A STEMitised curriculum development for informal vendors. The case of informal vendors near the Bulawayo Large City Hall.

Conference paper presented at Troutbeck Resort Centre, March 2018

Conference theme: Research based STEMitised TVET innovations: Solutions to revive Zimbabwe.

Authors
Gabriel Ngwenya
School of Hospitality and Tourism
gabrielingwenya@gmail.com

Khanyisani Ngwenya
Lupane State University
kngwenya@lsu.ac.zw

Gabriel Ngwenya is a Strategic Management lecturer at the School of Hospitality and Tourism, Bulawayo. A development economist and researcher with a bias towards youth entrepreneurial skills enhancement.

Khanyisani Ngwenya is a Tourism and hospitality lecturer at Lupane State University. A researcher who has a strong background in Human Nutrition and Curriculum Development of Technical Vocation Education and Training (TVET) programmes. TVET programmes enhance the development of lifelong skills that improve livelihoods of many communities.

Abstract

Curriculum planning and development has since been viewed as mainly targeting students in formal institutions for formal jobs training. The situation in Zimbabwe has drifted the idea of seeking employment to survival strategies. Consequently the prevailing atmosphere has forced the ‘business’ people to operate without training. Irrespective of skills and preparedness, school leavers, and those laid off from work, have found themselves in some kind of ‘businesses’. To this effect, various kinds of jobs are created, but are regarded as informal. It becomes difficult for those employed in this sector to view their ‘businesses’ as life jobs, although they are permanently self-employed. This paper therefore discussed ways that could be harnessed to design and implement a TVETised short courses curriculum that is STEMised to suit this newly
formed ‘industry’ to incorporate elemental technology, engineering, math, and science to benefit the informal trader to run businesses, and provide permanent employment solutions to Zimbabwe. There are potentials of entrepreneurship if the informal vendors are skills trained, financed and advised properly. The local government authorities can then formulate ways of creating a tax bracket for informal traders, widening the revenue base for the country. A quantitative research was conducted based on a case study design of informal traders around the Large City Hall in Bulawayo. The study recommends transformation of curriculum development at polytechnics to incorporate informal trading as presenting a training gap that can provide solutions to revive Zimbabwe’ economy.

**Key words** TVET, STEM, informal traders, self-employment, and transformation

### 1.0 Background of the study

The stagnation of economies of countries is not a new phenomenon. In Japan blame has been laid on unfavourable shocks that began with bursting of the ‘bubble’ economy (Boltho, 2000). Boltho (2000) suggests more appropriate macroeconomic policies that would target inflation leading to its reduction. Other economists believe that for any economy to grow there is need for the development of a sound human capital base (Ouandji, 2014). This calls for a collective investment and bargain towards the whole education system including the informal sector, and broadening the current curriculum to target everyone who has interest in developing themselves in order to acquire basic knowledge and skills in business as a way of contributing to the revival of economies and promotion of human capital development. Ogbuanya (2015) asserts that the rate of unemployment is alarming in Nigeria leading to many social vices that impact negatively on the growth of the economy. To try and curb the malpractices aggravated by lack of formal jobs, it would be prudent to develop technical vocational and training (TVET) programs that can assist those that have interest in business to develop their skills in a bid to revive the economy. UNESCO (2002), defines technical vocational education and training as;

“…those aspects of educational process involving in addition to general education the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills,
attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social lives.”

In the context of this research, TVET refers to a range of learning experiences for formal or non-employment, portability of competences and high end skills for decent work opportunities and lifelong benefits related to the world of work.

