety of ideas on how to educate in, for, through or about entrepreneurship (Hoppe et al., 2017).

Carlsson et al. (2013) argued that entrepreneurship has no home in academia and that its definition cannot be related to education only. Berglund and Holmgren (2013) agree on the dynamism and social process of entrepreneurship where individuals acting alone or in co-operation with others identify opportunities to create small businesses. Carlsson et al. (2013) concluded that the study of entrepreneurship is not only the reserve for the academia. Every individual who has an interest in the field can interpret and use entrepreneurship in a manner that suits one's purposes best. Therefore, entrepreneurship is not only about the immediate creation of new businesses (Fayolle et al., 2015).

It has been established that education in general can have a positive impact on entrepreneurship (Robinson et al., 2016). According to Bae et al. (2014) and Fayolle et al. (2015) entrepreneurship education programmes are of four kinds; entrepreneurial awareness education which increases knowledge about entrepreneurship and influences attitudes that effect intentions and then there is education which targets start-up. The programmes aim at people who have an entrepreneurial idea already and want to become self-employed. There is education for entrepreneurial dynamism which focuses on individuals who are already entrepreneurs. These individuals are

taken to seek and promote dynamic behaviours after the start-up phase. Finally, there is education for entrepreneurs which is carried out on a continuing basis which describes life-long learning programmes and focuses on experienced entrepreneurs.

According to Holienka et al. (2015), entrepreneurship education prepares individuals including youths to become responsible and enterprising people. These individuals become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers and contribute to economic development and sustainable communities. Thus, the fundamental premise is that entrepreneurial characteristics and skills can be taught.

According to Gautam and Singh (2015), the basic characteristics of entrepreneurship education as a discipline are as follows;

- (i) It is a function of innovation.
- (ii) It is a function of fostering leadership.
- (iii) It is an organizational building function.
- (iv) It is a function of high achievement.
- (v) It involves creation and operation of an enterprise.
- (vi) It exploits untapped opportunities thereby creating value for customers.
- (vii) It is oriented towards growth in wealth, knowledge and employment.
- (viii) It is concerned with attitudinal change, risk taking abilities and turning ideas in to actions.

Thus, as a discipline entrepreneurship education always tries to instill some skill so that one can play a role of catalyst for socio-economical change. It is argued that entrepreneurship mindset requires a number of entrepreneurial competences:

- (i) Initiative-taking ability.
- (ii) Communicating in settings that are different.
- (iii) Finding and utilizing possibilities.
- (iv) Ability to sell ideas.
- (v) Ability to take risks and responsibilities.
- (vi) Ability to realize ideas.
- (vii) Creation of products/services that are of value for others.

Gurol and Atsan (2006) found six personality characteristics that are used to explain the entrepreneurial profile of students studying entrepreneurship. These are the need for achievement, locus of control, propensity to take risks, ambiguity tolerance, innovativeness and self-confidence. These characteristics were selected because they are often times mentioned in different studies in the entrepreneurship literature (Palamida, 2016).

### **Entrepreneurship education models**

Entrepreneurial research has concentrated on the activities undertaken by entrepreneurs in creating new

ventures and making them grow and how such decisions are carried out.

### **Didactic model**

According to Gautam and Singh (2015) and Raji (2014), when planning for entrepreneurship education the didactic model describes the prerequisites for it. The model explains how entrepreneurial competences can be enhanced in students using certain factors. It provides four factors which must be taken into account in arranging for education for entrepreneurship. These include learning competences, learning culture, learning environment and learning activities which together are a source of entrepreneurial competences. The model is illustrated graphically in Figure 1 as four cogwheels. These wheels illustrate how the four categories influence each other mutually. Entrepreneurial action development can only take place when all four cogwheels move simultaneously.

