

A Comparative Study of Entrepreneurial Education and Startup Ecosystems: United States vs. Kenya

Joseph Owuondo

Doctor of Education Candidate, National University, San Diego, California

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ABSTRACT

The research paper undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis of the entrepreneurial landscape in the United States and Kenya. The analysis is theoretically grounded, focusing on two fundamental components: entrepreneurial education and the startup ecosystem, investigating their respective roles in fostering innovation. The research methodology employed primarily involves desk research, encompassing a meticulous review and analysis of diverse secondary sources, including academic articles, reports, case studies, government publications, and peer-reviewed journals. Relevant perspectives were distilled from this extensive array of sources.

The findings of this study unveil disparities and a few similarities between the United States and Kenya concerning entrepreneurial education and the status of their respective startup ecosystems. The United States places a strong emphasis on practical skills and industry exposure within its entrepreneurial education programs. In contrast, Kenya has historically favored a theoretical knowledge-centric approach. The paper duly acknowledges Kenya's efforts in incorporating practical experience into its educational landscape, marking a notable shift.

Moreover, the research underscores the influential role of government policies and support in shaping the startup ecosystem. Both countries notably acknowledge the critical importance of practical exposure and experiential learning in nurturing entrepreneurial talent. This study meticulously delineates the comparative dynamics of entrepreneurial education and startup ecosystems in the United States and Kenya, offering vital recommendations. These recommendations extend to policymakers, educators, and entrepreneurs on a global scale, delineating strategies to promote innovation, bridge industry gaps, and catalyze socioeconomic development through entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, entrepreneurship has emerged as a pivotal force, profoundly influencing socioeconomic and political growth across numerous nations. Its impact is vast, ranging from generating innovative ideas and creating new job opportunities to enhancing the living standards of families worldwide (Anjum, Farrukh, Heidler & Tautiva, 2021). Entrepreneurship significantly contributes to community development through its involvement in research and development activities. Startups have been instrumental in driving tangible progress by disrupting established industries, consequently accelerating the economic development of countries. The prosperity and sustainability of these emerging enterprises hinge on two fundamental concepts: the quality of entrepreneurial education programs provided by academic and professional institutions and the ever-evolving startup ecosystem within which they operate or conduct business (Clevenger, Crews, Cochran, Underdahl, Leach, Perlman & Udomsak, 2022). As highlighted by Solomon (2007), the entrepreneurial experience is often characterized by chaos and ambiguity, underscoring the necessity for entrepreneurship education programs and the entrepreneurial ecosystem to equip individuals and societies to navigate through these challenges.

This paper's comparative analysis centers on unraveling and elucidating the intricate interplay and interdependence between practical skills acquired from entrepreneurial education programs and the influence of a dynamic startup ecosystem. These characteristics are meticulously examined within two distinct environments: the United States and Kenya. The goal is to objectively explore the impact of entrepreneurial education programs in each country, thereby gaining a deeper comprehension of the significant roles played by startup ecosystems in the socioeconomic development of these nations. By comparing these two countries, each characterized by unique and continuously evolving socioeconomic landscapes, educational systems, and business environments, the paper aims to better comprehend how these essential components – entrepreneurial education and startup ecosystems – shape the creation and growth of startups.

In this exploration, the research delves into the specifics of entrepreneurial education and various facets of startup ecosystems in the United States and Kenya. By scrutinizing the relationship between these components, the study aspires to contribute to a broader discussion on fostering entrepreneurship and innovation to drive socioeconomic development. Rooted in contextual understanding, this research offers insights applicable to diverse international settings. The anticipated outcome is that these findings will provide diverse perspectives to policymakers, educators, and entrepreneurs. By analyzing the variations in the two nations, the paper seeks to comprehend how discrepancies in educational approaches and differing startup ecosystems contribute to the growth of startups, bridging industry gaps. Ultimately, this paper critically examines the existing corpus of knowledge, previous literature, and overall discourse surrounding entrepreneurial education programs and startup ecosystems, with a specific focus on juxtaposing the distinct situations observed in the United States and Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section centers on elucidating the pivotal role of entrepreneurial education and startup ecosystems in promoting innovation, with a specific emphasis on a comparative evaluation of these two components within the contexts of the United States and Kenya.

