

Full Length Research Paper

Are university students psychologically ready for entrepreneurship? A Botswana study

Ilse E. Plattner*, Mmakgosi Lechaena, Wame Mmolawa and Bagele Mzingwane

Department of Psychology, University of Botswana.

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This paper seeks to draw attention to the need for psychological maturity before young people can begin their own business and succeed as entrepreneurs. A study with 349 undergraduate students at the University of Botswana investigated students' career aspirations and their career-related self-concept. Only eight students considered entrepreneurship as a career option but many students mentioned careers that would provide them with an opportunity for self-employment. However, the majority of students lacked a positive self-concept and believed that their careers would depend on "connections" with the "right" people, luck, or the government (external locus of control). The findings suggest a decline in students' self-concept and job expectations throughout the course of their studies. Recommendations are made with regard to the role of the university in empowering students not just academically but also psychologically so that they can compete successfully in entrepreneurship.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, career aspirations, self-efficacy, locus of control, psychological empowerment, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, unemployment rates have increased throughout the world. Young people in particular have difficulties entering the job market; one reason being that they lack work experience. Education does not protect against unemployment, and many university graduates cannot find a job (Hussain et al., 2008). To address high unemployment rates, politicians have suggested that young people should engage in self-employment. Some universities have started to offer courses in entrepreneurship education (Adejimola and Olufunmilayo, 2009). However, the same work experience that is required to find a job is necessary for starting a business. Therefore, for the majority of school leavers and graduates, entrepreneurship is not a viable option. In addition, many young people lack career maturity and the confidence to make career related decisions (Sharf, 2002; Super et al., 1996) that would also empower them psychologically to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Choosing a career starts from childhood and evolves through different stages of one's life span (Hartung et al., 2005; Wahl and Blackhurst, 2000). Career theorists emphasise the need for professional career counselling

to make the young person aware of career options and his/her personal abilities and to build up self-confidence, assertiveness and self-responsibility (Isaacson and Brown, 2000; Savickas, 2003). Personality characteristics are essential for choosing a career and for succeeding in it. Unfortunately, in developing countries career guidance and career counselling are not adequate (example Mostert et al., 2001). As a result, young people are not well equipped to make informed career decisions and choose careers that fit their personalities (Grant, 2000; Isaacson and Brown, 2000), which could be one of the reasons why they end up unemployed (Plattner and Mbwale, 2006).

This paper seeks to draw attention to the need for psychological maturity before young people can begin their own business and succeed as entrepreneurs. The paper presents findings from a study with students at the University of Botswana that provide some answers to the question as to whether students can be expected to choose entrepreneurship as a career option. The aim of the study was to investigate whether students anticipate difficulties in finding employment. Some variables examined in this study concentrated on students' self-concept in terms of locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs, which are relevant for finding employment but also for entrepreneurial behaviour. The concept of locus of control (Rotter, 1966, 1975) refers to people's beliefs that either they

*Corresponding author. E-mail: plattner@mopipi.ub.bw. Tel.: +267-355-2825.

themselves (internal locus of control) or other people, circumstances, fate or luck (external locus of control) control their life. Internal locus of control is closely linked to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2000), which refers to a person's belief that he/she has the ability to achieve what he/she aims for. Various studies have shown that young people with an internal locus of control and a strong sense of self-efficacy are more motivated and goal-oriented in their career aspirations and they are even more likely to find employment as compared to people with external locus of control and lack of self-efficacy beliefs (Nurmi et al., 2002; O'Brien et al., 2000; Pinquart et al., 2003; Vinokur and Schul, 2002). It can be assumed that people with internal locus of control and self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to seek self-employment than people who do not believe in their own capabilities. Considering that institutions of higher learning prepare young people for careers, the question arises as to whether university education contributes to a positive self-concept among students that could motivate them to become entrepreneurs.

