
Entrepreneurial knowledge and aspirations of dentistry students in South Africa: The influences of gender and race

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Abstract:

An investigation of the intentions and knowledge of entrepreneurship of final-year university dentistry students is reported, with particular regard to the factors of gender and race. A questionnaire survey was used with final-year dentistry students, over two years, at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. The findings show that dentistry students across race and gender groups believed that entrepreneurship education was important. At least half of the students showed an interest in starting a business practice soon after their graduation and completion of a mandatory one-year internship, with more male students indicating an interest in starting a business than female students. More Black African students indicated interest compared to other race groups (Coloureds, Whites and Indians). There were no significant differences between male and female students with regard to knowledge of entrepreneurship, but there were significant differences with regard to race in the scores for knowledge of entrepreneurship, with White students scoring the highest and African students the lowest. The authors conclude that entrepreneurship education should be included in the curriculum in the final year of dentistry studies to encourage business practice start-up soon after the one-year internship period, with the aim of contributing to growth in employment.

Entrepreneurship is now a mainstream topic in many countries around the world. It provides individuals with career options and has the potential to help societies to become self-sustaining (Scott, 2003). In South Africa the small business sector accounts for a significant proportion of economic activity. In general, higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa provide courses and qualifications which serve the needs of industry well, in that they educate students to become employees, typically in large businesses, rather than to consider the creative or innovative opportunities related to setting up their own businesses and becoming employers themselves. As a result, HEIs in South Africa are now increasingly obliged to redefine their role in the national economy, with instilling a greater entrepreneurial awareness and desire in the students now regarded as their primary function. It has been argued elsewhere that HEIs should also strive to consider local development needs carefully and support the promotion of entrepreneurial education initiatives (Nicolaidis, 2011).

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