

## **Entrepreneurship Education, a Panacea to Graduate Unemployment in Ghana?**

**Wilberforce OWUSU-ANSAH**

Department of Marketing and Corporate Strategy  
KNUST School of Business  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology  
University Post Office  
Kumasi, Ghana

**Kofi POKU**

Department of Marketing and Corporate Strategy  
KNUST School of Business  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology  
University Post Office  
Kumasi, Ghana

### **Abstract**

*Recently, the relationship between business ownership and unemployment has received considerable attention from policy maker; as fifty percent of university graduates unable to find jobs for three years post-graduation. Entrepreneurship education has been introduced at the higher educational level in Ghana over the last decade to apparently address the relevance of tertiary education and unemployment. The study investigates the influence of entrepreneurship education on students' career intentions and aspirations, and their attitudes towards business start-ups. Business students were surveyed before and after exposure to entrepreneurship education in order to examine the relative influence of the entrepreneurship programme. The study revealed that not only does entrepreneurship education influence the career intentions and aspirations of tertiary students but also influences their career intentions and aspirations towards self-employment. The study recommends setting up an enterprise centre to support students to encourage more students to recognise self-employment as a career option.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship education, unemployment, self-employment, career intention, career aspirations, career decisions

### **1.0 Introduction**

According to Asante, (2011) despite more than two decades of positive growth, the Ghanaian economy is yet to achieve the desirable structural transformation that is needed to move the country into the state of a modern, industrialised and prosperous economy (JoyFM online, 2011; Chronicle, 2011). Evidently with the soaring unemployment rate in Ghana, self-employment and small enterprise initiatives are presently high on the country's national agenda, in the hope that they will provide alternative channels of employment. Yearly, thousand of university graduates join the labour market in search of gainful employment. The challenge is not only tackling the already sizeable unemployed graduates, but also of absorbing the new entrants into the labour market. Underlying this situation is the fact that the training which tertiary students receive has not been fully successful in equipping them with desirable skills and competencies required for job creation and self-employment (Madumere-Obike, 2006, Amaewhule, 2007 and Nwangwu, 2007). Recently, the relationship between business ownership (or self-employment) and unemployment has received considerable attention from policy makers. Persistently, high unemployment rates coupled with limited economic growth have triggered policy makers into giving greater importance to entrepreneurship and self-employment as ways to foster economic progress and reduce unemployment (Baptista and Thurik, 2004). Audretsch et al (2001) reports a dynamic relationship between self-employment and unemployment rates. On one hand, unemployment rates may stimulate start-up activity of self-employment. On the other hand, higher rates of self-employment may indicate increased entrepreneurial activity, reducing unemployment in subsequent periods (Audretsch et al., 2001).

The biggest weakness of the Ghanaian economy is the chronic joblessness of a vast proportion of the people. Though Ghana's Minister for Employment and Social Welfare, Enoch Teye Mensah, has indicated that there are no statistics on the unemployment problem in Ghana (BF&T, 2011), Professor Aryeetey is of the opinion that the extent of joblessness and under-employment is evident in the huge number of youth which line the streets "selling things nobody will buy" (Joyfm online, 2011, BF&T, 2011). It is reported that as many as 50% of graduates who leave Ghanaian universities and polytechnics will not find jobs for two years after their national service, and 20% of them will not find jobs for three years (Aryeetey, 2011). This statistics is considerably high compared to the global unemployment rate is of 6.1% and even that of South Africa where a third of the active labour force is unemployed (Asante, 2011). However, a similar statistics from Nigeria is even worse with as many as 80% of graduates finding it difficult to get employment annually (Adejimola and Olufunmilayo, 2009). This, notwithstanding, Ghanaian high unemployment rate appears to lend support to recent research findings that revealed that the capabilities being developed in graduates by the higher education process in general are not matching with the national manpower needs (TV3, 2010; Afenyadu et al., 2001; Afenyadu, 1998).

