

EXPLORING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET OF STUDENTS: IMPLICATION FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the entrepreneurial mindset of students after following an entrepreneurship education course. Several teaching techniques were utilized to infuse entrepreneurial skills and behaviour among students in the university settings. A modified version of entrepreneurial directed approach as discussed in the literature was adapted to conduct the study. Data were collected using qualitative and quantitative research method. Findings indicate that the entrepreneurial directed approach had broadened students' entrepreneurial understanding, and students are able to develop the entrepreneurial skills and behaviour required for their studies. The paper discusses practical implications for university entrepreneurship learning to guide students to have an entrepreneurial mindset.

Key words: Entrepreneurial Mindset, Entrepreneurial Directed Approach, Entrepreneurial Understanding, Teaching Techniques

Introduction

Enterprise education has been promoted to encourage entrepreneurial behavior in public universities. Literature review on entrepreneurship education program suggested that these programs are successful in encouraging entrepreneurs to start a business, or improve the performance of a business. Enterprise education programs provide social experience, such as opportunities to exercise significant responsibilities, to start one's own business and to observe relevant role models (Peterman & Kennedy, 2003). But the issue of the most effective approach to learning enterprise has been one that has raised regular discussion and debate especially on the issue of how to encourage the development of the qualities of enterprises through a teaching program and therein produce capable, skilled and enterprising individuals (Collins & Robertson, 2003). The result of Peterman and Kennedy's (2003) study proved that people who had low positive awareness of entrepreneurial experience before following the enterprise program recorded significant changes in their perception towards starting a business after participating in the enterprise program.

Collins and Robertson (2003) claimed that an understanding of the process of learning underpins any approach to a teaching programs and Gibb (1993) also argued that the learning mode for enterprise was the opposite of the didactic approach commonly used in higher education institutions. Several authors had differentiated entrepreneurship and enterprising behavior. Entrepreneurship is traditionally associated with a particular form of business activity, the creation of a firm, whereas enterprising behavior in the broader concept and the educational effort is directed towards developing self-reliant and enterprising people. The concept of enterprising behavior has been given a number of definitions, but in general seems to relate to personal characteristics such as willingness to change, initiative, opportunity identification and creation. Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006) identified the following objectives in entrepreneurship learning such as "learn to understand entrepreneurship", "learn to become entrepreneurial" and "learn to become an entrepreneur". All three objectives have some implications in terms of teaching approaches (Hyatti & O'Corman, 2004). Traditional teaching methods such as lectures, literature, reviews, and examinations do not activate entrepreneurship (Sogunro *et al*, 2004). Thus they suggested that the utilization of entrepreneurial directed approach will give the student the opportunity to take a new kind of role and to probe

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hidden aspects of the self, as role-playing encourage people to view situations from new perspectives (Sogunro, 2004). According to Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006) the entrepreneurial directed approach is well suited for gaining a better understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship, especially about the importance of the entrepreneurship process.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the entrepreneurial mindset of students after following an entrepreneurship education course. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the perception of students regarding the importance of teaching techniques in improving their entrepreneurial awareness and entrepreneurial skills.
2. Identify the reasons for selecting the top three most important teaching techniques.
3. Explore the entrepreneurial mindset of students after following an entrepreneurship education course.

Methodology

Sample and Research Procedure

A group of University students who had taken an entrepreneurship education course were selected to be the respondents of the study. They are 73 student teachers whose major was either in Moral Education or in Guidance and Counseling. Both groups of students were required to take the course as a requirement either in their major or minor package.

At the beginning of the semester, the students were given a course synopsis to ensure that they understand the content and the requirement of the course and the evaluation to be made in the process of learning entrepreneurship. Since all of them had never learned entrepreneurship before, this was the opportunity for the researcher to utilize the entrepreneurial directed approach in the class. Several teaching techniques were utilized to infuse entrepreneurial skills and behavior among the students. The course was conducted for a period of 4 months. The teaching techniques that were utilized during the process of teaching and learning were selected based on the concept of entrepreneurial directed approach which views learning as a process of co-participation among entrepreneurial individuals (Taylor & Thorpe, 2004).