Significantly Bhowmik (2010), alludes that informal trading, colloquially known as street vending in India acts as an efficient distribution network for daily necessities. It is practiced by many and contributes to a substantial population, resulting in it being of great demand. As such informal vending cannot be sidelined as it contributes to the bulk of employment opportunities although it is considered as ‘illegal’. Thus in 2004, India had to come up with a National Policy for street vendors, and this rendered them recognition. Anderson (1991), in Bhowmik (2010) propound that streets are institutions for sociability, source of entertainment and also an extension of living space. Informal trading has been recognised in Europe. In Peru it is being regarded as revitalising of public space, and in other developing countries such as Durban in South Africa it is highly recognised (Moser, 1984 in Bhowmik, 2010). Thus some people practice informal vending just because they want to find something to keep them occupied. It therefore, translates that some people engage in informal trading as a way of providing some kind of ‘social life’ and entertainment reducing the need to pay for such services in real life.

In Zimbabwe vending dates back to several decades where people have been known to operate in places called ‘umsika or musika’. Some people become vendors because they have been laid off from work, others start vending straight from school due to failure to meet the minimum academic entry points to qualify them for training in tertiary institutions. As such these school leavers have very little knowledge on how to run their small businesses profitably (Sharma, 2018).

The general trend in most countries has been concentrated on developing skills for those that follow a formal education system in order to start-up businesses that are considered as contributing to economic growth. This makes many systems to fail to recognize vending as ‘business’ that can also contribute to economic growth. The effort made by vendors is hardly recognised as they just start up their businesses such as selling of fruits, vegetables and sweets informally, without any prior training to help them operate profitably (Ganyaupfu, 2013). This
results in an outcry of health hazards and uncontrollable disease outbreaks. The main reason being that doors have been closed for vendors and the presence of stringent rules and regulations in our polytechnics have failed to attract vendors to be trained prior to embarking on their businesses. There are more benefits gained in training vendors than leaving them untrained. Matters of uncleanliness and disease outbreaks are minimised if the vendors are trained for their jobs. This can be propagated by coming up with short term programs targeted at empowering the informal vendors to operate legally in order to enhance economic growth.

Apparently, there is need to recognise vendors’ effort in creating their own jobs as this makes them survive. Crafting TVET programs in polytechnics and bringing them to the vendors door step may facilitate development of the entrepreneurial skills. This would go a long way in poverty alleviation and immensely contribute to solutions to revive economic growth. Blaming informal vendors for failure to conduct their businesses without crafting TVET programs to assist them would not benefit the nation.

Ogbuanya (2015) alludes that some countries especially in East Asia were able to grow their economy rapidly and generate jobs particularly for the youth because they made great use of TVET in their development strategy. Sharma (2018) propels that TVET is now perceived as an alternative option for those regarded as less gifted academically, but are still able to be offered a second chance to improve themselves. This comes as a way of empowering them to enable them to contribute to the revival of the economy if systems and policies are revised. This move caters for those who believe in unlocking their potential by creating their own jobs, in a bid to provide solutions to revive the economy. The researcher believes that although the formal education system may however, be immune to accommodate training of informal vendors, but properly designed short course TVET programs can tap and inspire the hidden talent that may provide value addition and beneficiation to the economy, hence contribute towards providing solutions to revive the economy. The rebirth of an economy may be realised if systems and policies are crafted to accommodate all those who aspire to gain skills and capabilities which vigorously push for the revival of the economy (Ibid). Thus programs and training sessions can even be brought to their door step as hourly sessions and rigorous campaigns for such learning could be done to make them view their positions in contributing towards economic growth. The system of
working from hand to mouth for informal vendors has been long overdue and need to be properly addressed.

