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PRACTICE-BASED ARTICLE

Sparking Entrepreneurial Tendencies in Youth: Lessons From Sport and Life Skills Education in Three African Cities

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Abstract

This practice-based article describes a program that aims to instil an interest in entrepreneurship among African youth by helping them make a connection between the skills they have developed through their participation in sport and the skills required of successful entrepreneurs. The program was developed in partnership between scholars at four universities (University of Botswana, University of Dar es Salaam, University of Ghana and Michigan State University), as well as schools at other community organisations in three African cities: Gaborone, Botswana; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and Accra, Ghana. The program, which seeks to contribute to the well-established need for job creation in sub-Saharan Africa, integrated basic entrepreneurship and life-skills training activities into a sports camp for youth athletes. The program appears to have developed entrepreneurial

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tendencies among youth sport participants in these African cities, suggesting that job creation efforts could benefit from targeting youth sport participants and helping them to recognise the important skills they have developed through their participation in sport, and helping them to identify ways in which that skill development could positively impact their futures.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship; Job Creation; Sport; Youth Sport; Youth Development; Africa

Introduction

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015 ‘as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity’ (UNDP 2015). Goal number 8 of the SDGs (*Decent Work and Economic Growth*) identifies job creation and encouragement of entrepreneurship as key to achieving this goal (UNDP 2015). Job creation and entrepreneurship have drawn particular attention throughout sub-Saharan Africa where many of the countries are experiencing a ‘youth bulge’, a demographic pattern whereby large percentages of the populations are comprised of children and young adults (Canning, Raja & Yazbeck 2015; Lin 2016; Mueller et al. 2019).

Although the large number of young people has created a sense of urgency among governments and the international development community (Resnick & Thurlow 2015), others see an opportunity for the region to turn the youth bulge into a ‘demographic dividend’ if enough young people can be fully employed in productive activities when they reach working age (Lin 2012). The opposing view increases the likelihood of a ‘demographic bomb’ (Lin 2016), characterised by social ills, such as violence, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and civil unrest.

Developing Interest in Entrepreneurship

Youth programs that emphasise development of entrepreneurial skills and mindsets will be an important component in developing an entrepreneurial culture and addressing the challenge of job creation. However, many leaders of such programs will face the challenge of how to encourage youth interest in entrepreneurship (Kirby 2004; Morselli 2018). Within the realm of youth development, some endeavours, such as sport, have been found to accentuate certain skills and competencies in youth, such as creativity, self-efficacy, self-discipline, resiliency, leadership and teamwork (Holt 2016).

The most ubiquitous youth programs today are sports related, largely because youth enjoy playing sport. Sport can keep youth constructively engaged, and is valued for its health benefits and capacity to teach life skills, such as those mentioned above, as well as goal-setting and emotional control (Gould et al. 2007; Gould & Carlson 2008). More importantly, and relevant to the United Nations SDGs, many of the other skills developed through participation in sport (e.g. interpersonal communication, social skills, time management, calculated risk taking, goal-setting, autonomy, problem solving, decision making, etc.) are the same ones needed to be a successful entrepreneur (Caird 1990; Cronin & Allen 2017). The use of sport in nurturing entrepreneurship is based on the premise that sport offers a viable approach to building long-term sustainable life skills. Moreover, Self Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that sources of motivation should be viewed on an intrinsic–extrinsic continuum to meet a set of basic and universal psychological needs, namely the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan 2008; Ryan & Deci 2000). Sport participation frequently delivers on all three of these components of motivation. For most youth, participation in sport is a choice they make and endorse (autonomy). Skill development and mastery comes with continued participation (competence), and youth sport participants often report feeling connected to others and a sense of belonging with teammates and even competitors (relatedness).

The program described in this article aims to show that participation in sport can inspire African youth to reach for employment and entrepreneurship. This can be achieved by providing positive activities, such as participation in sport, that help them to absorb life lessons from sport and learn basic entrepreneurial skills. The primary objective of the program is for youth athletes to experience significant improvement in life and entrepreneurial skills as a result of the program.

The link between the program as an intervention and an entrepreneurial activity (participants starting a business or pursuing education to support job creation) is seated in the Theory of Reasoned Action ([Ajzen 2000](#)), which suggests that intentions precede behaviour. As it applies to this program, it is expected that intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities can be formed in two ways: (1) by helping participants recognise that the skills they have been developing over the years through their participation in youth sport (e.g. resilience, interpersonal communication, time management, calculated risk taking, goal-setting, etc.) are the same skills required of successful entrepreneurs; and (2) by providing them with some basic education and skill development specific to entrepreneurship. By recognising that they have already been developing entrepreneurial skills, and providing them with introductory education related to starting and operating a business, participants will recognise a potential path for their futures, and realise they have a head start along this path.