In terms of delivering knowledge, the more traditional methods as lectures, using reading materials, discussion and tutorial were conducted. New teaching techniques which focused on students centered teaching such as case analysis, business plan, presentation, discussion, visit to business location, interview with entrepreneurs and running real business were introduced to match the entrepreneurial directed approach as discussed before.

Instrumentation:

The study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A self-rated questionnaire was utilized to collect the data. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part one consisted of eleven teaching techniques and students were asked to rate the importance of the teaching techniques utilized during the implementation of the course in improving their entrepreneurial awareness and part two consisted of students' perception on the importance of 11 teaching techniques in improving their entrepreneurial skills. Scales of 1 to 5 were used to measure the importance of teaching techniques where 1 indicates "not important" and 5 indicate "most important". Part three gathered students' perception through an open ended question to ascertain the three most important teaching techniques and the reasons why the technique is perceived as important. Part four measured students' entrepreneurial mindset, using an open ended question "*In your opinion, to what extent do you have the ability to be an entrepreneur?*" Students responded by answering the question on a piece of paper.

Findings and Discussion

Student's perceptions on the teaching techniques were measured and the findings suggested that the entrepreneurial directed approach had broadened student's entrepreneurial understanding, and they are able to develop the entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. The findings on students perception regarding the most important teaching techniques to improve awareness is illustrated in Table 1 and entrepreneurial skills are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1. Importance of teaching technique to improve entrepreneurial awareness

Teaching Techniques	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Lectures	3.69	0.99	8
Case analysis	3.79	0.98	6
Business plan	3.86	1.04	4
Presentation	3.71	0.95	7
Discussion	3.86	0.99	4
Visit to business location	3.97	1.07	2
Interview with entrepreneur	3.91	1.09	3
Reading materials	3.77	0.97	5
Tutorial	3.64	0.97	9
Laboratory	3.62	1.03	10
Run a real business	4.09	1.09	1

Table 2. Importance of teaching techniques to improve entrepreneurial skills

Teaching Techniques	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Lectures	3.84	1.10	11
Case analysis	3.64	1.13	8
Business plan	3.73	1.10	5
Presentation	3.69	1.06	6
Discussion	3.74	1.08	4
Visit to business location	3.87	1.00	2
Interview with entrepreneur	3.84	1.11	3
Reading materials	3.68	1.09	7
Tutorial	3.61	1.04	9
Laboratory	3.61	1.10	10
Run a real business	3.95	1.19	1

Table 1 and 2 illustrate that the 3 top ranked teaching techniques are: running a real business, visit to business location, and interview with an entrepreneur. These three techniques were considered important in

improving students' entrepreneurial awareness and skills since students are active participants in the learning process. A qualitative study was also conducted on these 3 techniques which are considered as most important by the students. The reasons why those techniques are important as perceived by students are as follows:

a) Running a real business

They obtain real business experience; understand and experiences the senses of responsibility in understanding the risks and rewards of setting up a business. They gain real experience in raising money, planning all the business management functions such as production, marketing, finance and the real business operation. At the same time students are able to improve their soft skills in the aspects of motivation, team work, networking and customer relation skills. Examples of students' perceptions are:

"Students are able to interact with people from all walks of life. They know their own potential when interacting with clients."

"Obtaining real experience through involvement in the business field is more effective."

"Involvement in the business field enables students to know the tricks and the trades of business from planning to application."

"Students get a chance to use real-life skills such as getting a capital, business operations, finance and marketing."

"Students can learn from their own mistakes."

"Obtain an understanding on the risks, perks and challenges in doing business."

"Obtain experience through real-life situations."

b) Visit to business location

Students perceived this activity as helpful because they are able to observe the real business operation, get the needed information direct from the entrepreneur, give them opportunity to understand who the real entrepreneur is, get more business input and to improve their self-motivation through the entrepreneur's experience and most importantly, they realize the ups and downs of operating a business. Examples of students' perceptions are:

"Opens students' eyes on how entrepreneurs run a business."

"Obtain real information directly from the entrepreneur."

"Exposed to an environment that encourages direct learning."

"Fosters interest, motivation and the desire to do business. Creates the drive in ones self."

