

# The Role of University Strategy Support towards the Effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Education in Ethiopian Universities

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## Abstract

*The research was carried out in Ethiopian public universities with the purpose of examining the status of universities' strategy support towards the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in the country. Multistage, stratified and proportionate sampling method were used to select the universities. Interview with top management of the universities, questionnaires from entrepreneurship teachers (who were selected purposefully) and strategy documents were the data sources and collections tools employed in this research. Qualitative data analysis and simple descriptive statistics such as percentage were used for the analysis purpose, and the result were compared with previous empirical findings and guidelines for entrepreneurial university developed by EC-OECD (2012). The finding of this study revealed that the strategy of the university is fall short in aligning entrepreneurship education in its strategy plan and mission statement; there was no strong and active efforts to promote entrepreneurship and innovation agenda to be heard and understood among university staffs and students; entrepreneurial attitude and behaviours as well as staffs those who prepare and disseminates best teaching and pedagogical materials and shared their best experiences in the university were not found highly encouraged and supported; and there was not special budget and financial arrangement to support entrepreneurial programs. Hence, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in these these universities remained questionable and underemphasized.*

**Keywords:** *Strategy, Entrepreneurship education, Support, Effectiveness, Universities*

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, entrepreneurship education became the concern of policy makers, authors, researchers and entrepreneurs due to the positive impact on the overall economic development of a country. Consequently, entrepreneurship education increasingly pioneered throughout the higher education institutions both in developed and developing countries. However, despite its blossoming spread, its effectiveness is still remain the issue of research in the past and now. According to many previous researches among many factors that contributes to the success or failure of entrepreneurship education, a solid strategic support is one of the key factor draws the eyes of researches such as (Parsley and Weerasinghe, 2011 and Dhliwayo, 2008). Cognizant with this, when the university believes that engaged in entrepreneurship education, there should be strategic alignment of entrepreneurship education (European Commission, 2008). Moreover, since the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education do not merely confined to the class course teaching (Tourism, 2011 and Dhliwayo, 2008). Which implies further, on the other hand, there has to be strong and active promotion of clear and prominent entrepreneurship and innovation agenda to be heard and understood among the university staffs and students; entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours in the university has to be encouraged and supported from the top management of the university (EC-OECD, 2012); entrepreneurship and those who contributes for entrepreneurship in the university have to be rewarded and supported (Potter & Storey, 2007); there has to be special budget/financial arrangements in the strategy plan of the university to support and encourage

various type of entrepreneurship programs and activities in the university (EC-OECD, 2012 and Hofer and Potter, 2010). However, these facts remain unstudied and unknown in Ethiopian public universities which resulting scant literature and wide knowledge gap. The researcher, therefore, aimed at examining the current state of facts with university strategy supports towards the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education and to provide personal policy advice.

## 2. Literature Review

Nowadays, the higher education institutions shouldered high responsibility to produce entrepreneurially oriented graduates. Since the most powerful resource for the universities to promote entrepreneurship is their students who are able to create and innovative job after graduation (Jansen *et al.*, 2015), entrepreneurship education is become integrated into the curriculum of the universities. But, many previous researches, on the other hand, confirmed that entrepreneurship education merely may not produces graduate entrepreneurs, instead the overall support and strategic emphasis towards it is interestingly important (Tourism, 2011) and Dhliwayo (2008). In the support of the above discourse, Tourism (2011) posited that full support of entrepreneurship (education) goes beyond offering entrepreneurship courses, it requires the strategic plan and commitment in its implementations. According to these authors, a central element for sustainable and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education lies on embedding entrepreneurship in the overall strategy of the institution.

The survey study conducted by European Commission (2008) also confirmed that the strategy dimension is crucial when the institutions engaging in entrepreneurial education. Concomitant to this argument, Tourism (2011) posited that the university strategy concerns about the commitment within the institute facilities (encouraging) entrepreneurial environment; promoting a change in outlook and value system to the point that the individuals (students) will become entrepreneur (Rigby and Ramlogn, 2013). Cognizant with this, Lubberink *et al.* (2012) strongly argued that entrepreneurship should get a more central place in the mission and strategic plan of the university. Entrepreneurship place in the mission statement and strategic plan of the university stimulates the entrepreneurial character of the educational institute (university), in turn, creates interest from the potential stakeholders and the business world.

