

Chapter 4

Informational Competencies Entrepreneurship and Integral Values in Higher Education

José Manuel Saiz-Alvarez
Tecnologico de Monterrey, Mexico

Edgar Muñiz-Ávila
Tecnologico de Monterrey, Mexico

Lizette Huevo-Ponce
Tecnologico de Monterrey, Mexico

ABSTRACT

Universities play a key role in modern societies inserted into a globalized economic world. This chapter studies how informational competencies, entrepreneurship, and integral values in higher education are necessary to foster economic growth and fight corruption. The authors especially are focused on distance education as it can be a tool to fight poverty by diminishing high illiteracy rates, mainly existing in developing countries. The purpose of the chapter is two-fold: 1) to study the impact of informational competencies in both education and entrepreneurship, and 2) to emphasize the importance of acquiring integral values by learners to be applied into educational processes based on emotional intelligence. As a result, students will be defined as prospective entrepreneurs endowed with the ability to recognize, internalize and understand emotions to be adjusted into relations and business behavior to impulse their goals. And in this sense, online education has an important role to play, especially in postgraduate studies, as in the case of MOOCs that are also analyzed.

INTRODUCTION

University institutions, especially those focused on post-graduate studies, have always played a crucial role in society. One of the main pillars for development is achieving highly-educated populations able to change their living realities through entrepreneurship, desire to change, positive attitude, adequate

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formation, and knowledge. Nations with lack or reduced number of universities, usually lag behind in the acquisition of knowledge by their populations, which leads to economic underdevelopment and poverty¹. Education is a fundamental human right, basic for every individual, and is essential for the exercise of all other human rights (UNESCO, 2015). Education promotes individual freedom and empowerment, and yields social and economic important development benefits². Yet millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities, many as a result of economic poverty and social discrimination.

When education is combined with informational competencies, skills acquired have a broader impact worldwide. This fact results into an accelerated gap enlargement between developed and developing countries. As the latter are unable to create new knowledge and many developing countries, mainly situated in Africa, are out of globalization. Consequently, developed countries are responsible of helping developing countries for their economic and social improvement, and education, trade liberalization and corporate tax competition (Keen & Mansour, 2010) are cornerstones in this process. This educational process can be impulsed with the use of online education, and the insertion of the target population into the digital era. Although international institutions are fighting poverty, more intense public-private partnership is needed to lessen the social impact of scarcity, mainly in developing countries. Economic resources are scarce, so a more efficient use of them is desirable with the adoption of new technologies and knowledge. One of the keys to reduce this impact is to put into action educational-based policies focused on acquiring practical skills and knowledge combined with investment in strategic sectors focused on sustainability and ethics. When higher educational levels are attained, countries are better able to face shortage gaps and social imbalances with success.

A second pillar in this educational process is the generation of entrepreneurs capable of rising social conscience, while developing strategies focused on Corporate Social Responsibility (hereinafter, CSR) oriented towards business growth. This entrepreneurial spirit must be rooted on integral values for avoiding corruption practices that can erode the whole changing process, as well as focusing on social-oriented business strategies based on cooperatives, and strong public-private initiatives driven by multilateral institutions, if necessary. Reducing economic and political corruption must be one of the main objectives to be fulfilled by nations worldwide. One of the main strategies to fight corruption is to reduce the number and complexity of administrative procedures, as there is a positive correlation between bureaucratic corruption and entrepreneurial activity (Neves, Menezes & Lima, 2015). Higher and sustainable development growth rates are generally linked to transparent practices. In fact, Kaymak and Bektas (2015) show that market growth rate, market intensity, market receptivity, commercial infrastructure, reduced country risk, and economic freedom are associated with lower levels of corruption in emerging markets.

Complementary to private-oriented educational and business strategies, in some developing countries the solidarity economics is emerging as a tool create socioeconomic wealth to be distributed as fair as possible to avoid socioeconomic imbalances (Saiz-Alvarez, 2016). Developed countries rely for their development on creating a large middle-class that does not exist or is very low in relative terms in developing countries. The importance of creating a large middle-class is given because this social class mainly pays taxes to support public expenses and income distribution. Only economies endowed with a large middle class are able to sustainable grow, as public deficit tends to be under control. So, implementing a basic economic policy strategy focused on creating a large middle-class is necessary to reverse this unfair situation in developing nations. And this can be achieved with the implementation of specialized education.

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