

BUSINESS STUDIES TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGH SCHOOLS

Tiisetso Perseverance Khasuli¹, Rhulani Maluleka², & Abelwe Maluleka¹

¹*Department of Education & Curriculum Studies, University of Johannesburg (South Africa)*

²*Academy of Computer Science & Software Engineering, University of Johannesburg (South Africa)*

Abstract

Entrepreneurship education has been positioned in South Africa as a response to persistent youth unemployment and as a means of building learners' agency, creativity and problem-solving skills. In the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), Business Studies is expected to contribute to this agenda by developing entrepreneurial competencies rather than only transmitting theory. The study reported herein explored how Business Studies teachers perceive and implement Business Studies as a vehicle for entrepreneurial skill development in Grade 10-11 classrooms. It focused on the pedagogical strategies teachers use, the constraints they experience and the extent to which classroom practice aligns with experiential learning expectations. The study was framed by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and adopted an interpretivist qualitative design. Four Business Studies teachers were purposively selected from two secondary schools in the Johannesburg West District, Gauteng, representing a township school with limited resources and a well-resourced urban school. For analytical purposes, two teachers were classified as novice teachers and two as experienced teachers based on the years of teaching experience reported in this study. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews and were analysed thematically. Findings show that teachers understand entrepreneurship education to empower learners to identify opportunities, plan and budget, build confidence, and develop leadership through collaborative tasks. Teachers reported using group discussions, case studies, role-play, business-plan activities and small school-based ventures. However, teaching remained largely theoretical and examination-driven due to curriculum pacing pressures, limited time, overcrowded classes, and uneven access to resources. When interpreted through Kolb's cycle, learners were perceived to engage mainly in abstract conceptualisation, with fewer opportunities for concrete experience and active experimentation. The paper argues that strengthening entrepreneurship education in Business Studies requires feasible experiential tasks, teacher development focused on practical pedagogies and stronger school-community support.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship education, business studies, experiential learning, teacher perspectives, South Africa.*

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has become a central educational concern because it is linked to innovation, employment creation and learners' capacity to participate productively in economic life. In South Africa, this concern is particularly important because young people are expected to leave school not only with subject knowledge, but also with the ability to recognise opportunities, solve problems and make informed decisions in formal and informal economic contexts. Entrepreneurship is generally understood as the ability to identify and act on opportunities to create value, whether through starting a business, developing a product or innovating within an existing organisation (Ratten, 2023). In education, this understanding is linked to competencies such as creativity, innovation, risk taking, leadership and problem-solving (Miço & Cungu, 2023). Business Studies is therefore an important school subject, as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement presents it as a subject that develops knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for informed, ethical, responsible and productive participation in the economy (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2011).

Since the start of democracy, South Africa has undergone curriculum reforms intended to make education more learner-centred and responsive to social and economic needs (Gumede & Biyase, 2016). The stated purpose of Business Studies aligns with this reform agenda, as the subject is expected to prepare learners to use creative thinking, identify business opportunities, and solve business-related problems

(DBE, 2011). However, the inclusion of entrepreneurship content in the curriculum does not automatically lead to the development of entrepreneurial skills. Research has raised concerns about the implementation of entrepreneurship education in schools, including the tendency for teaching to remain textbook-based, theoretical and unevenly resourced (Mbatha & Ndovela, 2024; Sathyanand et al., 2025). This creates a policy-practice gap: while the curriculum promotes entrepreneurial thinking, classroom conditions may restrict learners' opportunities to experience, practise and apply entrepreneurship meaningfully.

Existing studies show that entrepreneurship education is affected by teacher preparation, resources, assessment demands and school context (Nchu, 2015; Ruskovaara & Pihkala, 2013), with particular challenges where support is limited (Mbatha & Ndovela, 2024). However, less attention has been given to how Business Studies teachers make sense of these demands in Grade 10–11 classrooms. This matters because entrepreneurship education is often framed as a response to unemployment and economic participation, but its enactment depends on teachers' interpretations of CAPS, their pedagogical choices and the resources available to them (Mahadea & Kaseeram, 2018; O'Connor, 2013).

Therefore, the study focused on Business Studies teachers' perspectives and practices in two different school contexts. The study was guided by the following research question: How do teachers perceive and implement Business Studies as a vehicle for entrepreneurial skill development in South African high schools? Attention was given to the pedagogical strategies teachers use to foster entrepreneurial thinking and the challenges they encounter when integrating entrepreneurship into their lessons.

2. Theoretical framework

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Kolb (2014) argues that learning occurs through the transformation of experience and that effective learning involves a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. This framework is useful for studying entrepreneurship education because entrepreneurial competence cannot be developed solely through theory. Learners need opportunities to participate in business-related tasks, reflect on those experiences, connect them to concepts and apply new insights into changed situations.