At a UNESCO congress held in Korea in 1999, it was highlighted that there is need for a holistic approach to education to give everyone equal opportunities to enable the learner to launch into a lifelong continuum of knowledge, values and attitudes, and competencies and skills (UNESCO, 1999). In this contention for a viable valuable decision, there is need for an adjustment of the mindset to promote curriculum development that addresses the imbalances in communities. This requires development of strategies that include programs which provide lasting solutions on how to revive economies similar to the Zimbabwean type. It is against this backdrop that the researcher was triggered to develop a needs analysis for a special dispensation in development of short course programs that are STEMitised. These may be conducted in polytechnics with elementary science, technology, engineering and mathematics to facilitate the training of vendors to start-up businesses in vending, with basic business knowledge. Initiating such programs in polytechnics may provide lasting solutions to revive the Zimbabwean economy. This study therefore sought to identify ways of creating STEMitised TVET innovations that would lure vendors to enroll in programs tailored to bring solutions to revive the Zimbabwean economy and also grow their businesses.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Poverty and inequality continue to be critical economic challenges, pushing the bulk of the poor to look for employment in the informal sector. In Cambodia 95% of all employment is provided by the informal sector and has been the livelihood for many of the poor in Phnom Penh its capital (Bhowmik, 2010). In Zimbabwe the unemployment rate figure of 9.3% provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) in 2004, differs from both the newspaper reports and international media who routinely claim that it currently stands at over 80% (Luebker, 2008). What is considered as formal and informal employment within the current situation in Zimbabwe is subject to debate. In Zimbabwe a large proportion of labour force is self-employed in the informal sector. Crafting short term programs that train vendors to be innovative in vending may go a long way in improving their livelihood. Currently systems are rigid to the informal sector,
failing them access to acquire critical skills through organised training and accreditation schemes.

Lack of survival strategies towards enhancing one’s life is like thorn on flesh. Lack of programmes specifically crafted for vendors at polytechnics to enhance entrepreneurial skills remains a concern for vendors who are eager to professionally do vending. In the same vein, as long Bulawayo City Council (BCC) fails to tape finances from the informal traders around the large city hall, vending stalls may never be recognized as generating income for both the vendor and the city council. Identifying lasting solutions to promote acceptable vending terms may never be recognized as long polytechnic colleges fail to craft short term courses to train ending business as a way of reviving the Zimbabwean economy.

1.2 Main Objective

To design a STEMitised curriculum training program in polytechnics to empower vendors to grow their businesses.

Sub objectives

1.3.1 To create short course programs to train and accredit vendors on informal businesses to improve their livelihood.

1.3.2 To develop an investment strategy to assist vendors in saving money.

1.3.3 To determine challenge informal vendors face in their daily business.

1.3.4 To promote outreach programs in polytechnic colleges for training informal vendors in and around Bulawayo.

1.3.4 Delimitations

This study was delimited to the vendors in Bulawayo Central Business District that sell sweets, vegetables, fruits and curious.

1.3.5 Limitations

This study only focused on finding solutions to revive the Zimbabwean economy through initiating the crafting of short term tvetised courses designed to improve the livelihood of
vendors in the Bulawayo central Business District. Any information outside this bracket was not covered. If time and resources permitted, this research could have been extensively done to cover a large number of vendors in Bulawayo and outside.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Contribution of the formal and informal sectors in business towards national growth

The formal and informal business sectors bare significant similarities despite the fact that the greater part of society places more value on the formal business sector than the informal one. The two sectors both provide employment to members of the society and in addition render the much needed goods and services for economic growth. The informal economy originates from a variety of factors such as municipal bye-laws, changes in the labour markets, economic fundamentals like inflation and recessions and negative attitudes of trade unions which fail to represent this sector (Shaikh and Deshpande, 2017).

Chen (2007) deliberating on economics and social affairs argues that, since the discovery of the informal economy in the early 1970s in Africa, it has become subject to social debate and multiple criticisms have been tabled. Despite these debates informal economy has continued to prove to be a useful concept to many policy makers, activists and researchers, as it captures the reality of life by offering the biggest employment in many nations. Today worldwide, there is renewed interest of the informal sector and many nations now support informal enterprises and improved informal jobs are increasingly recognised as key path ways to promoting growth and reducing poverty (ibid).

