

## Attitudes of Private Higher Education Students Towards Entrepreneurship: A Case of Distance Learners in Wolaita Sodo and Hossana Towns

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**Abstract:** Normally, students of higher educational institutions in Ethiopia have in the past had a guarantee of employment either in the public sector or in multinational firms. Currently they are finding it difficult to secure employment in these sectors. Therefore, this study was aimed to explore self-employment intention of private higher education students and their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. By using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, the primary data were gathered over a two months period, through the administration of a self-completion questionnaire delivered to 180 final year distance learning students from Business and Economics field. The survey data was analyzed using an SPSS (version 20). Majority of the students agreed (78.4%) by expressing a wish to start a business in an ideally considered age level of 31-40 for majority (54.6%), as they would like to be their own boss. They were also more likely to believe that they had the business skills and knowledge required for business ownership than students who did not want to start a business. Whereas, the most inhibiting factors for students who do not want to start a business are the shortage of initial capital and fear of the risk involved. They also consider business ownership as giving them less control over their lives and therefore, believe it would be easier to work for someone else. Interestingly, 81% of these students expressed the belief that a good business support structure would encourage more of them to start a business. Therefore, these findings have implications for academics, educators in entrepreneurship, policy makers, enterprise support agencies and future young entrepreneurs.

**Key words:** Distance learners • Entrepreneurship • Private Higher Education Institutions • Entrepreneurial Attitude

### INTRODUCTION

Wolaita Sodo, the capital of Wolaita Zone, is found in the Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). It is located 385kms from Addis Ababa via Shashemene whereas 330kms via Hossana as well as 155km from Hawassa-the regional capital-to the south-west. Hossana, the capital of Hadiya Zone, is found in the SNNPR. It is located 230kms from Addis Ababa to south and 175km from Hawassa to the west. Both of the towns have been used as distance education coordination centers for many PHEIs since they got recognition from FDRE MoE. That is why these centers are preferred for this study.

Entrepreneurship is a worldwide phenomenon with economic growth across the globe positively impacted by the emergence of new and innovative business start-ups. These new small businesses play a significant role in job

creation, influencing country leaders to recognize and support entrepreneurial start-up activity due to its positive contribution to the economy. Historically, economists have supported the view that entrepreneurship is responsible for economic expansion (Cole, 1965; Weber, 1978)[1] due to its association with profit orientation, capital investment and the creation of new markets (Cantillon, 1755; Schumpeter, 1975)[2].

According to Odunaike and Amoda (2013)[3] entrepreneurship is the art of setting up and running an enterprise in a profitable and sustainable manner. The entrepreneurs are those people who are innovative, discover opportunities for existing and new products and have the quest to satisfy the needs of the customers in market. To satisfy these needs, the entrepreneurs have to start up new ventures in line with the identified needs of the market (Dumbu and Chadamoyo, 2012). Overall, entrepreneurship can be regarded as the ability of

the individual to mobilize scarce resource, attaches risk to the exploitation of the existing business opportunities in a profitable way. The desire of entrepreneurship is to gain in the process, some revenue that are above the cost and risk associated with the entrepreneurial activity. Hence in developing countries those problems of unemployment and poverty can be alleviated drastically.

An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related. A person having a positive attitude toward a behavior would be more likely to perform the behavior in question as would a person with a negative attitude be less likely to perform the behavior (Allport, 1954). Attention has been given lately to the role attitudes play in self-employment. There are surely more factors involved in creating the entrepreneurial spirit than just a positive attitude, through the theory of planned behavior will this study seek to gain a better understanding of the attitudes students have towards self-employment as well as the factors that support or hinder the entrepreneurial spirit.

Till the end of twenties, Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions graduates were certain of employment in the civil service or the private sector. Self-employment was therefore primarily the sanctuary of non-college graduates or school dropouts. Until very recently many institutions of higher education have also continued this tendency by setting up job placement offices without a counter effort to set up entrepreneurship support units.