This is a serious development and a puzzling one, given the numerous educational reforms that have been put in place in Ghana (NACVET, 2010). Besides, given the importance of entrepreneurship in helping to solve problems of unemployment, Government agencies and Scientists have become engaged in all aspects related to new companies and new business owners in recent decades (Sánchez-Escobedo et al., 2011). Yet, as Storey (1991) documents, the empirical evidence linking unemployment to entrepreneurial activity is fraught with ambiguities. While some studies report that greater unemployment serves as a catalyst for start-up activity (Reynolds et al, 1995; Reynolds et al., 1994; Hamilton, 1989; Highfield and Smiley, 1987; Evans and Leighton, 1989 and 1990), still others have found that unemployment reduces the amount of entrepreneurial activity (Audretsch and Fritsch, 1994; Audretsch, 1995). Baptista and Thurik (2004) argue that the ambiguities reflect the conflicting forces, namely, a two-way causation between changes in the level of entrepreneurship and that of unemployment: a 'Schumpeter' effect of entrepreneurship reducing unemployment and a 'refugee' or 'shopkeeper' effect of unemployment stimulating entrepreneurship.

Quite recently, a number of tertiary educational institutions in Ghana including Universities and Polytechnics have started offering entrepreneurship education to their students as a way of creating awareness and encouraging them to consider self-employment as a career option. For instance, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), a leading university in Ghana, has taken up this challenge and has introduced many new programmes. It is now on the throes of implementing a comprehensive entrepreneurship development programme including Kumasi Business Incubator, Enterprise Centres etc. (Adarkwa, 2010). The question of what has happened to these initiatives and how effective these have been especially, the effect of entrepreneurship educational initiative on students' career intentions and attitudes towards business start-ups needs to be investigated. To what extent has the entrepreneurship education at the tertiary level succeeded? Is the increasing graduate unemployment in Ghana an indicator of the failure of the various educational initiatives including entrepreneurship education? It is against this background that the current study seeks to investigate the extent to which entrepreneurship education has influenced the KNUST students' career intentions and aspiration as well as examine its relative influence on their attitudes towards business start-ups following exposure to entrepreneurship education.

## 1.2 Previous Studies

Collins English Dictionary (1994) defines career as a profession or occupation chosen as one's life work or the general progression of one's working or professional life. Similarly, Goffman (1961) defines a career as any social strand of a person's course through life which provides the broader context for understanding entrepreneurial careers. While some career theorists view careers only in terms of the work one performs (Arthur *et al*, 1989), a career in entrepreneurship is greatly influenced by what is occurring in the person's personal life and family as well (Dyer and Gibb, 1994). It is argued that a theory of a career in entrepreneurship should employ a broad definition of career to encompass more complex roles and dynamics (Dyer and Gibb, 1994). Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence behaviour. Intentions are commonly distinguished into two types, namely, choice intentions and intentions to perform a given behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). A person's career choice intentions for the purpose of this study is conceived as the choice between pursuing an entrepreneurial career in life or a career path as an employee.

A career intention is therefore defined as motivational factors that influence career choice behaviour. In the psychological literature, intentions have proven as best predictor of planned behavior, particularly when that behavior is rare, hard to observe, or involves unpredictable time lags. New businesses emerge over time and involve considerable planning. Thus, entrepreneurship is exactly the type of planned behavior for which intention models are ideally suited (Bird 1988; Katz and Gartner 1988, Krueger et al, 2000).

People tend to imitate the behaviour of those they admire, in both negatives and positive aspects, and this behaviour can change over time to the extent that, in today's society, it is natural to think that social interaction with entrepreneurs who can serve as role models can influence a person's intention to create a business (Bird 1988; Kolvereid 1996; Rubio et al. 1999, Koschatzky and Stahlecker 2010; Sánchez-Escobedo et al, 2011). Ronstadt (1985) argues that most people, even entrepreneurs, do not think of entrepreneurship as a career. Only a minority of all future entrepreneurs will know when they attend college that they will probably pursue entrepreneurship as a major life goal. Of those who are considering entrepreneurship while at college, it is envisaged that only a small minority will start immediately after graduating. Another small minority will wait but anticipate an entrepreneurial career by explicitly choosing to work for someone else in a position or industry, which will prepare him or her for future venture(s). However, the vast majority that become entrepreneurs will go to work for someone else without anticipating an entrepreneurial career. Ronstadt (1985) stresses the importance of sensitising students to the fact that entrepreneurship is a possible career option they will face or consider in the future.