METHODS

Applying a cross-sectional design, the study compared first and final year undergraduate students. The study aimed to explore whether students who were about to graduate had more career-related self-confidence than students who just began their studies. A questionnaire was designed and, using convenient sampling, distributed in six classes that were attended by first and final year students from various disciplines. Participation in the study was voluntary. Variables investigated were, among others, career aspiration, self-efficacy, locus of control, and causal attribution. The concept of causal attribution (Weiner, 1986) is related to locus of control and self-efficacy and refers to people's tendency to attribute success or failure either to themselves (internal causal attribution) or to external forces (external causal attribution). Another variable investigated was hope. When combined with internal locus of control and self-efficacy, hope can encourage people to become active in their pursuit of their goals; however, when combined with external locus of control, hope can lead to passive behaviour (Plattner, 1998). Most variables were operationalised through statements and pre-given answer categories (e.g., 'true', 'not sure', 'false'). Career aspirations were explored through the open-ended question "What career do you intend to pursue?". The variable self-efficacy was interpreted as an equivalent to internal locus of control and operationalised through the statements "Knowing me, I will definitely find a job when I complete my studies" and "If I work hard and get good grades I will get a job when I complete my studies". External locus of control was operationalised through the statements "Connections with the right people will help me to find a job when I complete my studies", "I need to be lucky to get a job when I complete my studies" and "The government has to provide me with a job when I complete my studies". Hope was operationalised through the statement "I have strong hopes that I will find a job when I complete my studies". Causal attribution was operationalised through the question "Whom would you blame most if you could not get a job?" and answer categories provided were "myself", "the government", and "others". The study also explored coping strategies that students anticipated in case they could not find work; they were operationalised through the statements "I will look for any job no matter how much it pays", "I will look for any job even if it does not require my qualification", "If I can get an offer for

a blue collar job I will take it", "If I cannot find a job I will go for post-graduate studies", and "I am considering failing some of my courses so that I can enrol for another year to avoid unemployment". Data were analysed through descriptive statistics and t-tests as provided by SPSS version 16.0.

RESULTS

Of the 349 respondents, 117 were first year students and 232 were final year students. The average age was 19.79 years (mean) for first year students and 22.83 years (mean) for final year students. In total, 156 respondents (44.7%) were female and 51% of the respondents were raised in rural areas. First and final year respondents did not differ significantly in terms of gender and rural/urban background. Overall, 38.8% of the respondents were enrolled in the Faculty of Business, 23.8% in the Faculty of Social Sciences, 13.9% in the Faculty of Humanities, 7.7% in the Faculty of Education, 14.9% in the Faculty of Science, and 0.6% in the Faculty of Engineering and Technology. First year students were significantly more often among those who were enrolled in the Faculty of Science ($p = 0.012$), and respondents enrolled in the Business Faculty were more often females ($p = 0.002$) and of urban background ($p = 0.042$).

In response to the open-ended question "What career do you intend to pursue?", a variety of sixty-six different careers were mentioned by the students but only one first year student and seven final year students reported that they wanted to become entrepreneurs; three of them were enrolled in the Business Faculty, two in Social Sciences, two in Humanities, and one in Education. However, many of the careers mentioned could provide the students with the opportunity for self-employment (example, lawyer, doctor, dentist, psychologist, accountant, architect, engineer, translator, consultant etc.). The list of aspirations also included careers such as banker, politician, diplomat, soldier, researcher, statistician, lecturer, actor, dancer or musician. Thirty-three students indicated that they wanted to become a "manager". In total, 17.0% either did not respond to the question at all or indicated that they did not know or were not sure what career to pursue (Table 1).

Table 1 shows that only 39.0% of the respondents agreed with the self-efficacy statement "Knowing me, I will definitely find a job when I complete my studies"; first year students were more likely to have such self-efficacy belief than final year students ($p = 0.30$). First year students were also more likely to believe that hard work and good grades would get them a job ($p = 0.009$). While 56.4% of the first year respondents believed in the efficiency of their hard work and accomplished grades, only 43.5% of the final year students believed in the efficiency of their hard work. In contrast, 65.8% of the first year and 69.0% of the final year students believed that "connections" with the "right" people would help them to find a job. Final year students were more likely to agree that they needed to be lucky to get a job once they completed

Table 1. Year of study and self-efficacy, locus of control, causal attribution and hope.