2.1. Entrepreneurial Education

The significance of entrepreneurial education programs in cultivating entrepreneurship and instilling an entrepreneurial mindset cannot be overstated (Rodriguez & Lieber, 2020). These programs, offered by professional institutions, play a vital role in nurturing the psyche of individuals, motivating them to explore entrepreneurship (Neck, Brush & Greene, 2021). Entrepreneurial education and training are instrumental in honing the attributes and skills essential for successful entrepreneurship (Solomon, 2007). These attributes encompass innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and the readiness to seize startup opportunities whenever they arise (Hameed & Irfan, 2019). They empower individuals to concentrate on entrepreneurial development and equip them with the capacity to devise innovative solutions to circumvent challenges.

In the United States, significant strides have been made in advancing entrepreneurial training programs, which have been seamlessly integrated into the educational curriculum. A multitude of academic and professional institutions such as universities, business schools, and entrepreneurship training centers, offer programs designed to instill entrepreneurial skills and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset (Rodriguez & Lieber, 2020). These institutions present a plethora of courses aimed at providing theoretical knowledge while actively encouraging entrepreneurial behavior (Solomon, 2007). According to Kuratko (2005), students are equipped with theoretical insights, practical skills, and the ability to apply entrepreneurial concepts in real-world scenarios. This ability is due to their experiences with hands-on projects, interactions with industry experts, and even the establishment of ventures within the educational framework (Kuratko (2005).

Furthermore, many entrepreneurial training institutions in the United States place a strong emphasis on the practical application of knowledge. Students are often tasked with initiating businesses, utilizing tools like the Business Model Canvas and Lean Startup (Neck, Brush & Greene, 2014). Entrepreneurship educators are increasingly incorporating guest speakers and class discussions, moving away from traditional lecture-based teaching methods (Rodriguez & Lieber, 2020). Additionally, students are required to formulate business plans (Solomon, 2007) and (Neck, Brush & Greene, 2021). Some courses even necessitate the creation of multiple venture plans, providing extensive exposure to entrepreneur role models, thereby facilitating substantial hands-on experience. This approach empowers students by mediating the relationship between experiential learning methods and the acquisition of valuable learning outcomes (Santos, Neumeier & Morris, 2019). As Neck, Brush, and Greene (2014) assert, entrepreneurship students are guided through creative exercises that transform mundane ideas into novel opportunities, facilitating the development of startups.

In contrast, Kenya's entrepreneurial education has faced criticism for its overemphasis on theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical exposure, rendering students ill-prepared to thrive in the business landscape (Otuya & Otuya, 2013). The programs offered in academic and professional institutions often fail to equip students with practical skills alongside theoretical insights obtained in lectures (Maiyo, Abong'o & Tuigon'g, 2014). Consequently, students emerge from these programs inadequately prepared and less empowered to navigate the real-world challenges of starting or running a successful business (Godfrey, Illes & Berry, 2005). Some universities offer entrepreneurship courses that predominantly consist of classroom lectures and case study analyses, with minimal attention given to practical experiences or mentorship opportunities that could instill hands-on skills in students (Maiyo, Abong'o & Tuigon'g, 2014). Online training programs also lack the interactive elements necessary for simulations or real-life projects where students can practically apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in class (Beckem & Watkins, 2012). This dearth of industry-related skills hampers students' ability to develop essential attributes such as problem-solving, adaptability, and negotiation skills critical for entrepreneurial success.

In response to these shortcomings, the Kenyan government is taking proactive measures to reshape the curriculum by introducing experiential learning methodologies, including the competency-based curriculum (CBC), internships, startup incubators, and mentorship programs (Nyaboke, Kereri & Nyabwari, 2021). These initiatives aim to ensure that aspiring entrepreneurs not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also gain practical industry skills and experience that can be applied in their entrepreneurial ventures (Otuya & Otuya, 2013). Initiatives such as the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) have been introduced in Kenya, providing aspiring entrepreneurs with skills, mentorship, and access to networks (Mannan, 2018). Strathmore University, for instance, has launched the IbizAfrica program, which supports and funds entrepreneurs, promoting innovation and the use of modern technology to enhance their entrepreneurial skills (Konyango, 2021). These efforts collectively contribute to nurturing and developing an entrepreneurial mindset among students, preparing them for success in an evolving and dynamic business landscape.

Comparative Analysis of Entrepreneurial Education Programs

A comparative analysis of entrepreneurial education programs in the United States and Kenya underscores several disparities with a few similarities. Entrepreneurial education programs in the United States are notably advanced, practical, and highly impactful (Buchnik, Gilad, & Maital, 2018). This superiority can be attributed to substantial resource endowments in the US, supporting a wide array of formal courses, extracurricular activities, mentorship programs, and experiential learning opportunities (Brush, Neck & Greene, 2015). Moreover, the presence of renowned entrepreneurial hubs like Silicon Valley enriches the educational experience, offering students unparalleled access to industry leaders, investors, and inspirational role models.