Universities must have a clear mission towards entrepreneurship, which is focused on changing mind-sets and clear expectations of what they want (Hofer *et al.*, 2010). Tourism (2011) believe a key element of facilitating sustainable and effective entrepreneurship education in the university is to make entrepreneurship part of overall strategy of the university. The strategy can have detail and specific objectives for entrepreneurship (education) with association to performance indicators (EC-OECD, 2012). Because, explicitly defining the principal and clear entrepreneurship goal enhances the development and design of framework to assess the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education activities (Tourism, 2011). A well identified and stated goals towards entrepreneurship, in turn, reinforces the commitment to deliver entrepreneurship education at the university (Parsley and Weerasinghe, 2011).

Further, the survey study of European Commission (2008) showed that, it is the strategy that makes the difference between the front runner institutions and the lagging institutions. According to the recommendation of the commission in order to develop their entrepreneurial education, universities have to ensure that the highest level of institution support the entrepreneurial agenda and the entrepreneurial vision, the goals and aspirations need to be very clear and known throughout the institutions. In this regard, Ghina, Simatupang and Gustomo (2017) posited that HEIs has to create learning environment and underlying context, high quality conditions in which teaching and learning activities are executed in order to achieve their goal. In the support of this, Lubberink *et al.* (2012) also revealed that entrepreneurship education is embedded in the mission and strategy of every best practice institutes compared to the others. Hence, the embedment of entrepreneurship education in the university's mission statement and strategy seems to be of crucial (Lubberink *et al.*, 2012).

An important question is how a university pursue its entrepreneurial activities with respect to entrepreneurial support system (Blenker *et al.*, 2006). On top of strategy inclusiveness of entrepreneurship agenda has to be heard and understood across the institution and understood as priority by staffs and students, and there has to

be commitment to an entrepreneurial strategy to pursue with respect to target groups and objective of teaching entrepreneurship (EC-OECD, 2012). Furthermore, Potter & Storey (2007) also supported, a university environment has to have a culture that recognizes the importance of entrepreneurship and supports entrepreneurial thinking among its members. Moreover, university departments have to have an academic culture that acknowledges, supports and rewards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education within a cross-disciplinary context, helping to nurture influential discipline-based role-models, curricular and co-curricular activities, and champions for institutional change (Graham, 2014).

Together with the strategy support, the commitment of the top management in implement and the strategy also paramount importance. The argument is, if the top management have a commitment and awareness about the importance of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education, they endeavour for its effectiveness through and with the university community. It's also apparent the acknowledgment among the top management at the universities of the importance of entrepreneurship education, both in terms of value for their institution and for the society as a whole, can be a principal driver of entrepreneurship education (European Commission, 2008). The top management members, by and large, assigned to take over responsibility for the development of entrepreneurship education (Hofer *et al.*, 2010). In this regard, Hindle (2007) supported the commitment and understanding of the university faculty members is also important. For him, if the rest of the university faculty, closest colleagues (entrepreneurship educators), in their hearts of hearts do not believe in the viability, the scepticism of the wide community is likely to be vast indeed.

The top management commitment and awareness resulting straight forward strategic support for the alignment and support of entrepreneurship courses with overall goals and strategies of the universities is important (European Commission, 2008). According to Lotulung, Ibrahim & Tumurang (2018), entrepreneurship education explicitly to be included in the curriculum as an education objective, adequate practical and incentive supports has to be provided to be entrepreneurship course part of the curriculum, entrepreneurship course teachers should be provided training and practical experience. Rahim *et al.* (2015) in the study under the title "Entrepreneurship education in Malaysia: A critical review" for instance documented that Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education has taken the initiatives to make entrepreneurship course compulsory to all students at the public universities, and the students are encouraged to take part in the many entrepreneurial activities such as training, seminars, short courses, conferences and entrepreneurial events.