Sport-Based Youth Development Program

The sport-based intervention program was collaboratively developed by eight faculty members (project leaders) from four universities in Ghana, Botswana, Tanzania and the US, with the help of community partners in each country. The program ran at approximately the same time in three African cities: Accra, Ghana; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and Gaborone, Botswana. Each city ran separate camps at separate facilities, but followed the same curriculum and format.

PROGRAM PLANNING

From its conceptual phase, the program advanced to the design and implementation phases with funding from the Alliance for African Partnerships (AAP) at Michigan State University (MSU). AAP seeks to build and strengthen equitable and collaborative relationships between and among MSU and African universities in order to transform lives and address global challenges. Funding allowed for the eight project leaders from the four universities to meet in person and virtually, and over a period of six months, this team developed the initial program to test proof of concept. The project leaders had backgrounds and experience in community engagement, as well as design and implementation of research and outreach programs in youth sport, life skills, pedagogy, entrepreneurship education, and community sustainability. The project leaders worked collaboratively throughout the planning period to design the format, curriculum and duration of the program.

Throughout the planning period, project leaders from each of the three African countries also engaged with community partners, local governments, schools and university colleagues to form country-specific project implementation teams. Under the guidance and supervision of the project leaders from the respective countries, the implementation teams partnered with local schools to recruit participants, identified facilities at which the camps could operate, recruited staff to work at the camps, and liaised with other community partners, such as government economic development offices, entrepreneurship incubators and ministries of education to identify post-program resources for participants.

PARTICIPANTS

The project teams for each country worked with schools to identify youth athletes in sports that are commonly played by males and females in all three countries, such as volleyball, netball, football (soccer),

and track and field. Each country had approximately 50 participants (total of 146 participants) with a roughly equal representation of males and females. Participants reported playing sport on average three times a week and had two to three years of experience playing their favourite sport. In Botswana, 43 student athletes (20 female) were recruited from five different schools in the capital city of Gaborone. In Tanzania, 50 students (25 female) were recruited from four schools in Dar es Salaam, and in Ghana, 53 students (26 female) were recruited from four schools in Accra. Costs related to the camp (i.e. housing, meals and transportation) were fully covered by the program using grant funds.

Because the study was conducted to assess the impact of the program on developing entrepreneurial tendencies, participants were randomly assigned evenly to either an intervention group or a control group. Members of the control group did not receive the entrepreneurship training. As this is a practice article with the aim of describing the program as it relates to engaging young people and their futures in African cities, a detailed description of the study methodology and results are not included, but are summarised in a section below. The research study of this program was published separately in [Malete et al. \(2022\)](#).

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The intervention included two overnight camps, the first lasting 14 days and the second, six months later, lasting 8 days. Daily activities during the camp were organised into three main programmatic groupings: (1) training in the participant's relative sport (e.g. volleyball, track and field, football); (2) facilitated team-building activities designed to develop a variety of skills, such as interpersonal communication, planning, goal-setting, problem-solving, emotional regulation and leadership; and (3) age-appropriate experiential training workshops on topics related to entrepreneurship, including market research, identifying business opportunities, and financial literacy. Activities early in the entrepreneurship portion of the program were designed to help participants identify similarities between life skills developed through sport and skills identified as important to the success of entrepreneurs, such as goal-setting, calculated risk-taking, resilience and leadership. To enhance the learning of individual life skills and entrepreneurship, as well as demonstrate the connection between them, the daily program was structured to deliver these as both separate and combined activities. In the evenings, participants took part in a variety of social activities, including movies, board games, etc.

Entrepreneurship Lessons

A subset of the Project Leadership Team, who had expertise in teaching entrepreneurship, developed the lesson plans for the entrepreneurship portion of the camp program, guided by five fundamental principles.

The lessons should:

1. be appropriate for the ages and education levels of the participants
2. be as experiential as possible to better engage participants, keep their attention, and be consistent with the overall camp experience
3. be able to be delivered consistently in each of the three countries, given the differences in culture, facilities and community resources
4. cover an appropriate selection of topics related to entrepreneurship without overwhelming participants
5. be facilitated in a way to continually reinforce the link to sport through sport analogies, metaphors, etc.