On the contrary, in Kenya, the impact and influence of entrepreneurial education face constraints due to limited resources and distinctive challenges (Mkala & Wanjau, 2018). Despite these limitations, the country is making significant strides to enhance its programs by embracing innovative initiatives (Osano, 2017). Programs such as iHub, Simulators, or Incubation Centers established by various universities play a pivotal role in imparting practical skills and nurturing problem-solving abilities in aspiring entrepreneurs (Konyango, 2021). Kenya is actively promoting entrepreneurial education programs that can adapt to the diverse and evolving industry landscape.

Identifying Best Practices in Entrepreneurial Education

The literature review and analysis conducted for both the United States and Kenya underscore the distinct approaches taken by these nations in promoting an entrepreneurial mindset and equipping individuals to navigate challenges within the sector. In their research, Brush, Neck and Greene (2015) found that in the United States, entrepreneurial education demonstrates highly positive outcomes, driven by programs that actively engage students in real projects and business planning, while providing invaluable opportunities for interaction with successful entrepreneurs and industry experts. Key aspects of these programs encompass experiential learning, industry engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021).

Conversely, Kenya is witnessing the innovation and development of best practices and programs, influenced by unique constraints and opportunities within the African context (Amunga, Were & Ashioya, 2020). The landscape is evolving, with an increasing focus on programs that offer practical exposure and instill real-world experiences (Konyango, 2021). Initiatives such as Simulation labs, internships, and mentorship opportunities provided by industry experts are gaining prominence, contributing to a more hands-on and dynamic approach to entrepreneurial education.

Startup Ecosystems and Innovation

To foster a conducive environment for entrepreneurs and startups to flourish, governmental bodies and key stakeholders must utilize the country's resources and policies effectively (Mason & Brown, 2014). This involves creating an ecosystem that nurtures innovation and facilitates the transformation of innovative concepts into viable entrepreneurial ventures or investments (Rashid, 2019). According to Mason and Brown (2014), a comprehensive startup ecosystem comprises critical components, including government policies or regulations, startup funding mechanisms, and entrepreneurial infrastructure, all of which play indispensable roles in supporting and catalyzing entrepreneurial success.

Comparative Analysis of Startup Ecosystems in the US and Kenya

The startup ecosystem in the United States stands as a highly conducive environment for successful entrepreneurship and innovation (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2014). A significant contributing factor to this success is the ample access to capital for investments, facilitated by a substantial pool of billionaire or multimillionaire investors, financial lenders, and supportive government initiatives (Audretsch, Grimm, Wessner & Wessner, 2005). Progressive policies like the U.S. Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program have played a crucial role in motivating new entrepreneurship and bridging the gap in early-stage technology funding (Audretsch et al., 2005). The United States is also home to top-tier research institutions that foster the generation of new ideas and information, and a federal government that actively formulates policies to promote and enable startups to thrive (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2014). Moreover, the country boasts an extensive network of seasoned entrepreneurs and mentors who embrace a culture of risk-taking (Audretsch et al., 2005). Hubs like Silicon Valley, renowned for innovation, provide a vibrant startup ecosystem that offers unlimited opportunities to aspiring entrepreneurs (López-Quesada, 2020). These robust startup ecosystems catalyze the development of new ideas and technologies, resulting in the United

States giving birth to numerous world-changing innovations and startups that have grown into world-beating entrepreneurial ventures, spanning realms such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and social media giants.

In stark contrast, Kenya grapples with challenges that have resulted in a severely limited startup ecosystem. Insufficient funding mechanisms and restricted access to funding opportunities continue to hamper the aspirations of entrepreneurs (Mkala & Wanjau, 2018). Unlike the abundance of venture capitalists in the U.S., Kenya has fewer, and financial lenders often perceive lending to startups as high-risk, imposing exorbitant interest rates that most emerging entrepreneurs cannot afford (British Council, n.d.). Converting innovative ideas into actionable entrepreneurial ventures is further constrained by the need for more mentorship and networking opportunities (Mwania, 2015). The country is also plagued by bureaucratic red tape and corruption, hindering the smooth registration and licensing of new businesses, and discouraging many aspiring entrepreneurs (Kimuyu, 2007). Despite these challenges, Kenya is gradually taking steps, albeit small and deliberate, towards nurturing talent and encouraging innovation, exemplified by initiatives like the Nairobi iHub (Hersman, 2012). New talents are emerging with ideas specifically tailored to the country's societal needs, such as mobile banking solutions and healthcare technologies, contributing to Kenya's growing prominence in the global innovation landscape.