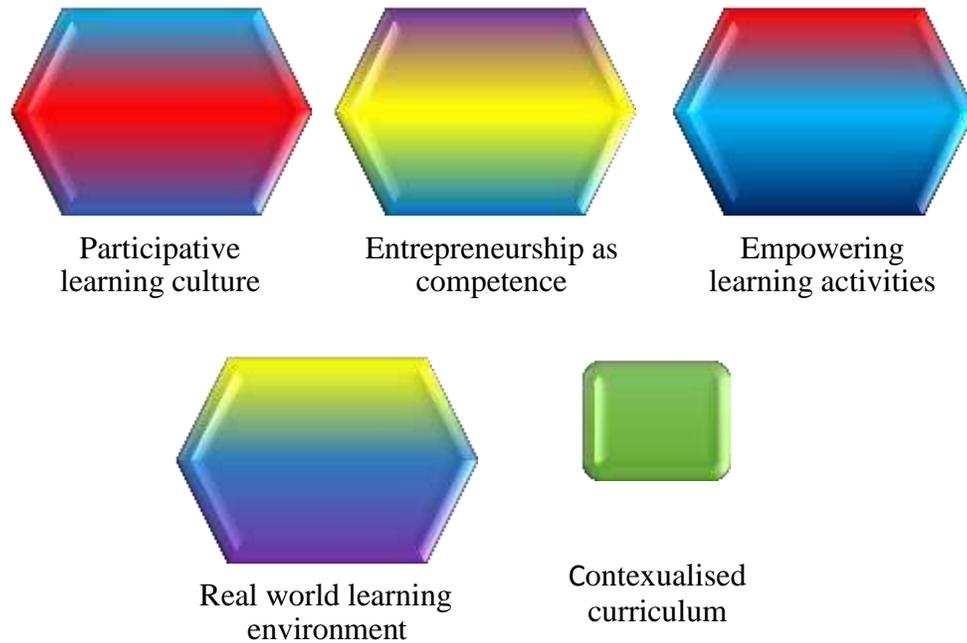
The physical, mental and virtual environment that surrounds education makes up the learning environment. The learning environment has openness and dynamics as the most important characteristic. This includes the surrounding world and local environment as part of education. The learning environment consists of workshops, different types of knowledge and the surrounding environment. In other words, it is project based working which is complemented by the virtual space as part of the learning environment. The learning culture includes the teacher as a partner and facilitator. The interaction between students, teachers and external partners results in co-creative networks which enable the students to participate equally with teachers and external partners like, for instance, local entrepreneurs. The learning culture is ideally characterized by partnership and team based learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator and external partners, for example, from the local community are involved. A learning environment and a learning culture provide the opportunity to organize learning activities that promote the development of entrepreneurial competences.

### **Learning competences**

The aim is to develop entrepreneurial competences in the students. These competences include the ability to use knowledge, skills and take up positions in certain situations in a qualified way.

### **Learning activities**

The learning activities are undertaken in the learning culture and learning environment and consist of generating new ideas, defining and planning projects,



**Figure 1.** Didactic Model for entrepreneurship education. Source: (Adapted from YEDAC, 2015 www.yedac.eu).



**Figure 2.** The process model. Source: (adapted from Raji, 2014).

finding information, collaborating with external partners on development, experimenting with different solutions and reflecting about processes and progress.

in the different subject areas which are integrated into a real world context for this to make sense. Furthermore this can be used in entrepreneurial projects.

**Contextualized curriculum**

This ensures that entrepreneurial learning is based on the national or local curriculum having learning objectives

**Process model**

The entrepreneurial learning process model in Figure 2 indicates how learning activities can be arranged. The

process is composed of three stages which are explore, develop and deliver. These stages are further subdivided into workshops. A workshop consists of intensive learning activities which are made up of specific activities such as entrepreneurship, real world themes, development of ideas, planning, production, presentation and evaluation. It is recommended that the students move through loops in the project phase when needed.

- (i) Explore entrepreneurship workshop: The teacher and students need to develop a shared understanding of the concepts of entrepreneur, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial competences. Then they will need to determine the illustrative examples that will help the students assess their entrepreneurial competences.
- (ii) Thematic workshop: The teacher presents a topic relevant for the region and the learning objectives related to the topic and the students do research on the topic.
- (iii) Develop idea workshop: The students and the identified partners collaborate on developing ideas for services or products connected to the topic. The best ideas are selected for further development.
- (iv) Planning workshop: With support from the teacher the students form teams, set individual learning goals and plan the specific projects.
- (v) Production workshop: The students develop their ideas, service, concepts or products and produce prototypes. If possible the prototypes are tested in a real world setting.
- (vi) Deliver presentation workshop: The students present their work and the practicality of the work.
- (vii) Evaluation workshop: The students evaluate the process, their own competences and the learning goals.