"Able to learn the tricks and the trade of business and know the ups and downs of running a business."

c) Interview with entrepreneur

This technique is helpful because students get clear, direct and real explanation from the entrepreneur regarding their business experience, give students the opportunities to meet with the entrepreneur face to face, and learn the reality of being an entrepreneur, to know the life-story of the entrepreneur and to observe his or her personality. Furthermore students are able to get the exact and precise information especially on the success and failure factors in business. Examples of students' perceptions are:

"Able to know the entrepreneur's background. Makes the entrepreneur as the role model, entrepreneur's success develops into motivation and fortitude."

"Obtain explanation on issues raised directly."

"A chance to meet with the entrepreneur face to face. Obtain knowledge on business more clearly."

“Able to ask the entrepreneur’s success and failure factors.”

“Increases communication skills.”

After following the learning activities such as visits to business locations, interviews with entrepreneurs, running their own business, developing business plan, presentation and discussion; which facilitate learning by “doing”, students feel more confident and have a more positive mindset about starting businesses. In response to the question “In your opinion, to what extent do you have the ability to be an entrepreneur?” about 83% of the students felt that they are able and have the confidence to start their own business. This proves that entrepreneurial directed approach is capable in improving students’ mindset and skills in entrepreneurship. Examples of students’ responses are:

“I am capable of becoming an entrepreneur with a high determination, a deep interest in the business field, always increasing knowledge in the entrepreneurship field and other people’s success as a source of motivation, as well as the support and encouragement from family as well as peers. Hence, I always seek available opportunities and observe the competition as a source of guidance.”

“I am confident that I am capable of becoming an entrepreneur and I am able to go far in my future career.”

“Yes, I am capable of becoming an entrepreneur because I have the ambition to open a florist business.”

“Before this, I never thought of becoming an entrepreneur, but now that I enrolled in the class, I began to see what an entrepreneur means. I feel I am capable because of the confidence I have, I am beginning to see its uniqueness and the freedom to follow my own creativity.”

The findings of the study suggest that the key learning outcomes desired were achieved and students felt that they were well prepared and motivated to start their own business. The students in the study had undergone entrepreneurial learning experience because they learned from one another, learned by doing, learned by discovery, learned through mistakes and learned through solving problems as suggested by Collins (2003). Students also need to make self analysis on entrepreneurial attitudes and competencies to understand own readiness and ability in entrepreneurship.

The findings of this study concurs Dale’s (1969) suggestions that the least effective learning method involves learning through passive information presented through verbal symbols which is in fact the style of many lecturers, while the most effective learning method involves the student actively participating in “hands-on” learning activities. It has been discussed in the literature that in order to develop successful teaching methods it is important to develop a basic understanding of how individuals and groups of students actually learn. Gibb (2002) argued that when students can take ownership of their learning, able to study on a “need to know” basis, can participate in setting their learning goals and tasks, only then generic entrepreneurial competencies can be practiced and developed. The conclusion that can be made is that this study had seen the benefits of using enterprising mode of delivery, and that learning takes place in the unique context of each student.

The findings of the study also supports the argument made in Shapiro-Krueger model (Krueger & Reilly, 2000) which illustrates that perceived desirability is influenced by expected outcomes of starting a business and propensity to act is the tendency that motivates an individual who desire to start a business. The students in this study felt that they are able and have the confidence to start their own business because they felt capable of creating own business. This view is related to their perception of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one’s abilities to plan and execute the path required to produce certain outcomes. This self efficacy was developed from prior experience through “hands on” teaching methods that had been utilized when they followed entrepreneurship education course. This prior experience refers to quality and quantity of prior exposure to entrepreneurship.

Conclusion and Implication:

Student centered learning model known as entrepreneurial directed approach enable students to have a positive entrepreneurial mindset. Students were also able to identify the three most important teaching techniques after following an entrepreneurship education course. The techniques were: running a real business, visit to business location and interview with entrepreneurs. These teaching techniques were considered as the most important in improving their entrepreneurial awareness and skills. Students were also able to improve their enterprising behavior because of their prior exposure to entrepreneurship through other “hands on” teaching techniques such as developing business plan, case analysis, class presentation and discussion. Entrepreneurship education in universities should consider teaching techniques that require students’ to have “hands on” enterprise experience as well as to practice entrepreneurial directed approach in improving university students’ entrepreneurial mindset.

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