But, nowadays university and college graduates of Ethiopia are realizing it difficult to secure employment in these sectors. Consequently, a lot of time is wasted as graduates search for that elusive job. One of the most effective alternates suggested by the economists is self-employment. Self-employment or entrepreneurship can contribute a great amount of output throughout the world and Ethiopia is no exception.

The education system in Ethiopia is being challenged to produce job creators rather than job seekers. Current teaching promotes rote learning rather than application, problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills. Rubanju (2008) notes that in the traditional lecture hall or classroom, theory and applications are not linked. Studying via distance learning will allow students to apply theories to their own settings and to observe the effect on their environment. However, the majority of Ethiopian distance learners enroll in distance education in order to obtain a qualification and/or a promotion with the attitude that

distance education is easy; however, distance learning requires self-discipline and self-management. Thus, the general objective of this study was aimed to explore self-employment attitudes of private higher education students towards entrepreneurship at Wolaita Sodo and Hossana Towns [6].

The research was limited to the distance students of the three private higher education institutions in Wolaita Sodo and Hossana towns who were taking Bachelor Degree of Arts in business and economics fields. Also, the study utilized a questionnaire in assessing attitude, which may not have captured a more encompassing view of the construct 'attitude'.

### Related Literature Review

**Introduction:** It is important that entrepreneurship continues to grow and prosper positively affecting the economic growth of nations through job creation and economic development. Entrepreneurship studies have been influenced by the economics, psychology, sociology and strategic management literatures providing established theoretical frameworks and methodological tools (Gustafsson, 2004).

One leading management specialist, Drucker (1985), [6] has extended the notion of entrepreneurship by emphasizing opportunity and took this idea further, describing the entrepreneur as someone who actually searches for change, responds to it and exploits change as an opportunity. Chandler and Lyon (2001) [7] see the multi-disciplinary approach to entrepreneurship in a positive light suggesting this is one of the strengths of the field of entrepreneurship as it considers and borrows frameworks and methodologies from other legitimate social sciences.

**Education and Entrepreneurship:** The increased interest in entrepreneurship and in the number of institutions offering entrepreneurship education can be attributed to the acknowledgment by external stakeholders of the importance of the creation of new businesses and innovation for wealth creation and economic growth globally (Minniti *et al*, 2006). Studies about entrepreneurship education focus on enterprise education and consider course content, pedagogy, entrepreneurial learning and assessment (Greene and Rice, 2007) [8]. The need to evaluate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs has been made evident by several researchers (Block and Strumpf, 1992; Porter and McKibben, 1988) [9].

According to Bechard and Toulouse (1998) [10], the goal of entrepreneurship education training programs should be specific to the target clientele and in turn evaluation should be adjusted accordingly. Students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship can be changed over time (Hatten and Ruhland, 1995) [11] and a useful approach to the measurement of entrepreneurship programs is to evaluate participants' changes in attitudes and perceptions of entrepreneurship and the impact of these on their entrepreneurial intentions. However, Wang and Wong (2004) [12] in contrast suggested that education might be a deterrent to entrepreneurship as honour students show less interest in starting their own business, speculating that a longer time spent in education assimilating more business knowledge does not necessarily lead to higher interest in entrepreneurship.

Matthews *et al* (1995) [13] acknowledged the significance of education and the part it plays in entrepreneurial activity, stating that it is critical to attract the young and educated to entrepreneurship, especially as current industrial trends are towards a knowledge-based environment (Henderson and Robertson 2000; Postigo *et al*, 2006) [14]. Thus, higher education provides the skills required for the formation of firms within these knowledge-based industries. Furthermore, Scott *et al* (1988) [15] observed that undergraduate students, with the assistance of an entrepreneurial education strategy, could be helped to consider entrepreneurship as a career.