### Entrepreneurial education model

Lackeus (2015) provides some initial advice on learning-by-doing activities that can trigger the development of entrepreneurial competencies. The teachers should give their students assignments to create value (preferably innovative) to external stakeholders based on problems and/or opportunities the students identify through an iterative process they own themselves and take full responsibility for. Such assignments lead to repeated interactions with the outside world which triggers uncertainty, ambiguity and confusion. This should be regarded as a positive outcome and a source of deep learning.

To alleviate the levels of difficulty and uncertainty such an assignment can result in a team-work approach which should be applied by giving the students access to increased creative ability and peer learning opportunities. Robust advice on how to manage the value creation process should be given to the students. Figure 3 outlines the relation between educational assignments, triggered activities/events and developed entrepreneurial

competencies.

According to Fayolle et al. (2015), entrepreneurial attitude is the extent of a person's positive intention of starting a new small business. The early development of entrepreneurial intentions is particularly important because it can lead to persistence in the future in the intention to start up a business. Also numerous studies on university students have shown that entrepreneurship education that focuses on self-employment as a career option has a positive effect on students' entrepreneurial goals or intentions.

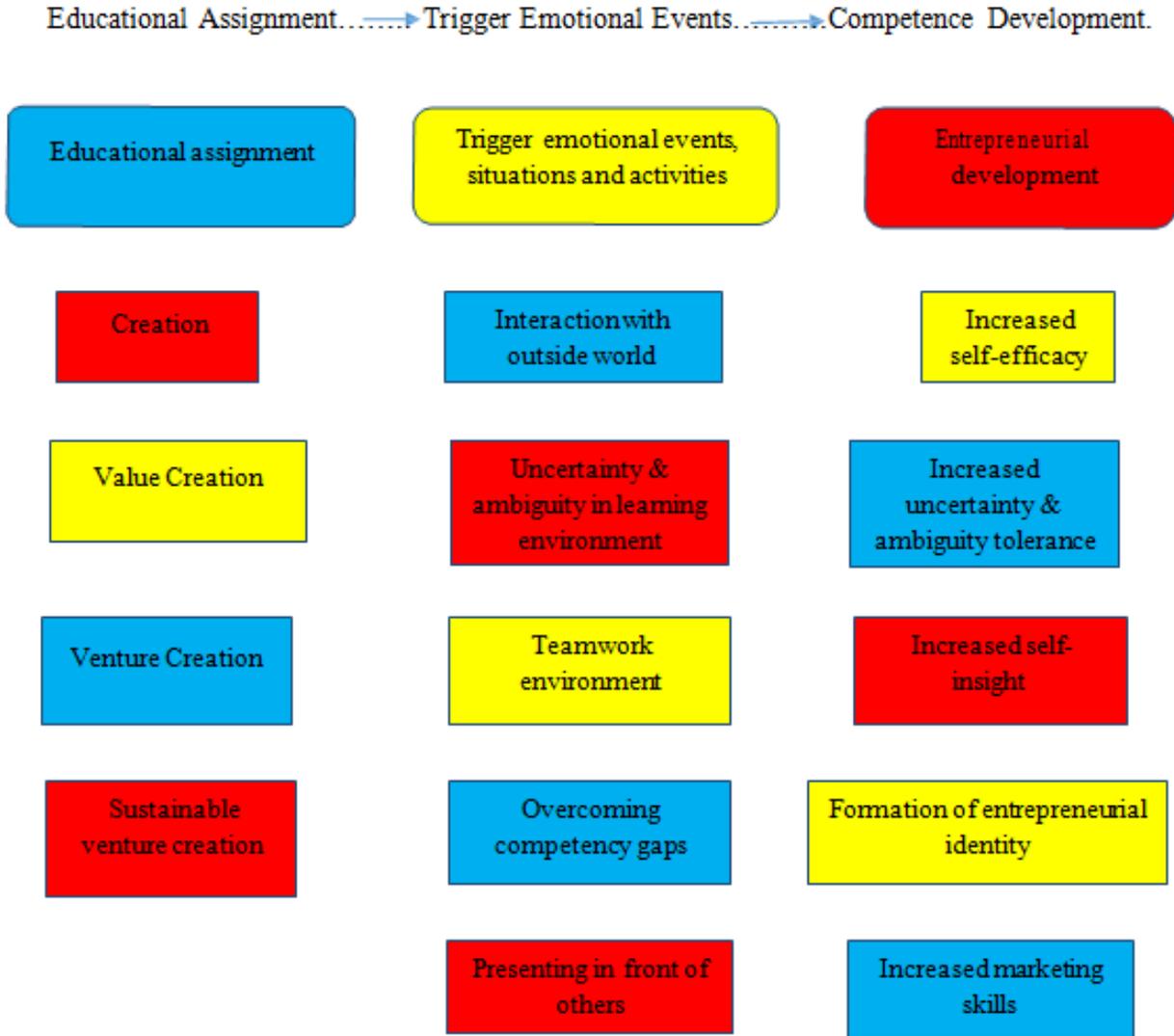
Jackson (2015) argued that the first purpose of education is to develop students as individuals who make their own decisions about their careers and in the second, the purpose of education is to create graduates to a politically determined model who support politically defined economic aims. Early entrepreneurship education experiences could inspire students towards an entrepreneurial career path (that is business start-up) or towards alternative career paths e.g. organisational employment (Elliot and Thrash, 2003). Entrepreneurial intention entails a person's plan or motivation to perform a behavior which leads to the setting up of a small business and a personal conviction that the person will create that new business venture in the future (Kautonen et al., 2015).