Government Role in Creating an Ecosystem that Nurtures Startups

Governments play a pivotal role in fostering a conducive environment for startups to flourish, primarily through policy formulation, funding mechanisms, and investments in entrepreneurial infrastructure.

In the United States, government policies have historically been favorable in encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2014). Notably, tax credits for entrepreneurs, particularly aimed at investment, job creation, and research and development, serve as strong incentives for startups (Slattery & Zidar, 2020). Additionally, the government institutes intellectual property protection laws to safeguard startups from intellectual property theft and often provides research grants (Hettinger, 1989). An example is the funding provided by the National Institute of Health for research and development in the pharmaceutical sector, leading to significant medical and technological breakthroughs that translate into entrepreneurial startups (Bloom, Van Reenen & Williams, 2019).

On the flip side, Kenyan government policies historically impeded innovation. Excessive regulations resulting from legislation have created bureaucratic red tape and intricate business registration frameworks (Muthini, 2012). Furthermore, consistent underfunding of grants for startups has posed barriers to innovation, compelling many aspiring entrepreneurs to abandon their startup ideas (Muthini, 2012). Encouragingly, lobbying and campaigns by young Kenyans have catalyzed initiatives such as the Ajira Digital Program, aimed at stimulating digital entrepreneurship (Wainanina, 2016). The establishment of technology hubs like the Nairobi iHub (Hersman, 2012) and Konza Techno City signifies steps in the right direction towards nurturing startups, although these measures remain a work in progress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology utilized in this paper is Desk Research, involving a purely theoretical analysis of secondary sources to probe the impact of entrepreneurial education and startup ecosystems through a comparative lens, focusing on the United States and Kenya. This approach centered on analyzing and synthesizing a spectrum of existing literature, encompassing academic articles, reports, case studies, government publications, books, and peer-reviewed journals. The selection of secondary sources was driven by their relevance to the study's objectives, aiming for a comprehensive and diverse representation of perspectives and insights.

The analytical framework established for this study revolved around two primary dimensions: entrepreneurial education and startup ecosystems in the United States and Kenya. This framework served as a guide for systematically examining the chosen sources and facilitating the identification of patterns and best practices. The analytical process involved an in-depth review of the sources to extract information and insights pertinent to the study's objectives. Variations and commonalities were carefully identified and compared. Subsequently, the findings were synthesized and interpreted within the context of the research objectives, seeking to derive meaningful insights regarding the comparative impact of entrepreneurial education and the factors contributing to vibrant startup ecosystems.

FINDINGS

Diverse Approaches to Entrepreneurial Education by the United States and Kenya.

One of the prominent findings of this study unveils the contrasting approaches adopted by the United States and Kenya in the realm of entrepreneurial education, resulting in distinctly different outcomes. The United States demonstrates a practical and impactful approach to entrepreneurial education, emphasizing practical skills and immersive industry exposure. In contrast, Kenya's approach leans more towards theoretical knowledge, providing fewer opportunities for real-world experiences. However, there is a transformation underway in Kenya, as noted by Konyango (2021), propelled by initiatives such as YALI, the new CBC curriculum, IbizAfrica at Strathmore University, Chandaria Innovation, and the Incubation Centre at Kenyatta University, among others. These initiatives are striving to integrate industry-specific skills into entrepreneurial training programs, aligning with the evolving needs of the entrepreneurial landscape.

Vibrant and Emerging Startup Ecosystems in the US and Kenya, respectively.

The research brings to light the stark contrast between the highly conducive startup ecosystem in the United States and the emerging but financially constrained startup ecosystems in Kenya. The study underscores that the United States enjoys a thriving startup ecosystem attributed to factors like abundant access to capital, presence of top-tier research institutions, substantial government support, and vibrant innovation hubs such as Silicon Valley (López-Quesada, 2020). On the other hand, Kenya grapples with challenges, including limited funding, bureaucratic red tape, punitive tax measures, and regulatory barriers (Kibuchi, 2016) (Muthini, 2012). Despite these obstacles, the country is showcasing adaptability through context-specific innovations and an increasing commitment to support startups. This adaptation signals a promising trajectory for the startup ecosystem in Kenya.