Moreover, the financial strategy that aimed at incentivising entrepreneurial behaviour in individual paramount importance (CE-OECD, 2012), and financing entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial activities should not be perceived as primary barriers to support entrepreneurship education. For instance, in the benchmarking study conducted by Hofer and Potter (2010) revealed that the top best practicing universities are characterised by engaging in self-generating income. All these discourse pointed towards the need for financial strategy to reward those who are designing and implementing innovative and high quality teaching material, and those who are sharing and instigating the dissemination of ideas and good practices is necessary in order to promote a continuation of activities, to inspire and encourage others to join (Hofer *et al.*, 2010; and Hofer and potter, 2010). In this regard, interestingly, Ethiopian higher education proclamation number 650/2009 provided a legal framework for HEIs in the country to establish self-generating income in pursuit of their mission and objectives (Mude *et al.*, 2015), including promoting and supporting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education, innovation as well as technology transfer.

Despite the significant importance of strategic support towards entrepreneurship education for the successfulness of its process, findings showed that HEIs do not have such a good practices. For example, the survey conducted in Canada revealed that most institutions did not have institution-wide strategy to deliver entrepreneurship education (Parsley and Weerasinghe, 2010). In the study of Mude *et al.* (2015) also indicated that there is absence of entrepreneurial strategy in Ethiopian universities.

### 3. Research Methods

The research type is descriptive survey which aimed at examining the current state of facts with regard to the university strategy support towards the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. To this end, four universities were selected using multistage sampling, followed with stratified proportionate and simple random sampling

techniques. Both primary and secondary data sources were robustly used in this research. Further, face to face unstructured interview with top management of the universities (presidents and vice presidents) and questionnaires from purposefully selected entrepreneurship course teachers (n=50) and strategy documents and report were used to collect the desired data. The collected data through interview and the documents were analysed qualitatively, the questionnaire were analysed using simple statistics such as percentage and the results were interpreted on the basis of previous empirical findings recommendations and entrepreneurial university guideline of EC- OECD (2012).

#### 4. Results and Discussions

The study used factors label in the table one, in order to assess the universities strategy to promote and support entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. As indicated in the literature section, universities must have a clear mission towards entrepreneurship, which is focused on changing mind-sets and clear expectations of what they want to achieve. The factors assessed includes;

**Table one: Summary of University strategy support assessment factors**

1. The university strategy plan and mission statement with an entrepreneurial vision for the future of the institution and operationalized with specific objectives
2. Top management of the university actively promote a clear and prominent entrepreneurship and innovation agenda to be heard and understood by the university staffs and students, entrepreneurship attitude and behaviours in the university is highly encouraged by the top management
3. Is entrepreneurship education aligned with overall strategy of the university
4. Special budget/financial arrangements to promote entrepreneurship research (for both teachers and students) and entrepreneurship education program
5. The university's entrepreneurial culture that acknowledges, supports and rewards best entrepreneurial teachers who design and implement innovative and high quality pedagogical material and teaching, and those who are sharing and promoting the dissemination of ideas and good practices to encourage and promote entrepreneurship education

Sources: OECD, 2013; OECD, 2012 and OECD, 2010

According the interview, the universities have a vision to be an entrepreneurial university and some of the interviewee argued that we are about to revise the existing strategy plan of the university to include entrepreneurship as one key mission and objective of the university, but in the existing strategy plan it was not clearly stated specific objectives. Similarly, entrepreneurship teachers were asked to understand their degree of agreement on the questions two below on table two Accordingly (36%) of the respondent (entrepreneurship teachers) remain neutral, (30%) disagree, whereas (24%) of them agree, and the remaining (8%) and (2%) fully disagree and full agree respectively. For question three, (38%) of entrepreneurship teachers were neutral, while the second highest respondents (28%) disagree, (18%) agree, and the remaining equal percentage of the respondents (8%) were fully disagree and fully disagree. As the data from entrepreneurship teachers reveals, the most of the respondents inclined to be neutral followed but those who disagree on the university entrepreneurial vision and that of entrepreneurship is part of the university strategy. It is true for the existing strategy of the university, none of the university under this study indicated entrepreneurship as third mission of the university as could be read from their document.