### METHODOLOGY

The study involved the students pursuing Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and Entrepreneurship at Malawi College of Accountancy in Blantyre District. It also included members of staff at the college who are involved in the teaching of the entrepreneurship programme. The former graduates of the programme were also included in the sample because they represented the actual interests of entrepreneurs in the industry after going through the programme and were determined to be the main focus of the study in as far as entrepreneurship education and intentions are concerned. The mixed methods research methodology was used in order to optimize the data collection and interpretation. In total 60 participants were purposively sampled for the study of which 42 responded to the questionnaire that was administered. The 60 respondents were purposively selected because they were believed to be information-rich. The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 5 respondents and was determined to be an adequate instrument for data collection. This represents a response rate of 70%.

### RESULTS

In total, 22 items were included and asked in the questionnaire with 16 items dealing with the feeling and attitude that the respondents have towards the entrepreneurship programme. The options ranged from highly agree to highly disagree and yes or no answers. The remaining 4 questions or items were about their occupation, gender and the period taken to finish the programme.



**Figure 3.** Relationship between educational assignments, triggered activities / events and developed entrepreneurial competencies.

The respondents were asked questions about being ever employed or owning businesses and the number of years they had been working or doing entrepreneurship or if they have not done any. This gave information of those with enough knowledge of the purpose of studying the programme and the expectations of the institution as well as their own expectations. This assessed their knowledge of entrepreneurship and how they could use such knowledge after graduating.

Out of the 42 individuals, 16 were self-employed and working, 9 were running their own businesses, 10 were just employed, and the remaining 7 were students with no work or self-employment experience. The items in the questionnaire included the followings given in Table 1.

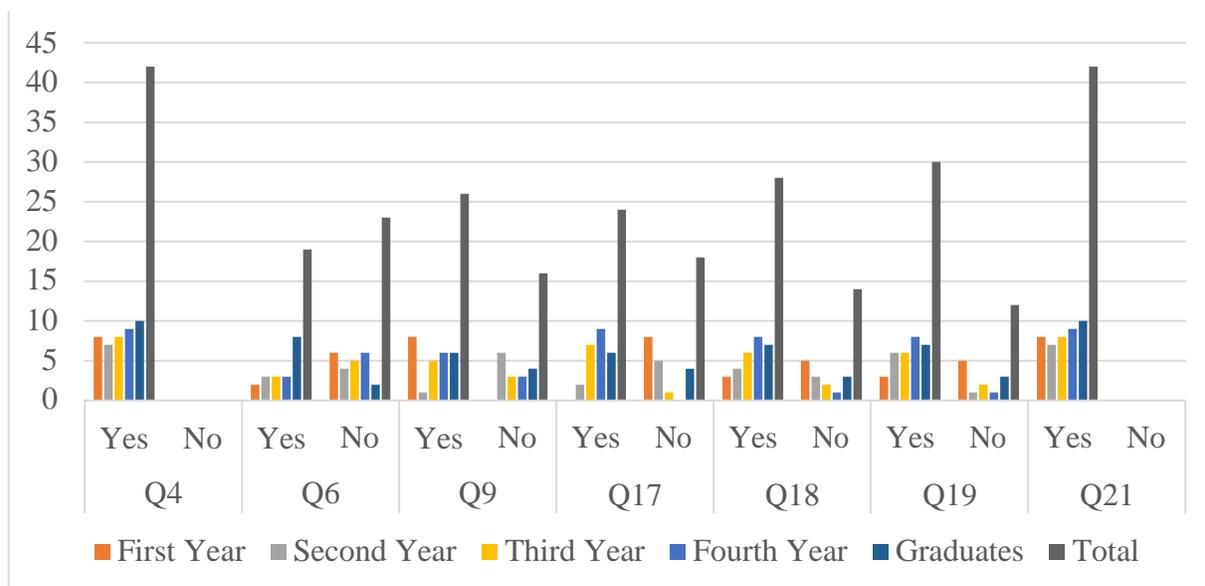
Of the 100% participants, all of them indicated that they had and still have a positive expectation of the