In the formal economy sector there are recruitment systems which are followed and it is mostly those that have the required credentials who benefit from this system. On the other hand the informal economy sector employees are mostly pushed by some forces beyond their control such as inflation, retrenchments or failure to meet the minimum job requirements for employment, and therefore find themselves involuntarily belonging to the informal sector. This is the bracket
where vendors at the Bulawayo large city hall mostly belong. Informal industries largely consist of vendors who generate new jobs although some may regard themselves as unemployed. (Stenconomiceurad, 2018). It is therefore paramount for polytechnics to bridge this gap by creating short term programs as a way of informing about the availability of such a facility to improve vendors’ business. This can make communities appreciate the Central Statistical Office (CSO) record of 2004 which states that unemployment rate in Zimbabwe stands at 9.3% (Luebker, 2008) not over 80% as depicted by newspaper reports and international media. In some nations activists have lobbied for policy formulation as a way of signifying the importance and increasing the market share of the informal economy sector as it contributes a big percentage towards the Gross Domestic products (GDP). To this end, the Zimbabwean situation is not an exception if matters of upgrading vending and finding solutions to revive the economy are discussed. Thus, the crafting and accreditation of the short term programs in polytechnics may go a long way in making vendors regard themselves as employed and contributing to economic growth. The formal accreditation of short term courses for vendors may instill confidence in vendors and make them dream bigger in business.

2.2 Short term programs that can be crafted by polytechnics to suit vendors

Vending like any other businesses requires the basic business skills such as information and communication technology (ICT), book keeping, basic interpersonal skills, leadership skills, management skills, health and safety amongst others. In fact such skills are largely hinged on the elementary knowledge of science, mathematics, technology and engineering (STEM). In view of the current social debate in local newspaper reports and international media, which reflects that unemployment rate stands at over 80%, it may be necessary for polytechnics to craft short term programs that make Zimbabweans view vending as lifetime jobs, like other countries such as India, Asia, Nigeria and South Africa (Moser, 1994 and Bhowmik, 2010). The informal business is found in various forms, in almost all the economic sectors now. There is so much that could be done for the informal vendor as a way of poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe because the current pattern indicates that vending is ‘here to stay’. This can be achieved by conducting some needs analysis through interrogating the vendors in order to assess their requirements regarding business development. It is against this backdrop that this paper advocates for a clear short term curriculum program in polytechnics for vendors.
2.3 Benefits associated with vending.

Vending in the Sub-Saharan region of which Zimbabwe is found contributes to an average of 70% of the total employment (Chen, 2007). It is a larger source of employment especially for women in developing countries. In India, it contributes to 93%, while in Mexico it’s at 55 to 62% and in South Africa its 28 to 34%. The greatest benefit of vending is the employment of people which improves the livelihood of communities and alleviates poverty. Vending therefore plays a significant role in growth of many nations and consequently provides solutions to revive economies.

2.4 Investment strategies that vendors can use to grow their businesses

It has been noted in third world countries, that cashless transactions are still rarely used by the informal sector who are found by the road side like the vendors, small shops and even for wage payment (Shaikh and Deshpande, 2017). Mobile wallets now offer a secure place to save as funds are stored virtually. In Zimbabwe there are three service providers of mobile money, Ecocash, Onemoney and Telecash. These services can be used to assist vendors to save if they are taught on ways of how to save their money. Such savings can be used to pay for school fees and other incidental expenses, or for productive investment, like expansion of an existing business.

There are many strategies that can be included in the short term programs to make vendors realise that vending is indeed a form of business like any other businesses found around them. The current growth in the technological advances has made significant strides towards promoting the informal sector business. Informal vendors have previously been grossly failed by lack of access to serving facilities such as banks because they demanded too many documents to simply open a savings account. Today serving money in the informal sector has grossly improved especially as saving facilities are now found in the palms of vendors. The usage of cashless mode of transactions can be taught through workshops or short course entrepreneurial programs that are developed for vendors to grow their businesses (Shaikh and Deshpande, 2017). Many times vendors keep expensive phone which they cannot utilize as their mobile banks to save money. Aspects of banking using mobile phones can be part of the course content of the short courses program to improve vending business. Financial institutions can play a major role in the growth
of informal vendors by being invited to do short presentation on how to save money using phones

