

Theory of Knowledge (Epistemology) and Application in Youth Livelihood Project: the case of Emmanuel Development Association, in Ethiopia.

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Theory of Knowledge (Epistemology) and Application in Youth Livelihood Project: the case of Emmanuel Development Association (EDA), Ethiopia.

Abstract

Before we discuss the practices of knowledge in youth livelihood projects in EDA it would be relevant to define the philosophy of knowledge (epistemology) first. The philosophy of knowledge is Epistemology, and it is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge. Epistemologists study the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge, epistemic justification, the rationality of belief, and various related issues. Epistemology concerns itself with ways of knowing and how we know. The word is derived from the Greek words *epistémē* and *logos* – the former term meaning “knowledge” and that latter term meaning “study of” (Donald, 1967). Correspondingly Martinich (2021) updated the definition that epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge; and referred to as the theory of knowledge demonstrated by people within the context and reality. It is also considered as one of the four main branches of philosophy, along with ethics, logic, and metaphysics. Knowledge can be managed by individuals, groups, and organizations. The main goal of knowledge is to contribute to the science or body of knowledge to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the organization to its set objectives. Knowledge could be explicit, implicit, and tacit and that could be transferred from observation, practicing, and experimenting.

This paper sheds light on the existing challenge of youth unemployment and the practical experiences of the Emmanuel Development Association (EDA) at the local level to address the challenge of unemployed youth by implementing the youth-focused knowledge-based livelihood program since 2009 in Ethiopia. Ethiopia’s youthful population is an incredible asset and untapped resource for positive growth. Of Ethiopia’s population, estimated at 104 million, 41 percent is

under the age of 15. More than 28 percent are aged 15 to 29. Youth unemployment is estimated at nearly 27 percent. One reason for the high youth unemployment rate is low literacy (68 percent). Ethiopia's secondary school gross enrollment rate is 39.8 percent—far too inadequate for a country with Ethiopia's natural resources, economic potential, and global ambition. Technical and vocational education and training reached 352,000 students in 2015 and female enrolment continues to be higher than male enrolment. Due to the increasing population of unemployed youths in Ethiopia, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) started youth initiatives programs to provide training and Internship aimed at providing relevant work experience and skills to enhance sustainable livelihoods and self-employment. Sharing local knowledge within the context among the youth community has seen the important strategy to replicate the self and group employment in Ethiopia. According to literature the three key mechanisms of entrepreneurial theories examined, in the youth livelihood program as (1) the triggering role of experiential and observational fragments; (2) the imagination of possibilities; and (3) reasoning and justification the imagination of possibilities (March et al. 1991).

Keywords: Epistemology, knowledge, youth livelihood, youth unemployment, natural resources, economic potential, sustainable livelihoods, and self-employment.

Introduction

The philosophy of knowledge is Epistemology, and it is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge. Epistemologists study the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge, epistemic justification, the rationality of belief, and various related issues. Epistemology concerns itself with ways of knowing and how we know. The word is derived from the Greek words *epistémē* and *logos* – the former term meaning “knowledge” and that latter term meaning “study of” (Donald, 1967). It is also considered as one of the four main branches of philosophy, along with ethics, logic, and metaphysics. Knowledge can be shared and managed by individuals, groups, and organizations. The main goal of knowledge is to contribute to the science or body of knowledge to improve and enhance the effectiveness of the organization to its set objectives. Knowledge could be explicit, implicit, and tacit and that could be transferred from observation, practicing, and experimenting. This article demonstrates the practical knowledge acquisition to be shared with youth in the community that is implemented by the Emmanuel Development Association in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia’s youthful population is an incredible asset and untapped resource for positive growth. Of Ethiopia’s population, estimated at 104 million, 41 percent is under the age of 15. More than 28 percent are aged 15 to 29. Youth unemployment is estimated at nearly 27 percent. One reason for the high youth unemployment rate is low literacy (68 percent). Ethiopia’s secondary school gross enrollment rate is 39.8 percent—far too inadequate for a country with Ethiopia’s natural resources, economic potential, and global ambition. Technical and vocational education and training reached 352,000 students in 2015 and female enrolment continues to be higher than male enrolment. Due to the increasing population of unemployed youths in Ethiopia, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) started youth initiatives programs to provide training and

Internship aimed at providing relevant work experience and skills to enhance sustainable livelihoods and self-employment (Developing Ethiopian Youth Report, 2017).