entrepreneurship offering to deliver on the students' expectations and equip them with the entrepreneurship mindset. On having and discovering entrepreneurial traits in the participants, 45.2% had entrepreneurial traits and mostly from families and close friends as they grew up in that environment while 54.8% of them denied having any entrepreneurial traits they could think of. In total, 62% of the participants agreed that they had been self-employed before while 38% of them had never been self-employed.

On trigger events that impacted the participants in their course or during the programme, 57% of them had several events that positively impacted their entrepreneurial intentions while 43% of them never experienced those trigger events. Of the 71% of the respondents, the programme matched their expectation of the programme while the remaining 29% were still not

**Table 1.** the items in the questionnaire.

| ID  | Question  |
|-----|---|
| Q4  | Was/is your expectation from the Entrepreneurship Programme positive or negative?                                     |
| Q6  | Do you have any entrepreneurial traits you are aware of?  |
| Q7  | If you decided to create a firm, would people in your close environment approve/ agree with that decision?            |
| Q9  | Have you ever been self-employed (independent worker or firm owner)   |
| Q13 | Indicate your level of agreement with the following sentences of being an entrepreneur                                |
| Q14 | To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your entrepreneurial capacity?                    |
| Q15 | Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about your intention of being an entrepreneur          |
| Q16 | What trigger event impacted your intention to become an entrepreneur?   |
| Q17 | Are there trigger events during the entrepreneurship programme that impacted the intention to become an entrepreneur? |
| Q18 | In retrospective, did your entrepreneurial intention develop during the entrepreneurship education programme?         |
| Q19 | In retrospective, did the entrepreneurship education programme match your expectations?                               |
| Q21 | Would you recommend this programme to a friend of yours?  |
| Q22 | In retrospective, at what level would you agree for the programmes continuation?                                      |

**Figure 4.** Summary of the results based on the questionnaire for yes or no answers.

decided and were still expecting more. All the 100% participants responded to Q21 and Q22 that they were 100% sure to recommend the programme to a friend and its continuation at the institution. Figure 4 summarizes the information given above.

From the questions that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the following were the responses. In total, 69% of the participants strongly agreed and some agreed that if they decided to open a firm, family and friends would approve and agree of that decision while 31% of them disagreed of any approval from their close relatives or confidants. In total, 64% of the respondents

were confident that they could control the process of a new firm and all the necessary practical details of managing a firm and had a high probability of succeeding.

On the intention to become an entrepreneur in the near future, 86% of the respondents strongly agreed and some agreed that they would become one and had an intention of becoming an entrepreneur while 14% of them disagreed of having that confidence now and any intention of becoming an entrepreneur. For those who believe they could be self-employed within the next five years, 55% of them strongly agreed and indicated that they would be CEO's while the remaining