A number of resources were used in preparing the entrepreneurship lesson plans. First, project leaders conducted a review of research into entrepreneurship education and determined best practices for teaching entrepreneurship generally, teaching entrepreneurship in Africa, and teaching entrepreneurship to young

people. They then identified a number of different open-source resources and lesson plans for teaching entrepreneurship in contexts similar to this project (e.g. [DSW 2014](#)). Finally, project leaders drew on their experience as teachers of entrepreneurship and creating experiential learning opportunities. The result of these efforts was a curriculum guide with 60-minute experiential lesson plans on the following topics (Appendix 1 shows a sample lesson plan):

- Characteristics of Entrepreneurs and the Link to Sport Participation
- Personal Branding
- Creativity and Identifying Business Ideas
- Marketing, Market Research and Target Markets
- Financial Literacy
- Prices, Revenues and Expenses
- Hiring and Managing People
- Business Plans.

The lesson plans themselves were typical of most lesson plans, consisting of sections such as learning objectives, time and materials required for each part of the lesson, trainer preparations, instructions and tips. A curriculum guide, containing the lesson plans in an easy to use and follow format, was prepared for each trainer.

The lessons were sequenced to build on each other and culminate in a business simulation where groups of participants competed against each other. At the end of the camp, invited speakers from community organisations shared resources and ways participants could continue to pursue their interest in entrepreneurship either through education or by exploring resources for entrepreneurs.

Program Outcomes

As previously mentioned, project leaders conducted a study that examined several research questions related to this program during the initial implementation of the program. This study is explained in detail in [Malete et al. \(2022\)](#). The purpose of that study was twofold: to provide proof of concept and to feedback to project leaders to inform future iterations of the program. The study used a comparison group in each of the three countries. This comparison group attended the sports camp, but did not attend the entrepreneurship portion of the program. To prevent the treatment and control groups from interacting, camps were either run at different sites or at different times, depending on the facilities and school schedules in each country.

To operationalise the concept of entrepreneurship for this program, we used Howard Stevenson's definition that 'entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity beyond resources controlled' ([Eisenmann 2013](#)). Working from this definition, we defined the entrepreneurial mindset as the ability to recognise, passionately pursue and exploit opportunities through innovative and creative problem solving and risk mitigation even in the context of significant resource limitations. Both groups were assessed for entrepreneurial tendencies using the GET2 (General Enterprising Tendencies) test, an established instrument for measuring enterprising tendencies ([Caird 2013](#)), at the beginning of the camp and at the second camp's conclusion months later. Findings from that study showed that, while scores for the comparison group remained essentially the same over the course of the program, the overall scores for enterprising tendencies increased for participants who received the entrepreneurship training. This suggests that the program was successful in increasing interest in entrepreneurship. Although an increase in entrepreneurial tendencies is promising, actual behaviours are more telling. To this end, project leaders plan to follow participants over time to track whether those who underwent the entrepreneurship portion of the program pursued education or became entrepreneurs at higher rates than those who did not receive the entrepreneurship training, or compared to similar youth who did not participate in sport.

In addition to receiving objective research results, many participants reached out to Program Leaders to share stories about how impactful the program was. One young woman in Tanzania, who opened a food stand after the course, wrote about how the program helped give her the confidence to start the business. She even launched an Instagram account ‘to encourage other athletes to get involved with entrepreneurship’. A paper that uses qualitative research methods to analyse comments from participants is currently in development.

As with any program that operates in three different countries, this program faced several challenges of consistency between the three countries related to the varying facilities, school schedules, sport organisational systems, etc. Additionally, although the camp model seemed to work well, it required significant planning and resources beyond the scope of the program’s main objective, with participants having to leave their homes and regular schedules to attend the camp. Project leaders therefore wondered if other models for introducing youth to sport (e.g. an after-school program) might be more efficient and generate similar outcomes with fewer resources. As for the study design, the authors wished they had measured outcomes with another comparison group of young athletes who did not attend either camp. Such an alteration to the study design would have provided insight into whether simply being invited to participate in a camp program had an impact on youth.

Next Steps

In addition to continuing to monitor participants from the initial program, the project leaders hope to experiment with different program formats to determine whether similar positive outcomes could be realised with formats other than the overnight camp-based program. The project leaders believe that the most instrumental parts of the program were: (1) helping young athletes realise that they have developed skills through sport that are needed by entrepreneurs; and (2) providing athletes with minimal training in entrepreneurship that could spark their interest and build enough confidence in them to experiment with entrepreneurial behaviours, or seek further education and training. If these beliefs are accurate, other formats, such as an after-school program or a program that spreads lessons out over a greater period of time than the condensed version at the camps, might also result in positive (or even more positive) outcomes. Other formats might also be better positioned for partnerships and therefore more financially sustainable. The project leaders have considered partnering with school systems, corporate sponsors, NGOs, and government agencies related to job creation and/or youth development. Future collaborations should seek to explore program models that better suit the needs of community partners.