This paper sheds light on the existing challenge of youth unemployment and the practical experiences of the youth-focused knowledge-based program in Emmanuel Development Association (EDA) at the local level by implementing tailor-made business skill training by master trainers to unemployed local youth from 2009 to 2017 in Ethiopia. Considering the above-mentioned tailored-made business skill training this paper highlights the three key mechanisms of entrepreneurial theories that examined, in the youth livelihood program as (1) the triggering role of experiential and observational fragments; (2) the imagination of possibilities; and (3) reasoning and justification the imagination of possibilities (March et al. 1991). Ethiopia's secondary school gross enrollment rate is 39.8 percent—far too inadequate for a country with Ethiopia's natural resources, economic potential, and global ambition to equip youth with the necessary marketable skills and knowledge. Technical and vocational education and training reached 352,000 students in 2015 and female enrolment continues to be higher than male enrolment. Due to the increasing population of unemployed youths in Ethiopia, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) started youth initiatives programs to provide training and Internship aimed at providing relevant work experience and skills to enhance sustainable livelihoods and self-employment.

According to authors, experiential mechanisms of belief formation have largely originated from the organizational learning and capabilities literature (cf. Levitt and March 1988; Zollo and Winter, 2002) which supports our past and current experiences of EDA to implement the same at the community level. Our perception and belief to empower the young men and women guided us to decide and to take action to implement this project in collaboration with the

multi-stakeholders group. The field-tested experiences of EDA became a source of our belief which helped us to implement this project with confidence as theories justify knowledge at the grassroots level (March 1991: 74; cf. Levitt and March 1988). The initial organizational experiences in creating social interaction and self-selection model played a vital role in the development of youth entrepreneurship in the community to transfer knowledge.

Moreover, theory and research constitute that the idea that knowledge comes from practices and experiments so that data and theoretical models are what establishes knowledge about the world (Piaget, 1932). The theory of acknowledges evolves from generation to generation based on the existing means of knowledge transfer. Tsoukas (1998) describes tacit knowledge, before the invention of modern writing and other technological means people use to learn from each other through oral tradition, like storytelling, demonstration of the process of production of different tools. Here the younger generation observes, learns the process, and tries little by little while assisting the elders. In the same way, in EDA, Youth Livelihood Business Toolkit (YLBTK) training is provided for ten days divided into two different rounds; the first round and the second round. The youth workers learn different skills and business-making knowledge in both rounds, while all the trainee youth learn and understand the contents of the business manual. The youth learn the whole process of business development from generating a business idea to the preparation viable business plan which is prepared based on personal interest, knowledge of the business, and market analysis within the context. In most cases, youth initiate business that they already *know how* through observation from their environment where from the group and individual business practitioners and mentors in the community, and started practicing little by little.

Cooper describes that “a person of great historical knowledge’ or ‘knowing a country well’, who suggests a notion of knowledge consisting, not of possession of lots of facts, but of a capacity to understand and explain, to fit things together and into the wider picture “(Cooper 1999). During the first round of the training, the Youth Workers (YWs) ‘learn by observation’ where they learn facilitation skills while the Master Trainers (MTs) provide the training. It is the time when they got the chance to observe how the MTs are providing the training using a different methodology, approaches, and practical exercise both in class and out of classes, by demonstration, particularly in different business centers.