More recent research would appear with findings to prepare students for self-employment (Klapper, 2004), [16] as University Career Centres tend to provide information about large organizations therefore, promoting a large firm culture (Henderson and Robertson, 1999; Oakey *et al*, 2002). Large firm culture according to Vickery *et al* (1990) and Henderson *et al* (1999) demoralizes and actually inhibits the entrepreneurial spirit and encourages the majority of students to plan to work for someone else. However, Vickery *et al* (1990) [17] countered these arguments by quoting the six fold increase in annual new business registrations in the USA in one generation stating this would seem to correlate better with the boom in secondary and higher education than with a major personality change.

In general, entrepreneurship education is an important component of business school education (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003; Zhao *et al.*, 2006) [18] providing a stimulus for individuals making career choices to consider self-employment thereby increasing new venture creation and economic growth. Main

objective was an examination of the influence of entrepreneurship education on student's attitudes towards entrepreneurship and their self-employment intentions. Therefore the current study sought to examine the role of the private distance education institutions in promoting entrepreneurship among their undergraduates.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was designed as the cross-sectional survey for the quantitative study which was used to gather the relevant data with regard to undergraduate students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. By using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, the primary data were gathered over a two months period, through the administration of a self-completion questionnaire delivered to 180 final year distance learning students from Business and Economics field. The survey data was analyzed using an SPSS (version 20). Frequency tables were used to summarize the respondents profile and other requiring data of the study whereas the descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviations of participants' answers were calculated in order to determine their entrepreneurial attitudes [19].

Distance learning students of the aforementioned private higher education institutions filled out a questionnaire asking them to express their attitudes towards self-employment. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to collect data from the participants. The convenience survey, in which students filled out the questionnaire during a tutorial period, gave 104 valid responses while the snowball sampling was used to collect the remaining amount of the total sample size used for the current study [20].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Characteristics of the Participants:** The total sample of this study is comprised of 180 final year undergraduate distance learners taken from three Private Higher Institutions within Wolaita sodo and Hossana towns, SNNP. It is of interest to this current research to note the representation of distance learning students in the field of Business and Economics regardless other fields. Total number of final year students undertaking degree course used for current research questionnaire from St. Marry's University, Unity University and Alpha University College are 80 (44.4%), 40 (22.2%) and 60 (33.3%) respectively [21].

Table 4.1: Number of distance learning students surveyed in each of the institutions and centers

Institutions	Actual responses of students in both centers for each institution		
	Wolaita Sodo	Hossana	Total
St. Marry's University	50	30	80 (44.4%)
Unity University	25	15	40 (22.2%)
Alpha University College	30	30	60 (33.3%)
Total	105	75	180

Table 4.2: Demographic Data of Distance Learners at Private Higher Education Institutions

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	61	33.9
	Male	119	66.1
Age	Below 20 years old	5	2.8
	20-25 years old	9	5
	26-30 years old	159	88.3
	31-40 years old	7	3.9
Entrepreneurship course taken	Yes	116	64.4
	No	64	35.6
Occupation	Government official	10	5.6
	Full time employee	90	50
	Part time employee	60	33.3
	Owner / Private business	12	6.7
	Others	8	4.4

Table 4.3: Preferred Ideal age to start a business

Ideal age to start a business	Frequency	Percentage
20-25	19	13.5
26-30	41	29.1
31-40	77	54.6
41-50	4	2.8

Note: N= 141

Table 4.4: Type of business students would like to start

Type of business	No. of participants	Percentage
Wood and metal works	17	18.5
Retail	18	19.6
Agriculture/Animal Breeding	7	7.6
Health & Beauty	8	8.7
Education	6	6.5
Entertainment	8	8.7
Food processing	14	15.2
ICT	10	10.9
Unsure	4	4.3

Note: N=92

Table 4.5: Important influencers in the encouragement of starting business

Important Influencers	No. of participants	Percentage
Parents & Family	34	22.4
Education System	29	19.1
Career Advisors	8	5.3
Friends	51	33.6
Entrepreneurs I know	10	6.6
Media	12	7.9
Other	8	5.3

Note: N=152

Majority of the respondents are from Wolaita Sodo center (58.3%) with the remaining coming from the Hossana center. Therefore, the attitudes of the student sample in this study is mainly based on respondents from the two distance learning centers found in Southern region [22].