*“The strategic plan is going to be revisited to include the issue of entrepreneurship as it becomes the concern of the government, as the number of unemployment is increasing from time to time and working on entrepreneurship and given strategic emphasis is getting the attention. It is also the direction of the government, now a days.”* Business development vice president of Debre Birehan University.

Furthermore, according to this research (data compiled from interview, questionnaires and secondary documents), it's revealed that currently entrepreneurship in the studied universities, by and large, myriad underemphasized strategically. This implies as explicitly stated in the literature review, on the other hand, the entrepreneurial character of the university and promoting entrepreneurial attitudes of students to become entrepreneur consequently is also weak.

Further, according to the interview, the overall effort of the universities to make entrepreneurship and innovation agenda heard and understood by the university staffs and students, as well as to encourage entrepreneurial attitude and behaviours some works are on place. The interviewee told, to this end, the universities have offered a six day entrepreneurship training workshop (except Woldia University) and a two days youth entrepreneurship training for undergraduate class students, and Global Entrepreneurship Week also celebrated university in collaboration with EDC-Ethiopia. It was the respective centres for entrepreneurship played the responsibility in organizing the trainings. On the other hand, entrepreneurship course teachers were also asked their opinion on question five and seven below on table two and most of the entrepreneurship course teachers (42%) participated in this study believe that top management of the university encourages entrepreneurial attitude and behaviours, while (30%) of the respondents neither agree nor disagree, (16%) of the entrepreneurship teachers were disagreed, while (8%) and (4%) were fully disagree and fully agree respectively. Similarly, on question number seven, (40%) of entrepreneurship teachers do not agree, (26%) neither agree nor disagree, (24%) agree, (4%) fully disagree and (2%) fully agree. According to data obtained from entrepreneurship teachers, even though they most of them agree on the top management of the university promote entrepreneurship and innovation agendas to be heard and understand among staffs and students, but entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours on the other hand are not highly encouraged by the top management of the university. This may be an indication that the universities need to work more on this regard.

Despite top management and entrepreneurship teachers agreed on the active promotion of entrepreneurship agenda to be heard and understood by the university community in general, the practices so far were fall short merely on training which are initiated and sponsored from EDC-Ethiopian as part of government agenda. This means, on the other hand, other means of understanding and awareness creation themes such as entrepreneurship research conference, entrepreneurship campus events, entrepreneurship short courses and training, seminars, panel discussions, workshops and other were missed out from many of the universities under the study. Thus, the universities' (the majority) practices towards entrepreneurship agenda awareness creation and understandable among university staffs and students do not include what previous researchers recommendation (CE-OECD, 2012 and Rahim *et al.*, 2015).

Further, rewarding best achievers (entrepreneurship teachers) is important to promote entrepreneurial activities, however, none of entrepreneurship teachers has received any type of exclusive support, encouragement or rewards for the best effort they did. The interviewees commonly believe that it's important, if not crucial to encourage and reward the best achievers, however they admitted on the experience they did not have so far. Besides, the top management, the entrepreneurship teachers participated in the study, (34%) of them disagree, (26%) neither agree nor disagree, (20%) agree, (18%) fully disagree, and (2%) fully agree on the statement question number six in the table two. The result implies that, if there is no motivation and supporting mechanisms to encourage staffs for their best performance and contribution, it does mean on the other hand, discouraging people. This, in turn, will resulting for the efforts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education remain unproductive. As it is clearly reviewed in the literature, the university have to have a culture to acknowledge and reward those are designing and implementing an innovative and quality teaching and pedagogical materials, and those who are sharing and instigating the dissemination of good ideas and practices, but what is in the ground in the studied universities squandered out these elements and were not in line with the recommendations of Graham (2014), Hofer *et al.* (2010), and Hofer and Potter (2010).