	Total		First-year students		Final-year students		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> value (2-tailed)
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Self-efficacy									
“Knowing me, I will definitely find a job when I complete from University”							-2.181	220	.030
True	136	39.0	58	49.6	78	33.6			
Not sure	173	49.6	46	39.3	127	54.7			
False	40	11.5	13	11.1	27	11.6			
If I work hard and get good grades I will get a job when I complete from University							-2.639	347	.009
True	167	47.9	66	56.4	101	43.5			
Not sure	137	39.3	42	35.9	95	40.9			
False	45	12.9	9	7.7	36	15.5			
Locus of Control									
“‘Connections’ with the right people will help me to find a job when I complete from University”							.416	347	.678
True	237	67.9	77	65.8	160	69.0			
Not sure	62	17.8	23	19.7	39	16.8			
False	50	14.3	17	14.5	33	14.2			
“I need to be lucky to get a job once I complete from University”							4.048	346	.000
True	119	34.2	25	21.4	94	40.5			
Not sure	79	22.7	26	22.2	53	22.9			
False	150	43.1	66	56.4	84	36.4			
“The government has to provide me with a job when I complete from University”							-.374	345	.708
True	107	30.8	39	33.9	68	29.3			
Not sure	70	20.2	19	16.5	51	22.0			
False	170	49.0	57	49.6	113	48.7			
Causal Attribution									
“Whom would you blame most if you do not get a job?”							-.370	210	.712
Myself	79	23.6	31	27.2	48	21.7			
The government	140	41.8	39	34.2	101	45.7			
Others	108	34.6	44	38.6	72	32.6			
Hope									
“I have strong hopes that I will find a job when I complete from University”							-1.832	300	.068
True	226	64.8	73	62.9	153	65.9			
Not sure	53	15.2	34	29.3	19	8.2			
False	69	19.8	9	7.8	60	25.9			

their studies compared to first year students ($p = 0.000$). Overall, 33.9% of the first year respondents and 29.3% of the final year respondents felt that government had to provide them with a job. When asked whom they would blame most if they would not find a job, only 27.2% of the first year group and 21.7% of the final year group indicated that they would blame themselves while the large

number of respondents would put the blame on others, specifically the government. A majority of 62.9% first year students and 65.9% of final year students had strong hopes that they would find a job once they completed their studies. There was no significant difference between the two groups at the 0.05 significance level, however, there was a tendency ($p = 0.068$) for final year students

Table 2. Year of study and anticipated coping strategies.

	Total		First-year students		Final-year students		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> value (2-tailed)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%				
"I will look for any job no matter how much it pays"							2.270	347	.024	
	True	107	30.7	29	24.8	78				33.6
	Not sure	104	29.8	32	27.4	72				31.0
	False	138	39.5	56	47.9	82	35.3			
"I will look for any job even if it does not require my qualification"							.857	347	.392	
	True	116	33.2	37	31.6	79				34.1
	Not sure	106	30.4	33	28.2	73				31.5
	False	127	36.4	47	40.2	80	34.5			
"If I can get an offer for a blue collar job I will take it"							1.496	342	.135	
	True	148	43.0	48	41.0	100				44.1
	Not sure	114	33.1	33	28.2	81				35.7
	False	82	23.8	36	30.8	46	20.3			
"I am considering failing some of my courses so that I can enrol for another year to avoid unemployment"							-1.333	210	.184	
	True	34	9.8	13	11.2	21				9.1
	Not sure	23	6.6	12	10.3	11				4.8
	False	290	83.6	91	78.4	199	86.1			
"If I cannot find a job, I will go for post-graduate studies"							-2.154	255	.032	
	True	191	54.7	72	61.5	119				51.3
	Not sure	95	27.2	30	25.6	65				28.0
	False	63	18.1	15	12.8	48	20.7			

to be more among those who had no hope of finding a job (Table 1).