The second round of the training is the times when the YWs have had have an opportunity to apply what they have theoretically learned from the MTs through observation. That is why this round is termed as ‘learning by doing. This time allows the youth workers to practice what they learned during the first round. Tsoukas (1998), describes “effective transfer of tacit knowledge generally requires extensive personal contact, regular interaction, and trust.” This kind of knowledge can only be revealed through practice in a particular context and transmitted through social networks and business mentors in the community.

EDA takes the facilitation and leadership role in the process of business management and transfer of such organized and codified knowledge, as well as the processes of coordination among the network partners such as the community of practice (CoP) members, MTs business mentors, and YWs. The YWs acquainted with both tacit and explicit knowledge and this approach helped them to discover new models and context-based business thinking to establish group or individual livelihood business activities.

The business mentors from the local community equipped with in-build mentorship knowledge and skills. This concept was described by Tsoukas (1998), tacit knowledge vs. explicit knowledge: “Although it is possible to distinguish conceptually between explicit and tacit knowledge, they are not separate and discrete in practice. The interaction between these two modes of knowing is vital for the creation of new knowledge. “According to Feldman. R. (2003), Traditional Analysis of knowledge (TAK), the member of community practice or youth workers have justified true belief, their belief maximizes the value of their business skills capacity to implement context-based livelihood development activities. In here, youth learn from youth, and (youth- to- youth) peer learning maintained.

Literature Review

Clifford’s thesis describes “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” The knowledge sharing among the youth is evidence-based and practically demonstrated in different types of business model projects in the region within the community. This is directly complemented with Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge, (Feldman, 2003). Here, the youth workers have enough evidence to establish their livelihood business activities based on the skills they are acquainted with, the trust and belief they developed, from mentors group members, and individual business projects.

Clifford describes, “belief is not epistemically wrong, but it is ethically right and beneficial with sufficient evidence.” The youth workers have knowledge and experiences, especially sensory experiences to form new business ideas, and have the capacity of exploring indigenous knowledge in the community to make an added value on their products. Besides, Cooper, (1999) describes, “the study of human knowledge, along with rationalism and skepticism, empiricism emphasizes the role of experience and evidence, especially sensory experience, in the formation of ideas, over