Moreover, as it could be observed in the strategy document of each university under the study, entrepreneurship education was not aligned in the strategy plan of the universities. The interviewees also agreed, but integrating entrepreneurship course in the department curriculum is attributed to the department

and /or college interests and responsibility. According to the interviewees, if the department believe it has to be part of their curriculum, they have the freedom to present to the concerned body of the university and it goes thought such a process.

*“Preparing curriculum is the responsibility of the departments or colleges. If they believe entrepreneurship has to be part of their department curriculum, they can make it and through the curriculum approval procedure of the university it can get its approval. The university do not have a problem to do it. But, we have never disapproved any department request in this regard.”* Academic vice president of Wollo University

Entrepreneurship teacher also asked about the commitment of top management of the universities to make entrepreneurship course part of the curriculum throughout every department. Accordingly, most of the teachers (32%) do not agree followed by (28%) remained neutral, while (22%) agree oppositely, whereas (14%) fully disagree and (4%) fully agree. The data obtained from the strategy document, interview and questionnaires similarly pointed towards the short fall of entrepreneurship course alignment in the strategy which is may be due to lack of commitment and initiations from the top management of the university who are mainly driver of institution. This is, further an implication towards issue of entrepreneurship education lies on the individual initiation or departments interest, not institutional interest and responsibility in these universities. Thus, it may be possible to write that, either due to lack of commitment or awareness of entrepreneurship education or anything else, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is questionable. Because, the literature review eloquently put in place that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in the university mainly depends on the embedment in the mission and strategy plan of the institution. Therefore, the researcher revealed that the universities under the study in this regard were not in line of the recommendation suggested by Lubberink *et al.* (2012), EC-OECD (2012), Hofer *et al.* (2010), Tourism (2011) and Parsley Weerasinghe (2011).

More importantly, none of the universities under the study have special budget/financial arrangements to promote entrepreneurship research (for both teachers and students) and entrepreneurship education program. In most universities, according to the interview, various fragmented entrepreneurship activities such as training are ran by the budget assigned for general community service program. An interviewee from centre of entrepreneurship from one university specifically emphasized that after the team of entrepreneurship trainers in the university, there was a challenge to pay for their allowance and professional fees due to lack of clear budget indicator. Consequently, the interviewee said, we break down what we have planned to deliver to the community. Similarly, entrepreneurship teachers engaged in this study majority of them agreed on lack of clear and special budget/financial arrangement for entrepreneurship purpose. Accordingly, (36%) disagreed, (30%) neither agreed nor disagreed, (24%) agreed and (10%) fully disagreed. It's quite true that without adequate financial support, to think about the effectiveness of any of entrepreneurial activities, and encouraging entrepreneurial education is hardly possible. This does mean, on the other hand, entrepreneurship education effectiveness directly or indirectly tend to be hindered.

*“We have arranged an innovative business pitch among our students, but due to lack of strategic direction of the university towards finance, we could not offer them prise and further financial support.”* Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation Centre Director of Baher Dar University

**Table two: Entrepreneurship Teachers opinion towards university strategy in promoting entrepreneurship (n=50)**

No	Items	Responses and responses rates				
		FDA	DA	N	A	FA
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1	The university has a sustainable financial strategy to support entrepreneurial development	5(10)	18(36)	15(30)	12(24)	0(0)
2	Entrepreneurship is a major part of the university strategy	4(8)	15(30)	18(36)	12(24)	1(2)