In the context of Business Studies, concrete experience may include role-play, business simulations, school-based sales activities or mini-ventures. Reflective observation involves learners thinking about what worked, what did not work and why. Abstract conceptualisation requires learners to connect their experiences to formal Business Studies concepts such as profit, marketing, risk, budgeting and forms of ownership. Active experimentation involves testing revised ideas, planning improved strategies or trying a new business approach. The framework, therefore, provided a way of analysing whether teachers' practices enabled learners to move beyond abstract theory into practical entrepreneurial action.

Table 1. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is applied to entrepreneurship education in Business Studies.

Concrete experience	Reflective observation	Abstract conceptualisation	Active experimentation
Learners participate in a mini-venture, role-play, market day or business simulation.	Learners discuss what worked, what failed and what could be improved.	Learners connect the experience to profit, risk, budgeting, marketing and business ownership.	Learners revise ideas, test another strategy and apply learning in a new task.

Source: Researcher's conceptualisation based on Kolb (2014) and the study findings.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative interpretivist design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand how teachers interpret and experience entrepreneurship instruction in their own classroom contexts.

The study was conducted in two secondary schools in the Johannesburg West District, Gauteng. School A was an urban township school with partial access to educational facilities and approximately 1,100 learners. School B was a well-resourced urban school with full access to educational facilities, including ICT, and approximately 750 learners. The two schools were selected to allow the study to consider how different resource contexts shape teachers' perspectives and practices.

Four Grade 10–11 Business Studies teachers were purposively selected because they taught Business Studies and had relevant experience for the study. The minimum teaching experience represented in the sample was three years. To address the distinction between novice and experienced teachers in this

study, teachers with three to four years of teaching experience were classified as novice teachers, while those with five to eight years were classified as experienced teachers. This classification was used only for analytic variation within this small qualitative sample and not as a general definition of teacher expertise. All the participants had no entrepreneurial experience.

Data was generated through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up the analysis. This allowed the researcher to identify patterns in how teachers perceived entrepreneurship education, how they implemented it and what factors constrained or enabled their practices.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the relevant authorities and principals before interviews were conducted. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants were told that they could withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used for both teachers and schools.

4. Results

Five major themes emerged from the interviews. These themes show that teachers recognised the value of entrepreneurship education and sought to use learner-centred activities, but they also encountered contextual barriers that hindered practical implementation. Table 2 summarises the themes, related codes and grounded frequencies from the analysis.

Table 2. Themes, related codes and grounded frequencies from the interview analysis.

Main theme	Related codes reflected in the interviews	Grounded frequency
Teachers' role as facilitators	Teachers guide learners to construct knowledge independently (4); promote learner-centred methods such as discussions and group projects (3); encourage practical application of ideas (3).	3-4
Teaching entrepreneurship is too theoretical	Lessons focus heavily on textbook content with minimal practical application (4); concepts are taught for examinations rather than skill development (3); learners show limited engagement where lessons lack real-world context (2).	2-4
Creativity is central to entrepreneurship teaching	Teachers emphasise creativity as essential (4); use role-play, product design and mini-business tasks (3); encourage learners to identify opportunities (3).	3-4
Entrepreneurship teaching empowers learners	Teachers associate entrepreneurship with confidence and independence (4); employability and problem-solving (3); and learners' own ventures (2).	2-4
Resources constrain practical entrepreneurship teaching	Teachers report limited financial and material resources (3); limited infrastructure and administrative support (3); overcrowded classes and lack of materials restricting experiential learning (3).	3

4.1. Teachers' role as facilitators in teaching entrepreneurship

Teachers understood their role as more than transmitting Business Studies content. They described themselves as facilitators who should guide learners towards independent thinking, participation and application of knowledge. Mrs Neuwe explained that she uses "probing questions that lead the discussion to the lesson topic", while Mr Abongile stated that every lesson should "begin from the known to the unknown" in order to check learners' understanding. These responses suggest that teachers try to make lessons accessible by linking new content to what learners already know.

Participants also referred to group work, discussions, information searches, and class activities as ways of promoting learner participation. Ms Lerato explained that learner-centred teaching allows learners "the opportunity to explore the topic for themselves". This shows that teachers value active learning and understand that entrepreneurial thinking requires more than listening to explanations. However, the extent to which such practices were sustained depended on time, class size and available resources.

4.2. Teaching entrepreneurship in Business Studies is too theoretical

A strong theme across the interviews was that entrepreneurship in Business Studies is still taught too theoretically. Mr Abongile argued that "the content prescribed in the Business Studies Teaching Plan is concentrated on theory rather than practical", while Mrs Neuwe indicated that learners enjoy practical aspects but often struggle when concepts remain abstract. Teachers were concerned that theory alone does not sufficiently expose learners to the realities of running or starting a business.

Mrs Neuwe gave a practical example when she said that telling learners how to make and sell ice blocks is not the same as allowing them to try it themselves. Her point was that learners may hear the steps, but without practice they remain uncertain about how business ideas work in real situations. This finding

shows a gap between knowing about entrepreneurship and learning entrepreneurially. Teachers associated this gap with CAPS content coverage, assessment pressure and limited time for extended practical projects.