2.5 Strategies that can be used to improve livelihoods of informal vendors

Informal vendors might have plans to grow their business and increase sales and profits, but fail due to lack of knowledge. Polytechnics can craft their short term programs basing on the type of vendors they are targeting. In as much, the methods companies use to grow their businesses depends on the capital base, the completion and local government bye-laws. Common growth strategies in business include market penetration, market expansion, product expansion, diversification and acquisition. Market penetration, market expansion, product expansion strategies are relevant to informal traders than product expansion, diversification and acquisition. Diversification and acquisition could be very risky for small informal vendors (Merrian-webster, 2018).

An informal vendor can use a market penetration strategy when deciding to market existing products within the same market one has been using. The best way to grow is for vendors to increase market share. Small Business (2018), posit that market share is the percent of unit and dollar sales a business unit holds within a certain market in relation to all other competitors. One way to increase market share is by lowering prices. Vendors around the city hall virtually sell similar products which have very little differentiation. The best way to increase their sales would be to slightly reduce their prices in order to move volumes of stock they have as a way of increasing their market share, and hence increase growth. For this to happen vendors would need to order their products in bulk as partners to reduce the strain one may have when they order individually (Ibid). This would be a significant strategy in trying to reduce the burden of buying in bulk as an individual and push the stock fast when alone. In this case it would mean that vendors would need to be taught how to work collectively in business to allow for growth.

Sometimes growth calls for innovation. Innovation is an important business strategy. Ganyaupfu, (2013) has defined it as the adoption of new concepts and behaviour. It calls for embracing new products, service, technology and new management approach. A business must be able to come up with unique and innovative strategy to improve its sales volume and profits.
Informal fruit and vegetable vendors can also expand their product lines. They can add products like selling air time electronically or even engaging in mobile banking. A product expansion growth strategy works well when technology starts to change. New products must come in as older products become outmoded.

If Zimbabwe’s growing economy views the informal sector as the mechanism for achieving economic growth, there is a need for polytechnics to craft various training programs to boost vendor businesses. As, alluded earlier on vending provides substantial employment and stimulates economic growth (Chen, 2007). It therefore must be supported from all angles in order to find solutions to revive Zimbabwe’s economy.

3.0 Methodology

While researchers may incline their researches towards the positivist’s or the interpretivist’s philosophy or either, this research shall largely be based on a the positivist ideology that uses the quantitative research approach. It dealt with scientific facts to enable the researcher to access information without relying on multiple realities and other systems for meanings (Creswell, 2014)

3.1 Research design.

A case study research design assisted the researcher to deal with social and behavioral problems such as causes of poverty, unemployment and focused on other community problems that cause people to venture into vending (Psyking, 2018). In addition, the case study also assisted the researcher to solicit answers on the ‘why and how’ vendors operate their businesses at and around the large city hall in Bulawayo. In this case the researcher does not have control over the activities vendors do, but only relies on information they provide (Ibid). As such the researcher dealt with community psychology and sociology based on the facts provided on how and why vendors operate around the city hall in Bulawayo.

3.2 Population

The population consisted of all vendors that sell different items around the city hall ranging from fruits and vegetables, curios and fresh and dried flowers. The researcher observed that an
estimated total of one hundred and twenty (150) vendors ply the large city hall circle everyday selling their different wares. These vendors therefore constituted the population of the study (Creswell, 2009).

3.3 Sampling procedure and sampling technique

As the vendors around the city hall sell different wares, a stratified sampling technique was utilised to cater for the different groups of vendors found around the city hall (Creswell, 2014). These vendors were categorised according to the type of wares they sell to prevent underscoring the number of vendors who operated around the city hall selling different wares. To ensure each strata is represented, the snowball sampling technique was employed basing on referrals given by each chosen participant to cater for each sector and had a mini representation of five respondents each. The sample size had a maximum of twenty participants to ensure all categories were catered for.