3	The university has an entrepreneurial vision for the future	4(8)	14(28)	19(38)	9(18)	4(8)
4	Top management of the university is committed to make entrepreneurship part of the curriculum across every department in the university	7(14)	16(32)	14(28)	11(22)	2(4)
5	Entrepreneurship attitude and behaviour in the university is highly encouraged by the top management of the university	4(8)	8(16)	15(30)	21(42)	2(4)
6	Top management of the university have an academic culture that acknowledges, supports and rewards entrepreneurship	9(18)	17(34)	13(26)	10(20)	1(2)
7	The university top management actively promote a clear and prominent entrepreneurship and innovation agenda that is heard and understood by staffs	4(8)	20(40)	13(26)	12(24)	1(2)

**Source:** Compiled from the questionnaire: 2018

Note: FDA: fully disagree; DA: disagree; N: neither agree nor disagree; A: agree and FA: fully agree

More importantly, the factors such as actively promoting entrepreneurship and innovation agenda to be heard among staffs and students; encouraging and supporting entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours in the university, align entrepreneurship education in the strategy plan and mission statement, special budget/financial arrangement support and encourage entrepreneurship, and a culture of rewarding and encouraging entrepreneurship and staffs primarily originates from the universities entrepreneurial vision for the future. Interestingly, the institution which has an entrepreneurial vision strides to produce entrepreneurially equipped graduates through effective entrepreneurship education and solid entrepreneurial support system. Despite the universities top management fantasy towards entrepreneurial university vision, however, the finding under universities strategy support towards the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, revealed hardly in effect. From document review, interview and entrepreneurship teachers questionnaire, most of the factors assessed under the strategy dimension found shortfall. As eloquently showed in the literature, if entrepreneurship wanted to be successful or effective, it has to be clearly centres on the strategy plan and mission statement of the university, objectives and measurements should be explicitly set, and the top management have to have awareness and commitment for its implementation as they are principal driver of entrepreneurship education as suggested by European Commission (2008). Similarly, there has to be special budget column/ financial arrangement in the strategy plan that could be used to support entrepreneurship programs; entrepreneurship agenda and innovation has to be actively promoted, heard and understood among the university community, entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours has to be highly appreciated and encouraged. With the absence or fragmentally present of these factors, thinking for the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, and graduates who will employ themselves, utterly unproductive. Thus, based on the assessed factors, the status of strategy support for the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education do not confirm with the suggestion of many of previous findings (Lotulung, Ibrahim and Tumurang, 2018; Ghina, Simatupanng and Gustomo, 2017; OCED, 2013; Lubberink *et al.*, 2012; EC-OECD, 2012; Hofer and potter, 2010; Hofer *et al.*, 2010; Charis and Manique, 2010; OECD, 2010; Dhliwayo, 2008; European Commission, 2008; Hindle, 2007 and potter and storey, 2007) and the finding showed is consistent with the previous finding of Mude *et al.* (2015) and Parsley and Weerasinghe (2011).

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the finding of this research the following keys are drawn as a conclusion of the research. *First*, despite the universities top management wish to be entrepreneurial, none of them have a solid entrepreneurship support via their strategy plan and mission statement. Therefore, entrepreneurial activities and behaviours were not found clearly and specifically stated as an objectives. If the university want to produce entrepreneurial minded graduates and step itself to entrepreneurial university, the agenda of entrepreneurship should be solidly centred in the strategy of the university and mentioned as a third mission statement of the institution as well as objectives and measurement have to be clearly set.

*Second*, since entrepreneurship education is not aligned in the strategy of the university, its effectiveness is believed fall short and not more that simple teaching traditional the course as credit fulfilment. Thus, if the students wanted to be graduated with adequate entrepreneurial skills, competencies and behaviours which enable them main to start their own businesses, entrepreneurship education has to be strongly aligned in the strategy plan, reached every department and adequate support has to be offered.

*Third*, almost all the assessed universities do not have special budget/ financial arrangements to support and encourage any entrepreneurship programs and activities. This could manifest, the weak entrepreneurial moves in the universities under the study. Since supporting entrepreneurship education is hardly possible without adequate financial arrangement, therefore, the universities has to endeavour to strongly engage in self-income generating activities that could give them an opportunity to have financial power or arrange separate budget from the government budget hub.

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