

First-year business students' entrepreneurial attitudes

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial competences consist of attitudes, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. Several higher education institutions support and promote students' learning of entrepreneurial competences during their studies. In order to verify the development of these competences they should be first examined at the early phase of the studies. Therefore, in the autumn 2017 when a new curriculum was launched in the business department of a Finnish university of applied sciences, a follow-up study with three sub-studies was planned to annually survey students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship, generic competences and subject-specific competences of entrepreneurship.

This article presents the results of the first sub-study which examined the first-year students' attitudes in the beginning of their studies. According to the findings, it seems that all in all their attitudes towards entrepreneurship are quite positive. Although the aim is not to generalize the results of the study beyond this student group, the findings provide a solid starting point for the implementation of the curriculum in its higher education institution, and thus, for the development of students' even more positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship during their studies.

Keywords: *Attitudes, Entrepreneurship, Business students*

1. Introduction

In the autumn 2017 a new curriculum (OPS2017) was launched in the business department of a Finnish university of applied sciences. Besides developing business skills the curriculum of business studies aims at supporting the development of entrepreneurial competences of students, and already enhancing the students' entrepreneurial behaviour during the studies. In addition, the new curriculum better supports the development of competences for setting up and running one's own company.

In order to make the development of students' entrepreneurial competences feasible, these competences can be examined by a follow-up study. It consists of three sub-studies related to entrepreneurial attitudes, generic entrepreneurial competences, and business-related entrepreneurial competences. Later, the development of the competences will be examined annually. The results of three sub-studies during the first year will create a solid starting point for the whole follow-up study, and each of them will be conducted again during the second and third year studies. Finally, the comparison of the results will be conducted and the development of the entrepreneurial competences documented.

This article introduces the results of the first sub-study related to the first-year business students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Thus, the findings create a starting point for follow-up studies in order to examine the impact of education on the attitudes.

2. Attitudes towards Entrepreneurship

In general, an attitude represents a summary evaluation of a psychological object. Further, one's own belief associates the object with a certain attribute, and the person's overall attitude towards an object is determined by the subjective values of the object's attributes in interaction with the strength of the associations. Only beliefs that are readily accessible in memory influence attitudes at any given moment (Ajzen 2001). Thus, an attitude is a mentally prepared state for any known subject, and a subjective consciousness that is affected by the environment. The attitude towards entrepreneurship, in turn, is an individual's conception of entrepreneurship, assessment and his or her inclination towards entrepreneurial behaviour or self-employment. (Chen & Lai 2010, 3).

The basic intention-based process model demonstrates the role of attitudes in an individual's behaviour. It is argued that attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioural control affect one's own intentions. In addition, according to the theory of planned behaviour, people act in accordance with their intentions and perceptions of their control over the behaviour. (Ajzen 2001; Krueger & Carsrud 1993). For example, to start a business is intentional and can best be predicted by intentions. Starting a business cannot be predicted by attitudes, beliefs, personalities or demographics. However,

intentions are best predicted by certain attitudes. In other words, attitudes predict intentions which, in turn, predict behaviour, and further, only intentions directly affect behaviour, while attitudes affect intentions. (Ajzen 2001; Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). Therefore, it is worth emphasising that his study makes a clear distinction between attitudes and an entrepreneurial intention.

3. Implementation of the study

According to the findings of an earlier study, entrepreneurial characteristics, interest and motives were quite a high level (means = 3.59-3.76) among international students (Kakkonen 2012a). This study focused on a national student group in Finland and it was conducted in September 2017. An invitation and a link for the Webropol questionnaire was sent by email to all the first-year business students who studied on a full-time basis on the campus (N = 65). By opening the link students were able to answer the questions in the questionnaire at the beginning of their classes of Professional Growth. There were 61 respondents in total.

The questionnaire included 27 statements related to four main themes: Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior (9 variables), Interest in one's own enterprise (4 variables), Entrepreneurial motives (6 variables) and Barriers of entrepreneurship (8 variables). It is worth mentioning that the statements were not introduced under any themes in the questionnaire. They were displayed in rows without any information on the main themes. In addition to 27 statements as variables (alternatives for describing how well the statements corresponded with their own opinions: 1 = not at all 2 = not well 3 = fairly well 4 = well 5 = very well), the students were asked to give background information on gender, and academic year.