As in the Table 4.2 above presented the summary of the demographic data, sixty six percent of the students were male. Majority of the students were from 26-30 years of age (88.3%). However, there were not more than 5% of participants for the range of less than and greater than to that of above mentioned range of age. Among the participants, higher proportion of students (64.4%) was taken entrepreneurship course directly or indirectly whereas the remaining part was not [21-25].

#### Students Who Want to Start Their Own Business:

Out of the total usable responses considered for this study, 141 (78.4%) participants agreed that they were interested in starting their own business. As we can see in Table 4.3 below, more than half of these students (54.6%) expressed a wish to start a business in an ideally considered age level of 31-40 years followed by 26-30 years as the ideal age to start a business.

The most repeated reason why this age range was preferred by most of the distance learners was because they believed this range is the productive period and they needed time to gain more experience before starting a business [26].

As it is seen in the table 4.4 above, most of the students would like retail, wood & metal work and food processing type of businesses whereas each of the remaining types are also considered by a few ones to be started within the expected period of age [27].

As indicated in the table 4.5 above, most of the undergraduate distance learners (33.6%) said that they would be/are influenced by their friends followed by parents & family (22.4%) to start their own business. As advertisement is used to form positive attitudes towards something (Berger & Mitchell, 1989) would education system along with career advisors, entrepreneurs they know and relevant factors influence students' opinions as well as intensify curiosity [28].

### Why Students Want to Become Self-Employed?:

The distance undergraduate students that want to start a business are in agreement with many of the traditional reasons identified as typical entrepreneurial reasons for business startup (as shown Table 4:6) by displaying a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. Those students who want to start a business were more likely to consider entrepreneurship as an attractive career [29].

The main reasons for those who strongly agreed (MS= 1-2) were that it would permit them to be their own boss as well as enable them to make best use of their personal skills and competencies. The measured responses were consistent with the findings of Brindley and Richie (2000) who recognized that being own boss was a key positive feature for the undergraduates when

considering starting their own business. Similarly the main reasons for those agreed (MS= 2-3) ones on starting their own business were that it would enable them to use their education to the best advantage, self-fulfillment and a career that would challenge them, allow them to work in the area of their own choice and to use their business ideas. These results are in line with Oakey *et al.*, (2002) who distinguished 'flexibility of choice in the work environment' as an important feature for those wanting to start their own business [30].

Almost half of the participants saw taking entrepreneurship course as an advantage to self-employment and when comparing to relevant statistics which shows a very encouraging degree of self-employment in Ethiopia (CSA, 2001) do we see that self-employment may be a relevant expression of taking entrepreneurship course for both of them. Therefore, entrepreneurship course is probably a decisive factor to one becoming self-employed. In line with Davidsson and Henerkson (2002) finding, it is too bad that the public sector is the dominant employer in Ethiopia in these areas where undergraduates have the highest employment rates which hinders these individuals' opportunities to start businesses in their field of expertise [31].

The present research noted that the majority of undergraduate students that want to start a business (53%) believe they require more work experience before actually entering into entrepreneurship. This is in line with the findings of Carter and Collinson (1999) who also found entry into entrepreneurship delayed because of the belief that respondents required more work experience.

Table 4.6: Mean and Standard Deviations for the reasons of students who would like to start a business

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
I want to be my own boss.	1.92	1.004
I have an assertive strong personality that is necessary for business ownership.	2.14	1.005
It would enable me to make best use of my personal skills and competencies.	1.96	.864
It would enable me to make a lot of money.	2.06	.923
It would enable me to do things in my way.	2.16	.895
It would enable me to have more control over my life.	2.15	1.003
It would enable me to pick my own working time.	2.21	.985
It would give me the flexibility to combine my career with my family life.	2.19	.957
It would give me better work / life balance.	2.17	1.073
It would give me a career that would challenge me.	2.52	1.102
There would be less boundaries to my career than if I worked for someone else.	2.72	1.247
I would be able to use my business idea(s).	2.10	.892
I would be able to use my business skills.	2.05	.939
I would be able to use my education to the best advantage.	2.04	1.102
It would give me self fulfilment to own and run my business.	2.13	.995
It would enable me to give something back to society.	2.35	1.125
It would gain me respect from others.	2.32	.939
It would enable me to work in the area of my choice.	2.23	1.095