Table 2 presents responses to statements that proposed ways of dealing with difficulties in finding a job. In total, 30.7% of the respondents indicated that they would look for any job irrespective of how much it would pay; however, first year students were less likely to go for such an option ($p = 0.024$). Also, 31.6% of the first year students and 34.1% of the final year respondents indicated that they would look for any job even if it did not require their qualification, and 41.0% of first year respondents and 44.1% of final year students reported that they would take a blue collar job if they were offered one. First and final year students did not differ significantly in their responses. Even though small in number, 11.2% of the first year students and 9.1% of the final year students considered failing some courses so that they could enrol for another year at university to avoid unemployment. Overall, 54.7% of the respondents were prepared to go for post-graduate studies if they could not find a job, and first year students were more likely to consider such an option ($p = 0.032$).

Respondents from the various disciplines did not differ with regard to self-efficacy, locus of control, causal attribution, hope, and coping strategies.

DISCUSSION

Considering that the majority of both first and final year respondents (61.1%) lacked self-efficacy beliefs, their readiness for the world of work in general and for entrepreneurship in particular should be doubted. Bandura emphasised that "unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions; they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties" (Bandura et al., 2001). In line with the lack of self-efficacy was the finding that 72.8% of the first year students and 78.3% of the final year students would blame others, especially the government, if they would not find work. While such external causal attribution might have been influenced by the fact that most students at the University of Botswana are sponsored by the Botswana government, which might, therefore, lead students to believe that government has to provide them with a job, lack of self-efficacy and external causal attribution are not good preconditions for entrepreneurship.

Also corresponding with the results on self-efficacy and causal attribution is the finding that 65.8% of the first year students and 69.0% of the final year students believed that "connections" with the "right" people would help them to find a job. While connections and networking are

important in business (Shane and Cable, 2002), they should be pro-active and reciprocal in nature. Many students investigated in this study, however, had taken on a passive-dependent wait-and-see approach that is characteristic of an external locus of control. Even though most of the students had strong hopes that they would find employment, when their hope is combined with external locus of control, it can lead to passivity and a tendency to wait for someone, a relative, a friend, luck or even some divine force to solve one's problems (Plattner, 1998; Plattner and Mbwale, 2006).

To be fair to the students in this study, their external locus of control could reflect a realistic assessment of the situation in Botswana where "connections" might, owing to the small population, easily be accessible; however, the combination of external locus of control and external causal attribution among students in this study makes them prone to the belief that they are not in control of their life, which can result in passivity and feelings of personal helplessness (Abramson et al., 1978). External locus of control is known to influence career aspirations, job-searching motivation and chances at the labour market negatively (Nurmi et al., 2002; O'Brien et al., 2000, Pinquart et al., 2003; Vinokur and Schul, 2002; Vuori and Silvonen, 2005). It can be assumed that University graduates are less likely to seek self-employment when they believe that the realisation of their career aspirations depends on others.

In spite of 82.6% of the respondents aspiring for a professional career, about one third of them (31.6% first year students and 34.1% final year students) were prepared to look for any job even if it did not require their qualification and 41.0% of the first year students and 44.1% of the final year students reported that they would take a blue collar job if they would be offered one. Such findings could indicate the helplessness that the students felt towards their anticipated difficulties in finding employment. However, the findings could also indicate that the students perceived the careers they mentioned as unrealistic wishes than as achievable goals. Similar results were found in a study of Namibian high school students (Plattner and Mbwale, 2006). Unfortunately the study did not investigate what motivated students to go to University, whether their motivation was career related, or whether the enrolment at university was perhaps perceived as a way to escape unemployment and to receive a living allowance provided by government. Such an assumption would be in line with the result that both first and final year students intended to go for post-graduate studies if they could not find a job, first year students were more likely to consider such an option ($p = 0.032$). In times of high unemployment, enrolment in post-graduate programmes can be an attempt to postpone being unemployed. Interestingly, 11.2% of first year students and 9.1% of final year students considered failing some of their courses so that they could enrol for another year at University to avoid unemployment. It is remarka-