The data analysis was made as follows. First, the frequencies, means and standard deviations were examined by each variable, and then the means of the variables were combined as the combined variables according to the four themes introduced above.

4. Results

The results are introduced below by the means of the variables (statements), and the means of the combined variables.

4.1. Respondents' background information

There were 61 respondents of which 34 were male students and 26 female students. Half of the respondents (n=30) were either 20 or 21 years old. Figure 1 presents the age groups of the respondents.

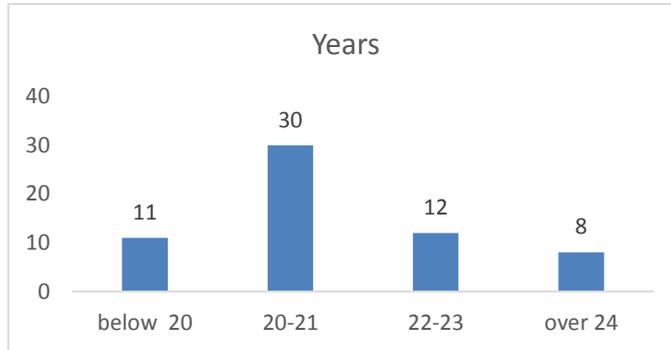


Figure 1. Age groups of the respondents

The question "Are there entrepreneurs in your close family?" received a negative answer from more than half of the respondents (n=34). Those who had entrepreneurs in their close family reported that their father, mother or both of the parents were entrepreneurs. Almost half of the respondents (n = 29) told that there are entrepreneurs among their circle of acquaintances. These entrepreneurs were uncles, aunts or friends. In addition, there were four alternative answers to find out about students' attitudes towards setting up a business: I have not thought about it, I have sometimes toyed with the idea, I have made preliminary plans, and I have already set up a business. Figure 2 presents the results by these alternatives.

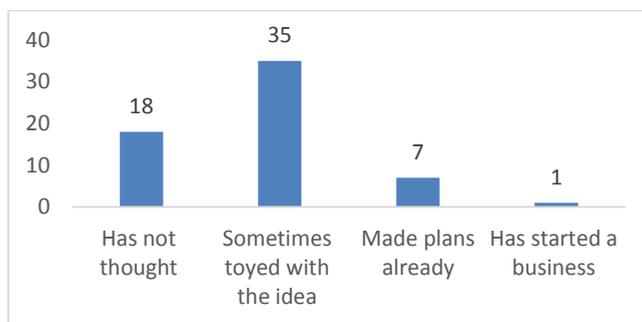


Figure 2. Students' attitudes towards setting up a business

4.2 Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior

The lowest mean of the statements of the theme Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior related to the statement "The entrepreneurial risk is not for me" (2.9) and the

highest mean related to the statement “An entrepreneur can affect his success with his own actions” (4.5). The mean of all the means of this theme (the combined variable) was 3.61. Table 1 introduces the means of the statements of this theme.

Table 1. Means of the statements related to entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior

Statements	n	Mean	Median	St. Dev.
The entrepreneurial risk is not for me.	60	2.9	3	1
I like to work in changing circumstances.	61	3.6	4	0.8
An entrepreneur can affect his success with his own actions.	61	4.5	5	0.6
I cannot tolerate financial uncertainty.	61	3.1	3	1.2
As an entrepreneur I have a chance to succeed.	61	4	4	0.8
In my work I want to advance resolutely to the goals I have set.	61	4.1	4	0.8
If you work hard you can make it as an entrepreneur, too.	61	3.9	4	0.9
I want to work in a familiar and safe environment.	61	3.2	3	1
Entrepreneurs are usually doing quite well financially.	60	3.2	3	1

4.3 Interest in one's own enterprise

There were six statements to ask about the interest in one's own. The statement "Entrepreneurship just does not interest me" had the lowest mean and the statement "As an entrepreneur I can take responsibility for my work" received the highest mean (4.3) of all the statements. The mean of all the means of the statements of this theme was 3.58. Table 2 presents the means of all the statements of this theme.