3.4 Data collection instruments

To ensure required data was collected, simple structured questionnaires and interviews were designed to precisely match the level of understanding of the vendors so that meaningful information could be sought (Creswell, 2009)

3.5 Questionnaires.

Structured questionnaires were ideal in collecting data in that they are quantitative in nature as advocated by Emily Durkhein (1858-1917). The same author contends that questions that are of low level reduces involvement of the researcher when respondents answer questions and there is likelihood of high responses from the respondents to answer the questionnaires quickly.

4.0 Discussion

Informal vendors find it difficult to save money as they lack the knowledge of how to do it. They do not have tangible security. Banks are not eager to advance them with working capital. This is also a major cause of lack of growth in this sector of the economy.

Lack of skill training for vendors at the city hall presents a huge problem that stifles empowerment and financial independence (Time review, 2018). Lack of proper business skills restrict these vendors to advance and most probable suffer from low-esteem and self-confidence.
They might also not take advantage of technology such as those offered by mobile banking. There should be strong and effective advisory services or mentoring which can be offered by polytechnics.

5.0 Findings

It was found out that vendors at Bulawayo City Hall were aware of their handicap in terms of skills acquisition. Of the 20 respondents interrogated all concurred for the need of basic skills in business management. The period spent in the vending business ranged from 1 up to 20 years, being too long a period one spends as a vendor. This information was revealed from the interviews which were conducted. This meant that one’s lifetime was spent vending. This period did not correlate with the growth of the business. Vendors indicated that they had the same stalls and same capital wares as they started some 20 years back.

It was found out that the respondents have excellent entrepreneurial ideas such as seeing their business grow. However, on investment strategies vendors were quick to point out lack of capital. It is in this light that vendors need to be equipped with alternative skills in of raising capital.

Vendors had no collateral, hence there is need for them to embrace savings to grow. It has been noted that 100% of the vendors interviewed live from hand to mouth. There is little or none capital formation. Savings creates capital formation and it further leads to technical innovation and progress which helps with the economies of large-scale production and increases specialization, which helps to accelerate the productivity of labour, it further resulting increased GDP. Thus savings leads to fuller utilization of available scarce resources in an efficient way, increase in the size of national output, income and employment, thereby solving the problems of inflation, unemployment and balance of payment, poverty, inequality; and making the economy free from the burden of foreign debt and leads to state of better welfare (Dhanya, 2015).

It has been noted also that vendors face quite a number of challenges. The fact that they do not belong to a trade union sometimes leads to a collision course with the Bulawayo city councils. They cannot innovate like selling their goods to customers who might be on commuter omnibuses. If they leave the designated stalls the goods they would be selling would be confiscated by the city council watchman.
6.0 Recommendations and Conclusions

There is need to start up short term courses for vendors in business management skills. Vendors should be taught courses on how they can manage and grow their businesses. Polytechnics should carry out needs analysis to come up with appropriate courses for the vendors.

Advancement in technology and its infrastructure is opening up windows of opportunity to informal traders. Customers can pay and shop as they go. Vendors can use mobile banking to tract their accounts and save their money. Valuable time is not lost in bank queues. Hence, continuous training in short term courses for vendors may be seen as the process of identifying and implementing professional skills, through the use of modern scientific and technological knowledge (Maria, 2018). Professionals need new life-long learning approaches to assist them in keeping up with the rhythm of technological change that requires a continuous update of the learning contents, learning processes and delivery approaches of developing training (Kadiri, S. E., Grabot B., Thoben, K., and Emmanouilidis, C (2016).

The researchers recommend that continuous training must be given to vendors in order to grow their businesses and improve their livelihood. Training institutes like polytechnics should impart communication, leadership, personality development, management, basic accounting and basic computer skills. These skills will ensure that vendors can support themselves and gain status in society which will pull more labour into this sector of the economy. Thus the macroeconomic challenges of high unemployment levels in the country can be brought down to manageable levels.

References