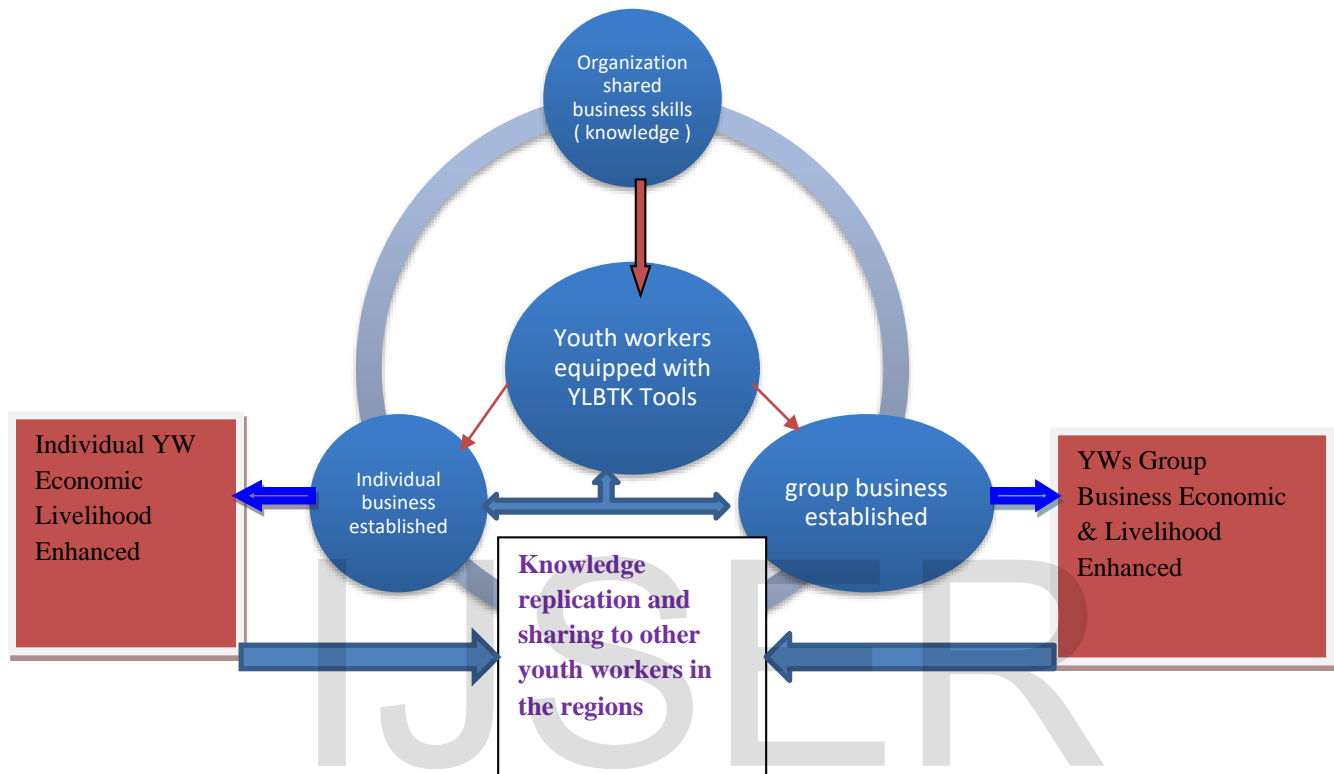
the notion of innate ideas or traditions; empiricists may argue however that traditions (or customs) arise due to relations of previous sensory experiences.”

The youth workers established strong synergy and solidarity among themselves for common objectives to change their economic and livelihood status for their existence. According to the UNDP report, there are 3.23% of unemployed youth, from the age group 15 to 34 young men and women (UNDP 2020) reported. According to African Development Bank (2014) report in Ethiopia, the unemployment rate for urban youth is 37.5% as opposed to 7.2% for rural youth. (Caveat: rural youth face high levels of underemployment). Among the many contributing factors, the most notable is the low absorption capacity of the formal sector, the low rate of employment creation, and the skills shortage as well as the lack of entrepreneurship of the youth. This situation created a sense of urgency for all youth works to look into workable strategies and opportunities to develop their sustainable livelihood business scheme for success.

On the other hand, EDA equipped the youth workers (YWs) with the necessary business knowledge and skills. Consequently, the skills training opportunity encouraged the YWs to demonstrate their empirical knowledge to implement their project. In the meantime, this implies and gives strengths of that the concepts of naturalistic view according to Cooper, (1993).

On the other hand, with its initial plausibility, youth livelihood intervention and knowledge sharing among the youth community is part of causal theorist's main idea of knowledge sharing in EDA's youth livelihood program (Feldman, 2003). The youth workers have a direct relationship with the skilled business mentors in the community who were equipped and acquainted with the business mentorship skills naturally to coach and mentor the youth workers for feasibility study, planning, and running a marketable business in their community.

Conceptual framework on Business Toolkit (YLBTK) Model by EDA.



YW- Youth Work , YLBTK -Youth Livelihood Toolkit , YWs-Youth Workers

Analysis of Cases

Alemayehu Megersa is a young boy aged 19 years, lives in the Akaki community. Alemayehu is one of the EDA Youth Livelihood Business Toolkit (YLBTK) Trainees. Alemayehu started his beekeeping by learning from an old man in his village who used to produce honey for his family and local business. The knowledge he gained 'learning by observation' helped him to adapt the knowledge of beekeeping from the old man in his village. Alemayehu didn't have any experience in beekeeping before he met the old man. In his first attempt, he went to the old man's backyard and made his observation on the traditional beekeeping scheme and he was inspired to

start his own beekeeping business. Originally, the old man has no theoretical knowledge of the beekeeping business, but he adapted the traditional knowledge (tacit knowledge) skill from his family.