Table 2. Means of all the statements of the theme Interest in one's own enterprise

Statements	n	Mean	Median	St. Dev.
An entrepreneur holds an esteemed position in society.	61	3.7	4	0.9
Entrepreneurship is interesting and challenging.	61	3.6	4	1
I would like to utilise my education in my own enterprise.	61	3.5	4	1.1
Entrepreneurship just does not interest me.	61	2.9	3	1.4
As an entrepreneur I can take responsibility for my work.	61	4.3	4	0.7
I would become an entrepreneur, if a suitable opportunity appeared.	61	3.5	4	1.2

4.4 Entrepreneurial motives

The questionnaire included four statements to ask about entrepreneurial motives. The statement "As an entrepreneur the quality of life is better than if I worked in a paid job" scored the lowest mean (2.8) and the statement "An entrepreneur has the chance to be independent, his/her own master" scored the highest mean (4.4) of all the statements. The mean of all the means of the statements of this theme was 3.65. Table 3 presents the means of all the statements.

Table 3. Means of the statements related to entrepreneurial motives

Statements	n	Mean	Median	St. Dev.
An entrepreneur has the chance to be independent, his/her own master.	61	4.4	4	0.6
My income level is better as an entrepreneur than in paid work.	60	3.1	3	1
As an entrepreneur the quality of life is better than if I would work in a paid job.	61	2.8	3	0.9
As an entrepreneur I can make independent decisions.	60	4.3	4	0.6

4.5 Barriers of entrepreneurship

There were eight statements to ask about barriers of entrepreneurship. The statement "My education does not support becoming an entrepreneur" got the lowest mean (1.8) and the statement "It is no use becoming an entrepreneur without practical experience" got the

highest result (3.4) of all the statements. The mean of all the statements of the theme was 2.66. Table 4 shows all the means of the theme.

Table 4. Means of the statements related to barriers of entrepreneurship

Statements	n	Mean	Median	St. Dev.
It is no use becoming an entrepreneur without practical experience.	61	3.4	4	1.1
You cannot educate yourself for entrepreneurship; it is a native talent or a trait learned at home.	61	2.1	2	0.9
Entrepreneurship takes all of the time, and there is not enough time left for the family or my own hobbies.	61	3.2	3	0.9
As an entrepreneur I cannot develop myself enough.	61	2.2	2	0.9
My education does not support becoming an entrepreneur.	61	1.8	2	1
I do not master the skills required in business.	61	3	3	1
I do not want to be responsible for the enterprise and its employees.	61	2.7	2	1.2
An entrepreneur's life is nothing but toil.	61	2.9	3	1

5. Summary and conclusions

This study aimed at finding out the first-year business students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. The study was implemented in the beginning of the first-year students' studies in September 2017. The questionnaire consisted of 27 statements as the variables. Table 5 sums up the highest and the lowest means of the statements by each statement. In addition, it shows the means of the means by each main theme.

Table 5. Summary of the means by the main themes

The main themes	Mean
1. Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior	3.61
2. Interest in one's own enterprise	3.58
3. Entrepreneurial motives	3.65
4. Barriers of entrepreneurship	2.66

Attitudes can affect and predict intentions (Ajzen 2001), therefore it can be concluded that since the attitudes of the students were quite positive, the students might develop an entrepreneurial intention for a new venture later. However, the impact of entrepreneurship studies can be studied later. According to earlier studies, entrepreneurial attitudes can become more negative during the studies in higher education, when the students' general awareness of entrepreneurship will be increased (Pihkala 2008) and when the students will learn more the entrepreneurial competences in higher education (Kakkonen 2012b). Therefore, it is relevant to examine the development of attitudes during the studies later.

Based on the findings, it seems that all in all the students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship are quite positive. Although the aim is not to generalize the results beyond this student group, the findings give a good starting point for the implementation of the curriculum in this higher education institution, and thus, also for the development of students' even more positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship during their studies. How this will succeed, remains to be seen in the future.

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