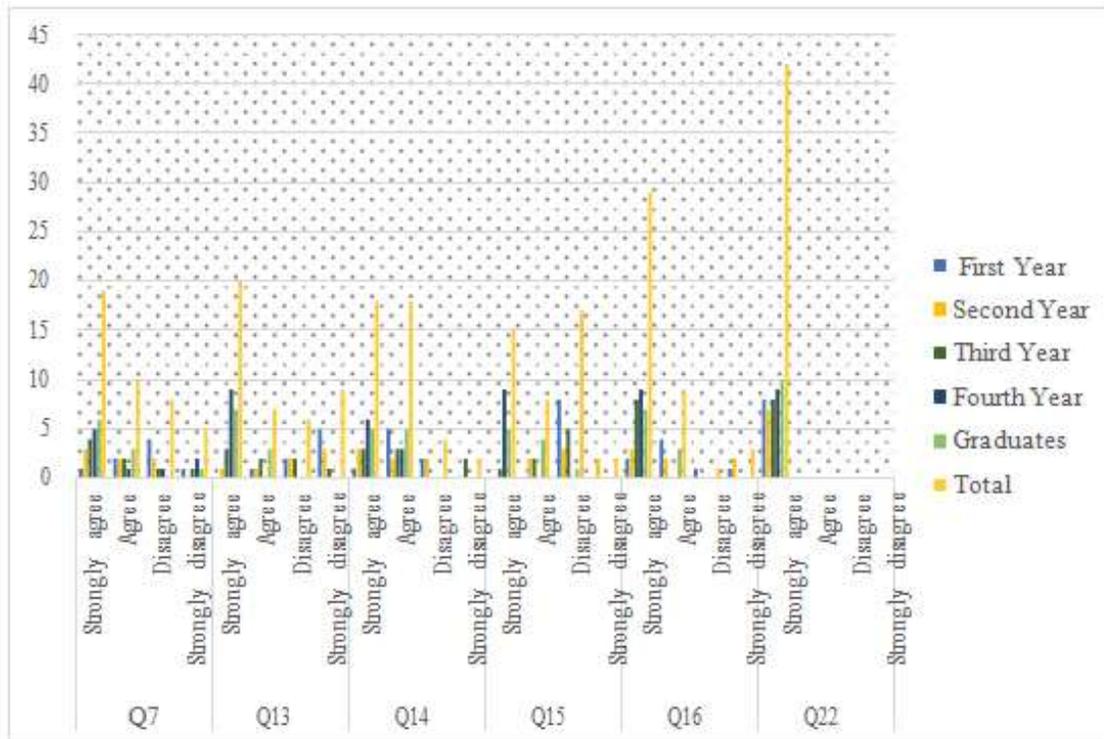


Figure 5. Summary of the results based on the questionnaire using Likert-scale.

45%, most of them first year students, said they have no confidence of running their own business in the next five years.

When asked of the trigger events that impacted their intention to become entrepreneurs, 76% of the respondents strongly agreed and indicated that the entrepreneurship modules in the programme helped them in becoming entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs even before they graduated and therefore positively impacted their entrepreneurial intentions. All respondents strongly agreed that this should programme still be taught at the institution (Figure 5).

Figure 6 shows the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship intentions in relation to the length and strength of the programme.

However, the study results are limited to the students of Malawi College of Accountancy Bachelor of Business Management and Entrepreneurship who formed the study sample. Extension of the study sample by incorporating other entrepreneurship students in HEIs located in Blantyre district is, therefore, recommended.