In his first attempt to start a business, Alemayehu used bamboo trees which is cheap and found in the village but he could not collect and sustain bees for almost several weeks, this is because he did not know how to properly attract bees in the traditional beekeeping techniques. He used to smoke the hives with animal dung which is used to chase the bees during honey collection. Alemayehu could not talk and ask the old man due to the social norm to talk to elders. After a few research Alemayehu, found one young person who told him what kind of smoke and incense to use to smoke the hives for bee collection. According to Paul K. Moser and Arnold Vander Nat, (2003),” Philosophers ordinarily distinguish different kinds of human knowledge: Including empirical knowledge, non-empirical knowledge, and knowledge by description (a sort of propositional knowledge), knowledge by acquaintance, and knowledge of *how* to do something.”

Moreover, Alemayehu is skeptical, he didn't satisfy with the young man's advice, and his belief is still to use better beehives so that he started questioning himself why he couldn't attract bees differently? He planned to observe other beekeeping in a different community. According to his statement, he said: “I got a new insight about modern beehives.” After the discovery of the modern beehives, he challenged the young man who knows about beekeeping by using the traditional beehives for his livelihood and his family.

Alemayehu has learned how to use the modern beehives by going to the nearest beekeeping of one businessman and acquainted with ‘new knowledge on how to implement the modern beekeeping business in the community. According to the local government office information,

currently, Alemyehu's project has become a role model youth livelihood project, and that others youth workers adapting his techniques for the beekeeping business in the Akaki community.

According to Cooper, (199), John Locke's essay concerning human understanding, *the reliability of the senses*, Alemhayehu's confidence in selecting the modern beekeeping business made his belief successful. Locke portrays, "for good or ill, the issue of innate knowledge came to be seen as the pivotal one joined by the empiricists and the irrationalist rivals. Certainly, it looks to be pivotal when empiricism is characterized, in Locke's words, as the view that 'all our knowledge is founded in, and 'ultimately derives from', experience.'" (Book II, Ch. 1).

Based on Feldman, (2003) conclusion, the attempt to explain all the different kinds of knowledge in terms of propositional knowledge is unsuccessful. The most reasonable conclusion seems to be that there are (at least) three basic kinds of knowledge: (1) propositional knowledge, (2) acquaintance knowledge or familiarity, and (3) ability knowledge (or procedural knowledge). Alemayehu has gone through all these processes of knowledge without knowing the theories of knowledge, but he is very successful as one of the young businessmen in the Akaki community.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above it can be learned from our youth workers, how knowledge could be gained from experiences, training, and observations. However, we can validate in different forms of sense organs. Knowledge is a true belief. Belief and truth could ascertain justification. Based on Feldman's suggestion, we have now found two conditions for knowledge: To know something, you must believe it and it must be true (Feldman, 2003). Alemayehu has already proved all the theories mentioned by philosophers and he has recourse to all his senses in good working order, and he achieved the greatest certainty in his community by acquiring

knowledge in different modalities and shared his knowledge with other youth workers to put them in next level epistemology or knowledge management technique. His commitment, dedication, and initiative to acquire knowledge is not only created an opportunity to develop his personal and professional skills in beekeeping but also contributed to other youth workers to further research and look into an improved and simple way of apiculture industry with innovative ideas to produce queen bee rearing skills for bee multiplication business.

Currently, Alemayehu and his friends have started a new business venture in collaboration with others the queen bee rearing and bee multiplication projects, which are new in the region. This shows that how knowledge could be erudite, updated, and shared from time to time. The new queen bee rearing project became one of the popular projects in the region and become the center of excellence to transfer skills for the other communities in the region.

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