Regarding the issue of enterprise/entrepreneurship education and training and echoing the conceptual tension surrounding "enterprise" and "entrepreneurship", Hannon (2005, p. 12), argue that current supply reveals "confusion about the purposes and impact" of enterprise/entrepreneurship education, whilst the UK's National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCGE) acknowledges that such education and training is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty about what and how it should be taught (Greene and Saridakis, 2007; Pittaway and Cope, 2007).

Nevertheless, several research studies in USA, Europe, Asia and West Africa indicate that students' attitude towards enterprise and small business are positive (Karr, 1985; Brockhaus and Horowitz, 1986; Scott and Twomey, 1988; Lord, 1999; Ekpoh and Edet, 2011). Jackson and Vitberg (1987) reported that business college graduates and students are increasingly disenchanted with career prospects as organizational employees. Consequently, more and more students view the possibility of starting and operating their own business as a viable alternative to being employed in an established company (Duffy and Stevenson, 1984). Other surveys support this view. Wilson, et al. (2007) found that, entrepreneurship education could also increase student's interest in entrepreneurship as a career. Karr (1985) reveals that 46% of college students consider a 'business of one's own' an excellent way to get ahead. In a University of Pittsburgh survey of 1000 MBA students from top business schools in the U.S., 44% responded that they wanted to become independent entrepreneurs. In contrast only 34% wished to be high-ranking corporate managers (Sandholtz, 1990). Scott and Twomey (1988), based on data collected from English students, reported that 25% had a business idea and that 41% aspired to self-employment. Figures by Harrison and Hart (1989) revealed that over 51% of a sample of Northern Ireland students expressed a positive desire to run their own business.

Additional research by Autio, et al. (1997) found that entrepreneurship education creates a positive image for the entrepreneurs and contributes to the choice of entrepreneurship as a professional alternative by graduates. Brenner et al. (1991) found in their study of 237 graduates in the U.S. that business graduates generally perceived business ownership in a positive light. However, the survey revealed an inconsistency between the graduates' attitudes towards owning and operating their own business and their intentions toward pursuing such a career. When they were given complete freedom of choice, 55% preferred operating their own business. An interesting point was that when they were asked their most likely choice considering their actual situation and constraints upon their options, only 5% indicated that they would probably choose to operate their own business.

Similarly, Fleming (1992) in a study of Irish graduates, who participated in entrepreneurship initiatives and programmes while at college, found that a comparatively high proportion (45%) of the sample reported that the course taken had a positive effect on their subsequent career decision. The study also found that 5% of the respondents had initiated a start-up venture within five years of graduation.

A follow-up study of the Irish graduate cohorts who participated in entrepreneurship initiatives and programmes, found that 28.4% had initiated own businesses a decade after graduation (Owusu-Ansah and Fleming, 2001). Hannon (2009) reports that 78% of the undergraduate students surveyed in Ireland expressed an interest in starting their own business in the future. However, 30% of non-business postgraduates surveyed reported being interested in starting their own business at some point later in their career, whilst 39% are interested in setting up their own business through their college infrastructure (Hannon, 2009).

In spite of the relationship demonstrated between level of entrepreneurship education and business ownership, it has been argued that formal education in general does not encourage entrepreneurship. Rather, it prepares students for the corporate domain (Timmons, 1994), promotes a 'take-a-job' mentality (Kourilsky, 1995) and suppresses creativity and entrepreneurship (Chamard, 1989; Plaschka and Welsch, 1990). It is clear from the evidence of a number of studies in the literature that the preferred career of a considerable number of students and graduates is towards business ownership. However, Robertson (1984) reported that higher education inhibits entrepreneurship development in Ghana. Nevertheless, a recent study carried out in Ghana involving tertiary students' revealed respondents' overwhelming (79.5%) positive attitude towards self-employment (Owusu-Ansah, 2004). However, many students and graduates perceive several obstacles that militate against business start-ups, such as lack of experience, or lack of finance, which block the path toward their preferred choice (op cit). There are a number of factors that motivate an individual to set up his/her own business and the principal ones as reported in a study includes to obtain wealth and success, be own boss, independence from employer and flexibility of the working hours offered. Others are 'to contribute to job creation', 'desire to innovate technologically' and 'identification of a new business opportunity' (Hannon, 2009).