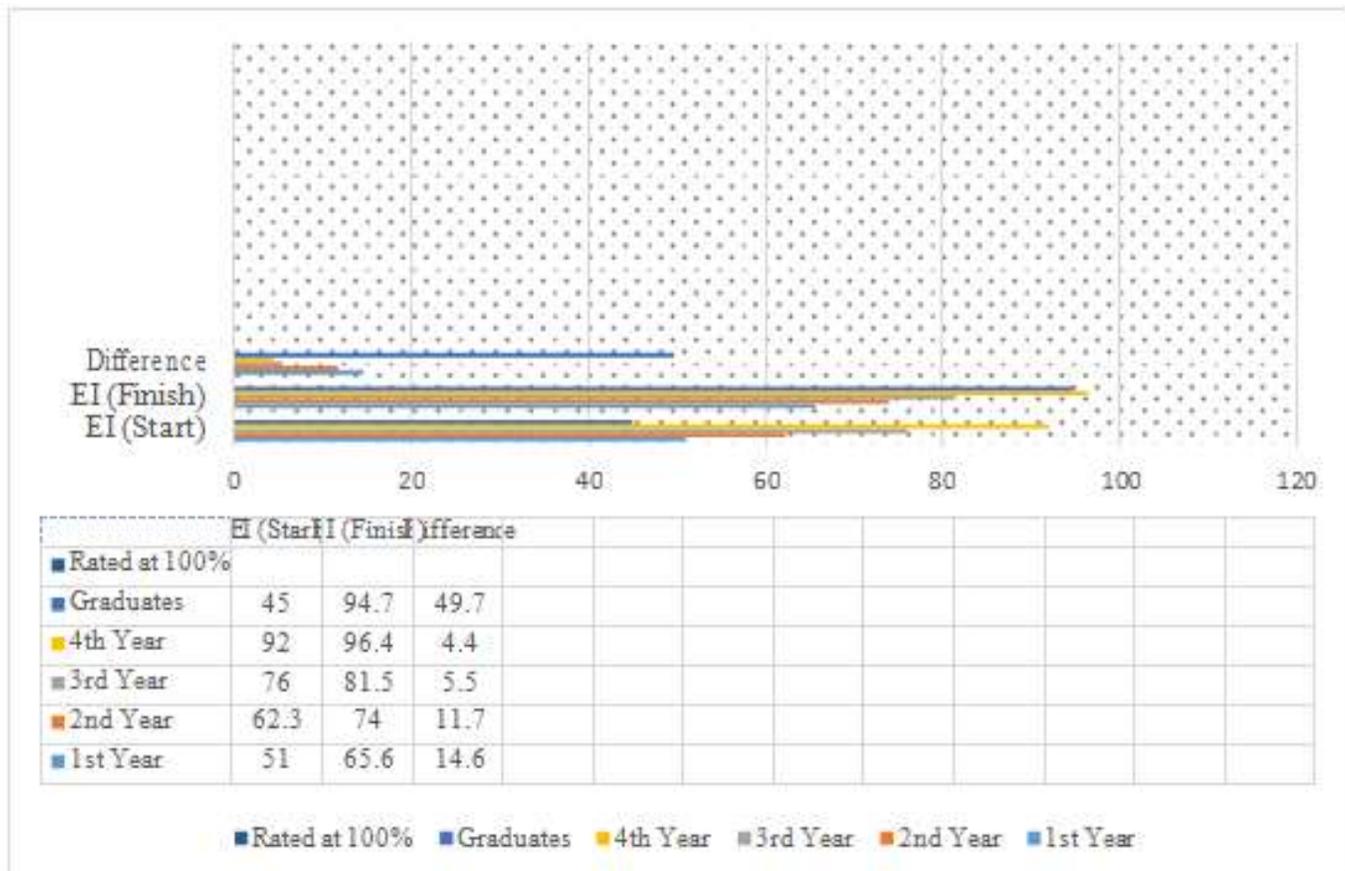
## DISCUSSION

The research objective aims to establish if the entrepreneurship programme has had an impact on students' entrepreneurial intentions. According to

Lackeus (2015), the aim of entrepreneurial education and training is to equip students with entrepreneurial skills and competence. Entrepreneurial competence includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes that affect the willingness and ability to create a new small business. This definition complies with the literature on competence in general as well as on entrepreneurial competence in particular (Lackeus et al., 2015). It has been argued that entrepreneurship education differs significantly worldwide. Some take it to mean that students should be encouraged to start-up their own company. This leans on a rather narrow definition of entrepreneurship viewed as starting a business. Others take it to mean that it is not at all about starting new organizations but rather it is about making students more creative, opportunity oriented, proactive and innovative, adhering to a wide definition of entrepreneurship relevant to all walks of life.

According to the Didantic model by Raj (2014), entrepreneurship education needs to have a learning environment characterized by openness and dynamics. The entrepreneurship education model by Lackeus (2015) stated that teachers must give assignments to create value and show understanding of the course taken. He further explained that through these assignments students identify new ideas and opportunities that are learnt to prepare them for the real world.

According to the questionnaires administered, all



**Figure 6.** Relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions.

participants in the study had a very positive reaction to the programme and that the course had positively impacted their lives and their mind-sets, helping them to unveil the true meaning of entrepreneurship that would in turn help them in making a change in society. In relation to the assignments given, and the good learning environment that they experience in HEIs, both students and graduates commended the programme for its existence as it has positively impacted their lives as students as well as their well-being. This is the aim of entrepreneurship which is also a competence that must be possessed by all citizens in the country like Malawi regardless of career choice.