Note: N=140

The reasons want to start a business are rated using a 6-point Likert scale labeled as 1 = strongly agree to 6 = Don't Know.

Table 4.7: Mean and Standard Deviations for Reasons of students who do not want to start their own business

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
I would find the responsibility of running a business too difficult.	2.17	.857
I would find the pressure too stressful.	2.61	1.145
I do not have the personal skills and competencies necessary.	3.11	1.132
There is too much red tape e.g. legal and employment regulations required when running a business.	3.00	1.495
The Ethiopian market is too small and does not have enough potential.	2.72	.826
It would take up too much of my time.	2.83	1.465
It would be easier to work for someone else.	2.44	.984
I don't have a good business idea.	2.22	1.114
I do not have the relevant experience needed to run a business.	2.56	1.247
I don't have the business skills required to run a business.	3.17	1.425
I would be afraid of the lack of a secure income.	3.17	1.200
I would have to work too hard.	2.83	1.505
It could take over my life.	2.39	1.145
It would be too difficult to run a business if I had family commitments.	2.22	.878
Entrepreneurship does not have the same status or respect as other careers.	2.22	.808
I would be afraid that my business would fail.	2.56	1.464
It would be too difficult to obtain the finance necessary.	2.22	1.003
The educational area that I studied is not suitable to start a business in.	2.33	.907
I do not have the contact or networks necessary to start a business.	2.67	.970
I do not know how to access business information or support structures.	2.61	1.335
The educational system does not encourage starting your own business.	2.33	.767

Note: N=39

The reasons do not want to start a business are rated using a 6-point Likert scale labeled as 1 = strongly agree to 6 = Don't Know.

This requirement of more work experience is of particular interest to the present research because work experience is often acknowledged as an important factor in the development of a business idea (Madsen *et al*, 2003). However, in the current study lack of work experience did not appear to interrupt on these undergraduates' perception of their ability to develop a business idea, as majority agreed that they are being able to use their business idea(s) as an important reason to start their own business.

**Students That Expressed They Do Not Want to Start Their Own Business:** The findings related to the distance learner students who do not want to start their own business is presented in the following table. From the sample of 180 appropriate responses, some of the students 39 (21.6%) said that they did not want to start their own business [32].

The majority of the undergraduate distance students who do not want to start their own business in the current study agreed they are afraid that if they started their own business it could fail and they could run into debt. They are also agreeing with the concept of the responsibility of running a business is too difficult that means the fear of risk (with MS=2.17 and SD=.857) this would be a reason for not starting their own business. This is in line with

Wang and Wong (2004) who also noted risk as a serious inhibitor to business startup by undergraduates.

It would also be observed as there is a distinct lack of confidence in these distance undergraduate students' attitudes concerning their ability to start a business. Many believe they do not have a good business idea (MS=2.22) to enter in to entrepreneurship. This is in line with findings cited in many literatures about lack of good business idea as a reason for not starting a business (Carter and Collinson, 1999; Klapper, 2004). Having family commitment is also found to be a problem for those not wanting to start a business, with many distance undergraduate students believing entrepreneurship does not have the same status or respect as other careers. A variable aggregate of distance students also agree that as they do not know how to access business information or support structures.

Generally, it was found that most of distance students in the current study who stated they do not want to start a business mentioned as a reason that they do not know how to access a good business information or support structure which would encourage more students to start a business. This is consistent with Oakey *et al*. (2002) who consider that the availability of more business support would encourage many students to consider entering into entrepreneurship.