Government Policies and Support.

The research underscores the pivotal role of government policies and support programs in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes (Rashid, 2019). In the United States, a reputation is established for fostering entrepreneurial startups through incentivizing policies like tax credits, intellectual property protection laws, and research grants. Conversely, Kenya grapples with a distinct situation. The nation's innovative environment is hindered by regulatory barriers, intricate business registration frameworks, and underfunded programs (Kibuchi, 2016). However, it is crucial to highlight that several initiatives are underway in Kenya aimed at enhancing its policy framework and bolstering support systems for startups, indicating a proactive stance towards fostering a more nurturing environment for entrepreneurship.

Importance of Practical Exposure

Both the United States and Kenya acknowledge the significance of hands-on practical experience and genuine industry exposure in entrepreneurial education. In the US, this acknowledgment is manifested

through the integration of concepts such as experiential learning, real-world projects, and extensive industry engagement into its educational programs. Conversely, Kenya is embracing innovation by introducing programs like simulation labs, internships, and mentorship opportunities, aiming to narrow the divide between theoretical knowledge and practical industry application (Konyango, 2021). These initiatives in both nations underline a shared emphasis on imparting practical skills and instilling a real-world understanding of entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving socioeconomic growth and development within a nation. Cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset is vital for promoting innovation and generating new opportunities, ultimately enhancing living standards by creating jobs. The success and progress of entrepreneurial ventures, particularly startups, are significantly influenced by two core components: entrepreneurial education and the fostering of conducive startup ecosystems that encourage innovation. The comparative analysis conducted in this paper, illuminating the distinctions between these elements in the United States and Kenya, offers insights with global resonance.

Initiating an entrepreneurial mindset that equips individuals to successfully navigate the challenges inherent in entrepreneurial ventures necessitates entrepreneurial education that seamlessly integrates practical industry experiences into the learning process (Konyango, 2021). Key programs vital for achieving this success encompass practical exposure, experiential learning, and industry engagement through avenues such as internships and mentorships. While the US is actively implementing these practices, Kenya is in the process of progress, showcasing positive signs. The study distinctly showcases the influence of a conducive startup ecosystem on entrepreneurial success. An enriching ecosystem that supports startups should encompass accessibility to investment capital, robust research institutions, and substantial government support through funding and policy formulation (Nyerere, Opinde, Muthoni & Mutuma, 2022). The startup ecosystem in the US largely embodies these success factors, whereas Kenya faces challenges but is displaying determination to enhance its circumstances.

In conclusion, this research transcends the boundaries of the two nations, aiming to offer universal insights. It underscores the criticality of integrating practical skills into entrepreneurial education programs, fostering positive startup ecosystems, and implementing supportive government policies to nurture entrepreneurship and innovation. These findings provide valuable guidance to policymakers, educators, and entrepreneurs on a global scale, aiding their efforts to bridge the gap between innovation and industry, ultimately steering the trajectory of socioeconomic advancement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governments should proactively drive targeted education reforms, prioritizing the integration of practical, hands-on entrepreneurial education programs. These initiatives should equip students with both theoretical knowledge and crucial industry skills, preparing them effectively for entrepreneurial endeavors.
2. Policymakers must enhance lending mechanisms, facilitating easier access to funding and venture capital for aspiring entrepreneurs. Initiatives should be devised to mitigate risk for investors, encouraging investment in innovative startups.
3. Nations need to simplify their regulatory landscape and streamline registration frameworks for new businesses. This simplification will incentivize startups to register and operate more efficiently, ensuring they can easily access government support.
4. Collaboration between the government and various stakeholders is essential to establish innovation hubs. These hubs should serve as platforms for networking and meaningful engagements among

entrepreneurs, nurturing startups and fostering innovation.

5. Governments worldwide should enact policies geared towards promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. Incentives such as tax credits, grants, and robust intellectual property protection should be offered to catalyze innovation and fuel entrepreneurial growth.
6. International collaboration and the sharing of information are paramount. Governments and stakeholders should facilitate the exchange of best practices and ideas globally, fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurial ventures and startups.
7. Adequate allocation of resources by governments to research and development initiatives is vital. These initiatives should focus on groundbreaking innovations, acting as catalysts for the emergence of new startups and bolstering economic growth.
8. Government bodies and entrepreneurship stakeholders should collectively champion a culture of entrepreneurship. Encouraging risk-taking, creativity, and innovation will inspire individuals to venture into startups, fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial landscape.

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