What leads a person to stand on his or her own and start a business differs from one person to another and for many, being laid off from a job once or more is the reason enough to think of starting an entrepreneurial activity. Sometimes a person is frustrated with his or her current job and does not see any better career prospects on the horizon. Sometimes a person realizes that his or her job is in jeopardy. A firm may be contemplating restructuring that could end a job or limit career or salary prospects. For some, frustration coming from the fact that one has been passed over for promotion may lead them

to undertake an entrepreneurial activity. Perhaps a person sees no opportunities in the existing organization and decides to start a small business. Some people are actually repulsed by the idea of working for someone else. They object to a system where reward is often based on seniority rather than accomplishment, or where they have to conform to a corporate culture. Other people decide to become entrepreneurs because they are disillusioned by the bureaucracy or politics involved in getting ahead in an established business or profession. Some are tired of trying to promote a product, service, or way of doing business that is outside the mainstream operations of a large company. In contrast, some people are attracted by the advantages of starting a business (Rauch and Hulsink, 2015).

According to the survey, a total of 45% of the respondents admitted to have acquired entrepreneurship traits from the environment they had been in, some from family background, some from workmates, and others from doing business while some from frustration of being unemployed. Elliot and Trash (2003) state that there are three elements of inspiration:

(i) Transcendence – This is a tendency to strive for

something which is better.

(ii) Evocation –This is where inspiration is natural, that is, evoked and unintended.

(iii) Motivation- This involves taking action.

Therefore, Elliot and Trash (2003) suggest that inspiration represents a juxtaposition of two component processes:

(i) Being inspired by-This involves the denial of responsibility on encountering an inspiring influence, for example, a role model.

(ii) Being inspired to - This involves the motivation to transmit or extend the inspiring qualities toward a motivational object, for example, a future self.

Therefore, the inspirational experience is triggered or facilitated by a given situation. In total 32 of the respondents agreed that the modules learnt in the entrepreneurship programme as well as classmates who were entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs even before they graduated positively impacted their entrepreneurial intentions and were regarded as some positive trigger events to them in developing their entrepreneurship intentions. They regarded this as the turning point in their life where they got out of their comfort zone and took a risk to start imagining being entrepreneurs.

Assuming that education for entrepreneurship positively affects the entrepreneurial intention, how long does this effect last? If the strength of entrepreneurial intention is reducing fast, then this would have a significant effect on the way the entrepreneurship education is designed. The entrepreneurship education and training effort would need to provide the required support for the immediate set-up of businesses after the end of the programme. Furthermore, there is the need that the entrepreneurship education and training offering should only focus on students who want to set up a business within a short time after the end of the programme (Lorz and Volery, 2011).

According to Lorz and Volery (2011) first assumption, the strength of entrepreneurial intention might increase or decrease after the end of the programme. Rengiah (2013) concurred that in developing countries there is a high rate of unemployment among the graduates emerging from the higher educational institutions. This is one of the main social development problems facing the developing countries. Graduates' preference for being paid employees over becoming self-employed is one of the contributing factors to the current problems the governments are facing.

Norasmah and Othman (2015) argued that entrepreneurship would help graduates develop their own careers and expand the job market by easing the current unemployment problem. Higher education institutions offering formal entrepreneurship education and including it as one of the subjects in the curriculum of business and other courses; organizing seminars, conferences, short courses and training for the students would help in

solving the problem (Cheng and Chan, 2004)

The findings in the study revealed that out of 10 graduates who participated, a total of 6 are currently working and have small businesses running while the other 4 are formally employed. These findings agree with the study conducted by Lorz and Volery (2011) that the stability of the programme can decrease quickly or increase after the end of the programme. The impact on stability for HEIs entrepreneurship students seem to be above par as most are into entrepreneurship and just a few are not. As per Lorz and Volery (2011)'s assumption, the stability of the programme will depend on oneself. It can be said that for those who want a promotion at work after having a degree, they can have their stability decreased quickly while those who have an entrepreneurial intention would increase their stability. It has also been noted that entrepreneurial intentions increases from first year to third year among students studying the programme.

## Conclusion

Research indicates that entrepreneurship education and training programmes enhance the ability to identify opportunities and improve entrepreneurial intentions. There is a concept of effectuation that represents a quite practical and hands-on approach to teaching through entrepreneurship. Effectuation is described as an iterative process of decision making and active commitment seeking that results in creation of new value. Viewing entrepreneurship as a generic method holds much promise for the field of entrepreneurial education, but requires emphasis on taking action, value creation and using creativity tools, all of which the HEIs are striving to deliver in developing entrepreneurial intentions among their students.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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