Table 4.8: General attitudes towards entrepreneurship

Characteristics	Strongly Agree	Agree	Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
You require special characteristics or traits to start your own business.	36%	42%	14%	5%	3%	0%
Undergraduates do not like taking risks.	22%	54%	13%	7%	1%	3%
Undergraduate business owners are taken less seriously than non-graduate business owners.	19%	32%	28%	14%	2%	5%
You need to work extra hard when you have your own business.	40%	52%	3%	4%	0%	0%
You need to be very determined to run a successful business.	42%	34%	8%	6%	4%	6%
To own a successful business you need to be selfish.	3%	6%	10%	44%	32%	5%
To own a successful business you need to be ruthless (cruel).	2%	8%	19%	36%	25%	10%
Support from family and friends is important when starting a business.	34%	55%	5%	3%	0%	3%
There is a lack of undergraduate role models, who own their own business.	30%	38%	16%	10%	6%	0%
Society in general encourages undergraduates to start their own business.	3%	11%	18%	37%	29%	2%
The media encourage undergraduates to start their own business.	6%	12%	31%	26%	21%	4%

Note: N=172, 180, 180, 163, 170, 173, 180, 178, 180, 176 and 174 respectively.

Table 4.9: Immediate intentions after completion of present degree course

Career intentions immediately after degree	No. of participants	Percentage
Continue further with your education?	85	47
Work with a company and obtain a professional experience?	98	54
Work for the public sector e.g. civil service?	35	19
Work with a Small or Medium Company?	22	12
Work with a large Ethiopian company?	30	16
Work with a large multi-national company?	27	15
Start your own business?	68	38
Continue with a business that you have already started?	27	15

Note: N=180

As the respondents could give more than one answer the percentage column will not total a hundred percent

**General Attitudes of the Combined Group of Students Towards Entrepreneurship:** The general view of the combined group of 180 distance students towards entrepreneurship in general is summarized in Table 4.8 below.

As the result indicates in the above table, majority of participant students on this study (78%) perceived that required special characteristics or traits is important if one want to start one's own business, which is in agreement with Postigo *et al* (2006) whose research found entrepreneurs are seen as people with specific attributes. The need to work extra hard was also seen as a basic requirement when entering entrepreneurship with 92% of the students agreeing with this. There was also significant agreement on the need to be very determined to run a successful business with 76% of the students sharing this opinion. This is consistent to Gasse (1990) who found determination as an important trait for entrepreneurship. The relevant majority of the participants (89%) also acknowledged the support from family and friends as important when starting a business.

The study also identified as the majority of the distance learning students did not agree that it is necessary to be selfish (76%) or ruthless (61%) to own a successful business. This is related to the view expressed by Kalafatis and McMillen (2004) in which it was found that more than half of the undergraduate respondents surveyed disagreed that business owners only cared about the success of their business and did not care about any negative impact they may have on society or the environment.

The immediate intentions of the participants after the completion of their degree course is summarized in Table 4.9. It was found that over half of these students (54%) wanted to work with a company and obtain a professional experience immediately after completion of their undergraduate program. Whereas nearly half of the total participants (47%) said that as they wanted to continue further with their education. As Fletcher (1999) suggested the more educated a person is the more likely he/she is to start his/her own business, this could have a positive impact on future undergraduates.

On the other hand, appreciable amount (38%) of the combined group of undergraduate distance learners expressed a wish to start their own business immediately on the completion of their degree. As the current study found that specifically the students who expressed the wish to start their own business are no more likely to want to work with a company and obtain a professional experience than those do not want to start their own business.

### CONCLUSION

Total number of final year students undertaking degree course used for current study from St. Mary's University, Unity University and Alpha University College are 80 (44.4%), 40 (22.2%) and 60 (33.3%) respectively. Majority of the respondents are from Wolaita Sodo center (58.3%), male (66%) and within the range of 26-30 age (88.3%). Among the participants, higher proportion of students (64.4%) was taken entrepreneurship course directly or indirectly.

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