

Chapter 2

An Investigation of Patterns of Entrepreneurial Competencies Among Undergraduates at a Malaysian Public University

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial competences are related to the knowledge and skills needed to establish or manage a business that is profitable. However, research into the relationship between different types of entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial competencies has yielded varied results. This study investigates the various types of entrepreneurial competencies that students would have developed after taking the basic entrepreneurship course at the said university and compares them to students who did not take the basic entrepreneurship course. The study comprised 1049 undergraduates from different disciplines who took Basic Entrepreneurship class as well as individuals who did not take Basic Entrepreneurship. The Personal Entrepreneurial Competencies (PEC) assessment utilised had 13 competencies. The designed basic entrepreneurship enculturation course only positively predicted five of the 13 entrepreneurial competencies (i.e., persistence, systematic planning, initiative, see and act on opportunities, and use of influence strategies).

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial talents have been extensively researched in academic literature and are a matter of interest for educational institutions. There has been a spike in new start-ups especially online businesses that requires entrepreneurial skills, particularly after the Covid 19 epidemic. According to Ratten and Jones (2021), the COVID-19 crisis provided an excellent moment to devote greater attention to the value of entrepreneurial education among undergraduates.

The purpose of entrepreneurship education is *“to shape ideas of what it means to be an entrepreneur, not to promote an ideology of entrepreneurship, and to create critical awareness that contributes to the accountability of entrepreneurs to society”* (Rae, 2010, p. 603 in Allahar, 2021). The entrepreneurship education notion here is seen as building and sustaining a learning environment that encourages entrepreneurial qualities and behaviours such as becoming a creative and independent thinker, taking risks, accepting responsibility and appreciating differences (Gautam & Singh, 2015 in Kyguolienė & Švipas, 2019).

However, there is much debate on the different approaches and methods that are being used in entrepreneurship education. As proposed by many researchers there is a need to move towards an unconventional, experienced based (experiential) teaching and evaluation methods. Duval-Couetil, Shartrand & Reed (2016) found that combining entrepreneurial education with experiential learning, forced students to actively engage and reflect on their experiences, increasing the effectiveness of entrepreneurial education. In other words, experiential learning has the potential to teach or inculcate the much needed soft skills/ entrepreneurial competencies.

In order to support entrepreneurship studies within higher education, support for learning environments that diverge from traditional lecturer-led passive learning has been growing for some time (Bell & Bell, 2020). The practical based approach is a framework for designing entrepreneurship education courses that take context into account. This includes being aware of the relevance of specific context components to the course learning outcomes (Thomassen, Williams, Ramsgaard, Neergaard & Warren, 2020). According to Che Embi, Jaiyeoba, and Yussof (2019), entrepreneurship education should be structured to provide students with collaborative learning experiences, relevant hands-on skills, and real-world applications that lead to an entrepreneurial mindset/competencies.

Entrepreneurial competencies have been identified as a separate set of abilities required for effective entrepreneurship practice (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010), and can be cultivated via the entrepreneurship education process. Entrepreneurial competencies are regarded as a higher-level feature that encompasses knowledge, personality traits, and abilities that may be demonstrated as the overall capacity to perform a job function successfully, enabling entrepreneurs to achieve and maintain business success (Man, Lau & Chan, 2002). The launch, survival, and growth of new start-ups are all attributed to an individual's entrepreneurial competencies (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010).

Entrepreneurial competences in general includes generic and specialised knowledge, motivation for progress, risk taking, internal control, creativity, independence, attitude, self-image, social roles, abilities, opportunities, relationships, strategy thinking, organising, and commitment in executing a successful business endeavour (Malekipour, Hakimzadeh, Dehghani & Zali, 2017). Generally, these soft skills are associated with knowledge, skills, and experience, can be acquired via both practical and theoretical approach.

To achieve this in entrepreneurship education, it is necessary to inculcate in students the development of entrepreneurial competencies in order to better prepare them for an entrepreneurial life (Saranza,

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