ble to note that some students who had just started their studies were already contemplating the idea of failing courses in order to avoid unemployment. These findings indicate a tendency among students to use evasive-avoidant coping strategies. While such coping strategies could reduce students' emotional stress (Lazarus, 1993) caused by their anticipated difficulties in finding employment, evasive-avoidant behaviour becomes counterproductive for entrepreneurship.

Considering the lack of self-efficacy combined with a predominately external locus of control, an external causal attribution and a tendency for avoidant-evasive coping strategies, it is doubtful whether students are actually psychologically ready for the world of work at all, be it as ordinary employees or as entrepreneurs. Most, if not all, of the professions mentioned by the students, be it a lawyer, teacher, nurse, pilot, researcher, actor, or dancer, require a belief in one's capabilities. Even though only eight respondents indicated that they would want to be entrepreneurs, many of the careers aspired for by the students (e.g., accountant, consultant, engineer, architect, translator etc.) could provide them with the opportunity for self-employment once they graduate or at some later stage in their life. However, they would need a strong sense of self-efficacy and internal locus of control.

Thirty-three students (9.4%) reported that they wanted to become a "manager". Similar to entrepreneurs, managers need confidence in their capabilities (self-efficacy) and, in order to give direction, provide leadership, take decisions and solve problems, they need to believe that events can be controlled by them (internal locus of control). Students might not be aware that they would have to work on their self-concept before they could become efficient managers.

As compared to first year students, final year students were less likely to believe that they would be able to find employment ($p = 0.030$) and that their hard work and accomplishment of good grades would benefit them when looking for a job ($p = 0.009$). Final year students were also less likely to worry whether they would enjoy their work ($p=0.036$) but they were more likely to look for any job regardless of pay ($p = 0.024$). Final year students tended to lose hope of finding employment ($p = 0.068$) and final year students were more likely to believe that they needed to be lucky to find work ($p = 0.000$); they were also less likely to opt for post-graduate studies compared to their first year counterparts ($p = 0.032$). Such results could indicate that students lose their excitement and optimism for work throughout the course of their studies; by the time they are about to enter the world of work, they seem to have lost confidence in their capabilities. Owing to the cross-sectional design intra-individual changes in the self-concept could not be measured. To determine a possible decline in students' career excitement and self-efficacy throughout the years at university, it would be worthwhile to carry out an in-depth longitudinal study. In spite of the need for such

research, the findings of this study raise concern about the extent to which the University psychologically empowers young people.

Conclusion

Personal attributes and psychological readiness for entrepreneurship are important in determining whether someone will succeed in free enterprise. Students who have internalised a self-concept that makes them believe that they lack self-efficacy and that "others" will solve their problems cannot be expected to become successful entrepreneurs. Their beliefs are likely to develop into personality traits that will affect them negatively in their career aspirations as well as in their personal life. While knowledge about entrepreneurship can be taught in specifically designed programmes of study at university, success in entrepreneurship is not guaranteed by knowledge about entrepreneurship alone. The courage to engage in entrepreneurship and the ability to succeed in it depends on personal development and psychological maturity over the years. Universities have an obligation and a responsibility to prepare young people for professional careers but university programmes also contribute to young people's personal development.

Consequently, university programmes, no matter the discipline, should infuse young people with a positive self-concept so that they can find employment, become entrepreneurs and be self-employed. University programmes should seek to strengthening students' self-concept and produce confident, determined, and assertive graduates that can compete successfully in the world of work. Universities should also ensure that students do not lose their career-related excitement during the course of their studies. More research is needed to investigate how Universities can empower students academically and psychologically so that they can engage and succeed in the world of work in general and as entrepreneurs in particular.

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