To reiterate, the entrepreneurship education at the tertiary level has grown over time and is more structured in Ghana. KNUST has also introduced entrepreneurship education of which no serious investigation has been made to verify the effectiveness and the relevance of the programme. This is particularly so, when it is reported recently that graduate unemployment is high in Ghana (BF&T, 2011; Chronicle, 2011; Joyfm Online, 2011). The objective of this paper is to evaluate the impact of entrepreneurship education on career intentions and aspirations of tertiary students who have been exposed to different types of entrepreneurship education in Ghana. To achieve this, the following sub-objectives were formulated in the development of the research instruments:

- *To investigate the influence of entrepreneurship education on career intentions and aspirations.*
- *To examine the influence of entrepreneurship education on attitudes towards business start-ups.*

### **1.3 Research Methodology**

The study was designed in a manner to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship education offered to the undergraduate second year students at KNUST School of Business (KSB) in the 2010/2011 academic year to solicit perceived influence of exposure to entrepreneurship education on career intentions and aspirations as well as on their attitudes towards business start-ups. The usage of students exposed to entrepreneurship education as the unit of analysis is consistent with similar numerous studies on entrepreneurial intentions (Kolvereid, 1996, Autio et al., 1997, Tkachev and Kolvereid, 1999, Krueger et al., 2000, Fayolle and Gailly, 2004, Veciana et al., 2005).

With the total population of the undergraduate second year (KSB students) for 2010/2011 of 352, questionnaire were administered to all students of which 310 valid questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 88.1%. The valid data were coded and results were analysed using an SPSS computer package. The survey questionnaire consisted of 29 questions and 100 variables. Most of the questions in the survey questionnaire were closed questions with checklists and Likert rating scales where the respondents were offered a choice of alternative replies. Questions were designed to be easy and quick to answer by students. The closed questions could be divided into questions of facts and questions of perception. The closed questions were arrived at via a process of pilot test using initially a wider framework of open questions. The layout and sequence of the questions were designed to facilitate ease of response. Significance of test results is reported in the three ways suggested by Coolican (1990), based on the probability level (p): 'significant':  $0.05 > p < 0.01$ ; 'highly significant':  $0.01 > p < 0.001$ ; and 'very highly significant':  $0.001 > p$ . All probability values reported are based on two-tailed tests as each comparison has two possible directions. In addition two educationalists with Business and entrepreneurship backgrounds were interviewed to gain further insights from the survey findings.

## 1.4 Research Findings

### 1.4.1 The influence of entrepreneurship education on career intentions and aspirations

This section explores the first of objective of the study in relation to the influence of entrepreneurship education on career intentions and aspirations.

Table 1 outlines the students' career intentions before exposure to entrepreneurship programme. Interestingly over 77% (77.4% or n=240) of the respondents initially intended to go into employment compared to 16.1% (n=50) who wanted to further their studies. However, 6.5% (n=20) initially aspired to self-employment.

**Table1. Immediate Career Intentions of Respondent Prior to Entrepreneurship Course**

	No.	%
Further studies	50	16.1
Employment	240	77.4
Self-Employment	20	6.5
Total	310	100

Table 2 presents the results of the respondents' immediate career intentions, which is within one to two years of graduation. The majority of the respondents 64.5% (n=200) aspire to work in the employment of others. It was also instructive that 25.8% (n=80) of the respondents aspire to work for themselves following the exposure to entrepreneurship. Apparently, a career in the employment of others represents the major career intentions and aspirations of both groups of respondents. The correlation co-efficient between students' exposure to entrepreneurship and career intentions suggests that there is a significant relationship between exposure to entrepreneurship and career intentions (Kendal's tau<sub>b</sub> = 0.591, p < 0.05). The level of significance is at 98% confidence level.