The project leaders are also interested in additional research related to the program. One interesting approach could be to assess parents’ perceptions of change in their children on a wide range of short-term and intermediate development outcomes during and after participation in the program (academic achievement, sense of belonging at school, creativity, innovation, wellbeing, etc.). Another line of inquiry could be to explore whether trainers experienced positive outcomes from their involvement in the program.

Finally, the project leaders are continuing to identify ways to make the program financially sustainable. They are seeking additional funding to support efforts to build on the successes of the initial program and co-create community-based interventions to nurture youth enterprises, in collaboration with youth, government and the private sector. Regardless of the format of future iterations of the program, there seems to be great potential for youth participation in sport to contribute to efforts to spark job creation, something that is vital to the futures of youth in African cities.

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Appendix 1

Sample Lesson Plan

WHAT IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP? CHARACTERISTICS OF ENTREPRENEURS

DURATION: 60 MINUTES

Session Overview	Materials Required
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome, introduction to entrepreneurship Introducing the characteristics of entrepreneurs and athletes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flipchart or blackboard Markers or chalk Tape Tables Chairs Notebook Pens or pencils A bucket and at least five balls (around the size of a tennis ball, but the exact type of ball doesn't matter)
Objectives	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate a basic understanding of entrepreneurship. Cite traits of a successful entrepreneur. Recognise traits common to entrepreneurs and athletes. 	
Trainer Preparations	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare the room in advance for risk-taking exercise described below. 	
Time	Activity Number/Title
15 mins	1. Welcome, introduction and interest in entrepreneurship
	Activity Details
	<p>Welcome, Introduction and Interest in entrepreneurship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce yourself as the instructor and your experience with entrepreneurship. <p><u>Introducing Entrepreneurship</u></p> <p>Ask the participants what they think entrepreneurship is. When there are no more responses, write the following phrase: <i>'The definition of entrepreneurship is the act of organizing and operating an income generating activity, and taking a financial risk to do it.'</i></p> <p>Pose the following questions and encourage participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does anyone practise business in your family? What are some examples of entrepreneurship in your community? Which businesses are the most successful in your community? Why?

Time	Activity Number/Title
45 mins	2. Characteristics of Entrepreneurs
	Activity Details
	<p><u>Risk-Taking Exercise</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up the room: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Place a bucket in the room. ◦ One metre away from the bucket, place a chalk mark (or tape) with the number '1' written on it. Two meters away mark the number '2'. At three meters away mark the number '3'. ◦ Set up the flip chart, putting the score sheet (see below) on one page. • Break the participants into small groups and provide each group with 5 balls. • Instruct the participants that they have four choices for each ball. They can either attempt to toss it into the bucket from line #1, line #2 or line #3 or they may choose not to toss the ball. Each team will attempt to earn points based on the following scoring system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ A ball successfully tossed into the bucket from Line #1 earns 2 points, but a miss is minus 3 points. ◦ A ball successfully tossed into the bucket from Line #2 earns 3 points, but a miss is minus 4 points. ◦ A ball successfully tossed into the bucket from Line #3 earns 4 points, but a miss is minus 5 points. ◦ A ball that is not tossed earns 1 point. • Provide teams with a few minutes to plan their approach. Teams may decide to have one person take every shot or share the throws in any way they desire. • Tally the scores for each team. <p><u>Debrief this exercise by facilitating a discussion about the following:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have groups briefly describe their strategy and why they chose it. • In what ways does risk-taking play a role in this exercise (e.g. more risk = more potential reward, but a greater chance of loss)? • In what ways does risk-taking play a role in sport? • In what ways does risk-taking play a role in entrepreneurship? • Besides the ability to take calculated risks, what other characteristics are shared between sport and entrepreneurship? <p><i>Trainer Note: The list might include several of the following characteristics. Fill in missing items to enhance the discussion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to take calculated risks • Ability to set and achieve goals • Uses efficient management practices • Perseveres, even when times are tough and especially after some failure • Ability to use creativity to solve problems • Listens to others. • Has good relations with other individuals • Ability to motivate and lead others • Manages time well • Can communicate clearly • Work in group settings

Trainer Note: The above debrief is critical to setting the stage for the rest of the program. Risk-taking is not necessarily a more important characteristic shared by athletes and entrepreneurs, but is meant to be a launching point for a discussion about other characteristics shared by both, and why this program connects sport and entrepreneurship.