4.3. Creativity and learner empowerment

Participants repeatedly linked entrepreneurship education to creativity. They argued that learners do not always need large amounts of capital to learn entrepreneurial thinking; rather, they need opportunities to generate ideas, identify needs and test small solutions. Ms Lerato explained that learners could use school functions such as Parents' Day, market day, spring day, or awards day to sell affordable, legal products. Such examples show how everyday school events can become spaces for entrepreneurship learning.

Teachers also viewed entrepreneurship as empowering. Mr Abongile stated, "I tell my learners every day that I am not teaching them to be employed, but to employ themselves". This view was echoed by participants who associated Business Studies with self-confidence, independence, leadership and preparation for future business careers. Ms Sisipho explained that Business Studies introduces learners to the idea of starting a business through topics such as forms of ownership. Mrs Neuwe added that the subject can influence learners to establish their own businesses and contribute to the economy.

4.4. Challenges constraining experiential entrepreneurship education

Despite teachers' positive views, several constraints limit the implementation of experiential entrepreneurship education. The first was the lack of teaching and learning resources. Teachers explained that in some schools, learners and teachers rely mainly on textbooks, with limited access to computers, the internet, libraries, or materials for practical projects. Mrs Neuwe and Mr Abongile noted that "resources are scarce", and Ms Lerato added that learners were expected to research assignments even where libraries and internet access were not available.

The second constraint was overcrowded classes. Teachers indicated that large class sizes made it difficult to form groups, monitor learner participation and provide individual attention. Mrs Neuwe described how difficult it was to move between desks during group work because of limited space. The third constraint was the positioning of Business Studies as a filler subject in some schools. Teachers reported that some learners were placed in the subject not because of interest, but because it was considered a route to passing Grade 12. This affected learner motivation and made it more difficult to develop sustained entrepreneurial engagement.

These challenges were not only material but also pedagogical. Teachers wanted to use practical, creative and learner-centred strategies, but they had to work within a curriculum and assessment environment that encouraged content coverage and examination preparation. Consequently, practical activities such as mini-businesses, market days, or role-play tended to occur occasionally rather than form a regular part of entrepreneurship teaching.

5. Discussion

The findings show that Business Studies teachers recognise entrepreneurship education as a vehicle for learner empowerment. They saw its potential to build confidence, creativity, independence and problem-solving skills, which supports the view that entrepreneurship education should be active and learner-centred, enabling learners to engage with opportunities and apply knowledge in meaningful contexts (Gibb & Hannon, 2006; Ratten, 2023). This finding addresses the study's problem: although Business Studies is expected to develop entrepreneurial skills, classroom conditions do not always enable practical entrepreneurial learning.

The findings also show that practice remains shaped by theory, examinations and resource conditions. In relation to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, learners were perceived as spending much of their time in abstract conceptualisation, with fewer opportunities for concrete experience and active experimentation. This is important because Kolb (2014) argues that learning is strengthened when experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation are connected. Without opportunities to test and reflect on business ideas, entrepreneurship education risks becoming theoretical rather than preparation for economic participation.

The study highlights a tension between teachers' intentions and the conditions in which they teach. Teachers described themselves as facilitators and used learner-centred strategies such as group work, role-play, case studies, business-plan activities and school-based ventures. However, overcrowded classes, limited ICT access, lack of materials and time pressure restricted how deeply these activities were used. This is consistent with Ruskovaara and Pihkala's (2013) argument that teachers' implementation of entrepreneurship education is influenced by classroom resources and institutional support. Both novice and experienced teachers identified similar problems, suggesting that practical entrepreneurship education is

shaped not only by teacher experience, but also by school context, curriculum pacing, assessment demands and access to support.

Creativity emerged as a bridge between curriculum theory and entrepreneurship practice. Teachers' examples of market days, school functions, mini-ventures and small sales activities show that experiential learning does not always require complex infrastructure. However, such activities require time, planning, school management support and a curriculum environment that recognises practical work as legitimate learning. Without these conditions, creativity remains an occasional strategy rather than a sustained pedagogy.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study explored Business Studies teachers' perspectives on teaching Grade 10 and 11 learners for entrepreneurship. The findings show that teachers view Business Studies as having strong potential to develop entrepreneurial skills and prepare learners for self-employment and economic participation. Teachers positioned themselves as facilitators and used discussions, group work, role-play, case studies, business-plan activities and small school-based ventures. However, entrepreneurship teaching remained largely theoretical. Learners were exposed to concepts without sufficient opportunities to practice, reflect and experiment. From Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, learners may not complete the full cycle required for practical entrepreneurial development. Key constraints included limited resources, large classes, assessment pressure, limited time, and treating Business Studies as a filler subject.

The study recommends more practical entrepreneurship learning in Business Studies, teacher training in project work, mini-ventures and learner-centred pedagogy, stronger links with local businesses and community entrepreneurs, and assessment support that values application, reflection and creativity. The Department of Basic Education should support experiential entrepreneurship education that is feasible across school contexts.

Although limited to four teachers in two schools and interview data only, the study provides useful insight into teachers' experiences and a basis for further research involving learners, classroom observations and varied contexts.

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