**Table 2: Immediate Career Intentions of Respondents after Graduation**

Immediate Career Intention	No.	%
Further studies	10	3.2
Employment	200	64.5
Self-Employment	80	25.8
Others (Not stated)	20	6.5
Total	310	100
Correlation Tests		
Kendall's tau <sub>b</sub>	0.528	
Significance	0.05 (two-tailed)	
Spearman's rho	0.602	
Significance	0.06 (two-tailed)	

The 'significance' of the relationship between entrepreneurship education and career intentions of the student respondents is not surprising. The entrepreneurship programme aims to provide insights into the role of entrepreneurs and small business in society and attempts to develop core skills and attributes necessary for entrepreneurship such as creative problem-solving, diagnostic skills, communication and project management. It also provides an enriching integrative educational experience such as the development of business plans and business consulting, which allows students to integrate accounting, finance, marketing and other business disciplines. It appears that the entrepreneurship programme both aided in engendering entrepreneurial career intentions and aspirations and encouraged over one-in-four (25.8% or n=80) of the respondents to include self-employment in the career intentions compared to 6.5% (n=20) prior to exposure to entrepreneurship (see Table 1). The results and statistical tests outlined in Table 3 indicate the extent of the perceived influence of the entrepreneurship education programmes on the career intentions of the respondents.

**Table 3 Influence of Entrepreneurship Programme on Career Intentions**

	No.	%
Not at all	-	-
Very little extent	40	12.9
Average Extent	60	19.3
Great Extent	110	<b>35.5</b>
Very Great extent	100	<b>32.3</b>
Total	310	100
Weighted Av. Score	<b>3.9</b>	
<b>Correlation Tests</b>		
Kendall's tau b	.345	
Significance	0.05 <b>(two-tailed)</b>	
Spearman rho	.430	
Significance level	0.05 <b>(two-tailed)</b>	

Majority of the respondents, 67.8% (n=210) thought that the entrepreneurship programme has either a 'great or very great extent' influence on their career intentions. The weighted average score of 3.9 on a five-point scale, with one representing no influence at all and five for a very great extent of influence, also confirms the respondents' perception. Moreover, there is a statistical significant relationship between respondents' entrepreneurship education programmes and career intentions ( $\tau_b = 0.345$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) at 95% confidence level. The implication is that entrepreneurship education programme of the respondents positively influence their career intentions. This finding statistically supports previous studies (Owusu-Ansah, 2004; Owusu-Ansah and Fleming, 2001) that found that an entrepreneurship education programme influences students' career intentions. Evidently, a significant relationship exists between entrepreneurship education programmes of respondents and their career intentions. This finding is quite interesting for a number of reasons. First, it suggests a vote of confidence for the entrepreneurship educational programmes offered at KNUST, as indicated by the high approval ratings. It demonstrates also that perhaps the entrepreneurship programmes and curricula match with students' expectations. This findings contradict with a similar study of three decades ago that found that higher education inhibited entrepreneurship (Robertson, 1984). Second, it is also an affirmation of the role of the university as an organisation with a great influence on the societal development through the programmes it offers.

#### 1.4.2 Attitude towards self-employment

This section presents information on the attitudes of respondents towards starting a business and perceived skills to undertake such ventures.

**Table 4: Motivation to Start Own Business**

	N	%
To a very large extent	170	54.8
To a large extent	90	29.1
To a certain extent	50	16.1
To a small extent	-	-
To no extent	-	-
Total	310	100
Weighted Average Score		4.4

The survey respondents were asked to report on a five-point scale, the extent to which they felt motivated towards starting own business. Table 4 outlines the results. An overwhelming 83.9% (n=260) of the business degree respondents felt motivated to either a large or a very large extent to start own business. A weighted average score of 4.4 is indicative of the level of motivation towards self-employment. This finding is also significant as it further strengthens the relevance of entrepreneurship education in motivating students towards a career in self-employment.

**Table 5: Do You Have Necessary Skills to Start Own Business?**

	n	%
Yes	280	90.3
No	30	9.7
Total	310	100

In order to explore the effect of entrepreneurship education on students' perceived ability to initiate and develop a new venture, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they have the necessary skills to start own business. The results are presented in Table 5. An overwhelming 90.3% (n=280) of the business degree respondents affirmed that they possessed the necessary skills to start own business.

**Table 6: Probability of Own Business in Future**

	n	%
Highly Probable	200	64.5
Probable	100	32.2
Some probability	6	1.9
Improbable	2	0.7
No probability	2	0.7
Total	310	100
Weighted Average Score		4.6

Continuing further with the investigation, students were asked the probability of their owning a business in future. The results are outlined in Table 6. Interestingly 96.7% (n=300) of the respondents indicated that a future business set-up was either probable or highly probable compared to 1.4% (n=4) who were not likely to set up. It is instructive that 96.7% of the survey respondents perceive future business ownership as probable or highly probable. The finding is revealing as it supports similar finding in the literature (Owusu-Ansah, 2004), but lends itself to many deductions. It is possible that the reported high predisposition as well as overwhelming perception of desirability of business set-ups is partly attributable to the exposure to entrepreneurship education.

However, it appears socio-cultural environment may also be a factor as speculated in the previous study (op cit). Business ownership appears culturally embraced and supported by many irrespective of academic background. Interest in business ownership varies from well-established formal businesses to informal ones, including petty trading. Anecdotal evidence reveals that the majority of Ghanaians have been involved in business activities particularly in the informal sector. Children of all ages have been commissioned by their parents and guardians to sell items including foodstuff and vegetables in most rural Ghana and in some instances, in semi-urban areas, while others have been involved in street hawking in urban areas to augment family incomes. At any rate, it appears that it was the wish of the majority of the respondents (96.7%), including those who gave career intentions and aspirations other than self-employment, to start own businesses in future.

Evidently, a positive relationship appears to exist between exposure to entrepreneurship education and attitude towards business start-ups as the weighted average score of 4.6 on a five-point scale substantiates the finding. What is puzzling is that, in spite of this reported high career intentions and aspirations is in line with the previous studies and the current one, the unemployment rates continue to escalate in Ghana among graduates. What could possibly account for graduates' inability to translate the high intentions and aspirations into career decisions? In order to address this question, the perceived barriers to business start-up were investigated.

**Table 7: Perceived Barriers to Business Start-ups**

	N	%
Finance	100	32.3
Business Ideas	20	6.4
How to Explore Business Opportunities	80	25.8
Business Management Skills	10	3.2
Business Advice	100	32.3
Total	310	100

The survey respondents were asked to indicate their perceived barriers to business start-ups and the findings are outlined in Table 7. Nearly a third of the respondents, (32.2% or n= 100) perceived finance as a barrier to business start-ups in Ghana. A similar number of the respondents (32.3% or n=100) perceived that an absence of business advisory services could be a militating factor in achieving their self-employment objective. Besides, over a quarter (25.8% or n=80) of the respondents were of the opinion that a lack of know-how to start a business was a barrier to business start-ups. Interestingly, only 6.4% (n=20) of the respondents saw an absence of business ideas as a barrier to business set-ups. Evidently finance and absence of business advisory services appear to represent the two greatest barriers to self-employment career option to the majority of the survey respondents. Another revelation is that only 3.2% (n=10) of the respondents perceived lack of business and management skills as a barrier.

The three major barriers perceived by student respondents were finance (32.3%), appropriate business advisory services (32.3%) and how to exploit business opportunities (25.8%). This finding appears to support earlier studies (Hannon, 2009) where finance and lack of business experience were reported as key barriers to business start-ups.

### 1.5 Conclusion

It is evident from the study that entrepreneurship education exposed to the Business school students at KNUST is creating entrepreneurship awareness and encouraging students to include self-employment in their career intentions and aspirations' options as well as inculcating a positive attitude towards business start-up. However, in order for the project to fully succeed, certain potential barriers that could militate against the successful translation of the high career aspirations and overwhelming positive attitude towards business start-up have to be addressed. It is against the three perceived barriers to business establishment, namely finance, business and exploitation of business ideas. The reported perceived barriers to business start-ups could possibly explain low business start-up decisions in spite of the high career intentions and aspirations. This observation supports Brenner et al's (1991) report that 'when their respondents were asked their most likely career choice considering their actual situation and constraints upon their options, only 5% indicated that they would probably choose to operate their own businesses'. It is recommended that a student enterprise centre is set up to provide business advice, mentorship and other practical support towards the realisation of the self-employment aspirations of the students. In addition, the Centre could help expose and link students to funding sourcing institutions such as Ghana Angel Investors Network, National Board for Small Scale Industries and EMPRETEC to help address the barriers students indicated. A further study is required to monitor what the students do with the high motivations and aspirations gathered at the tertiary level towards self-employment in order to address the research gap between enterprise education and actual career decisions in business establishment.

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