

Start It Up – Support for young entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to disclose how entrepreneurship education can be developed and examined in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) via a EU funded local project. The paper examines HEI students' motivation factors and needs concerning Entrepreneurship education (EE). Start It Up – Support for young entrepreneurship project's objective is to support students and young people in entrepreneurship, new business creation and innovation, and also employment in and out the innovation ecosystems. Differentiating entrepreneurial methods, best practices, entrepreneurship coaching, and entrepreneurship spirit are tested and organized throughout the project. The project strives to deliver tools and motivation towards entrepreneurship. This article introduces the activities that have been done to support EE and a case study which examines how the entrepreneurship education can be improved to develop EE in the Finnish HEI. The main testing platforms for EE are presented and the results of the case study show that to promote entrepreneurship and to enhance students' awareness and motivation towards entrepreneurship in the Finnish HEI, the offering of EE teaching, events and competitions for students should be increased and promoted more effectively.

Keywords: *student entrepreneurship; learning; entrepreneurship education; entrepreneurial intentions.*

1. Introduction

The aim and focus of the paper is to disclose how entrepreneurship education (EE) has been assessed and developed in a local project managed by a Finnish University of Applied Sciences. In 2017, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture published new alignments for EE to guide, develop and direct the activities that promote EE in different educational levels.

The article starts with the current sights of EE in Finland and proceeds to a case study executed in Start It Up - Support for young entrepreneurship project. The main testing platforms for EE are presented in the paper. The results of the case study show that to promote entrepreneurship, more teaching, events and competitions can act as useful promotion tool and as a way to increase the awareness and motivation towards the entrepreneurship. The results introduce students' ideas for developing student entrepreneurship. Consequently, the paper focuses on the current state of students' needs involving EE in a Finnish University of Applied Sciences.

Start It Up – Support for young entrepreneurship project is carried out between 2017-2019. The project is managed by a Finnish University of Applied Sciences and funded by the EU via the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. The central objective of the project is to support students and young people in entrepreneurship, new business creation and innovation, and also employment in and out the innovation ecosystems and HEI's in a Finnish region. The project strives to deliver tools and motivation towards entrepreneurship. Differentiating entrepreneurial methods, best practices, entrepreneurship coaching, summer school, and the innovation and entrepreneurship spirit are tested and organized throughout the project.

2. New alignments for entrepreneurship education

Entrepreneurship is observing and seizing possibilities and the capability to transform ideas into such actions, that generate economical, cultural, social and societal values. Entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship can be learned. Entrepreneurship and intrapreneurial spirit include creativity, innovation, risk management and accountability, as well as the ability to plan, set goals and lead action to achieve goals. The importance of entrepreneurial skills is emphasized in the change of working life. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017.) Drucker (2007) posited that entrepreneur is often defined as the one who starts his own, new business and small business. Nevertheless, not every new small business is entrepreneurial or presents entrepreneurship. According to Burns (2007), research consistently shows a positive association between the probability of starting up a business and increases in educational attainment and business growth.

Entrepreneurship education is one of the fastest growing fields in education globally. This indicates the importance of entrepreneurship for the economy of any society. (Sirelhatim & Gangi, 2015.) Fretschner and Weber (2013) state out that the importance of EE has expanded rapidly in higher education institutions around the globe. (ref. Nabi, Walmsley, Liñán, Akhtar, and Neame, 2016.) According to Smith and Beasley (2011), the development of entrepreneurial intentions is increasingly encouraged from the outset of higher education through to the graduation, with the aim of stimulating entrepreneurial behavior. (ref. Nabi et al., 2016.) DeGeorge and Fayolle (2008) mention that the early development of entrepreneurial intentions is particularly important because it can lead to later persistence in the intention to start up a business. (ref. Nabi et al., 2016.)

Developing the entrepreneurship education is a current issue in all levels of education. In Finland, entrepreneurship education and positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behaviour are striven to be promoted in all levels of education. EE is teaching the skills and capabilities that are needed in life, which aim at the comprehensive development of attitudes and skills. The entrepreneurial education encourages entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurship. The main factor is that young people are successful in their life and find their place in the society. This way well-being is created to the young generation and for the whole society. (YES organization, 2017.)

In the spring 2017, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture published new alignments for EE. The alignments are meant to increase positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship, to develop entrepreneurship related knowhow and skills and to create new entrepreneurship. Implementation of the entrepreneurship education requires the management and development of an entrepreneurial business culture, entrepreneurial pedagogy and teaching, and the utilization of learning environments that support the above-mentioned factors. Activating the entrepreneurial culture is inclusive and the key issues include pedagogical leadership, openness and cooperation between teaching staff and other actors. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017.)

Cooperation between degrees and fields of education build up strength in the entrepreneurship education. In addition to the education sector, many working life organizations support and offer entrepreneurship education. The entrepreneurship education follows the principles of lifelong learning, a network-based approach that bases on science. An entrepreneurial culture contributes to the creation of a stimulating environment and the creation of goal-oriented activities by creating a creative, experimental and interactive atmosphere. The key themes in the entrepreneurship education are experimentation, functionality, learning, project-oriented working methods, business co-operation, and entrepreneurship related tasks and experiences. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017.)

3. Developing Entrepreneurship Education in a HEI

Start It Up – Support for young entrepreneurship project supports students and young people in entrepreneurship with differentiating entrepreneurial methods by testing and organizing events and courses. In this chapter, three main testing platforms organized to develop EE in the case project are presented.

3.1 NY Start Up -programme

NY Start Up programme was launched in the Finnish University of Applied Sciences in October 2017. The programme is a part of an international JA Worldwide and locally offered by Junior Achievement Finland, organization that offers entrepreneurship, working skills and financial skills for 7- to 25-year-old people – learning by doing. (Nuori Yrittäjyys, 2018.) NY Start Up is targeted at students in HEI. The programme has clear steps, and support and guidance is given to teachers by the organization. (NY Start Up, 2018.)

In this 10 credit study module, students found a real, multi-disciplinary company. The companies operate in real markets offering products and services to consumers. The study module is an excellent route for developing own ideas and skills needed in the business management. The purpose is that the students learn by doing and the learning process is supported by regular workshop sessions. The workshops have their own themes and visiting experts that support the process. The role of the teachers is coachy, so there are no lectures in the module and the aim is that the students find the answers to their questions by themselves.

In the pilot, 10 students from multi-disciplinary programmes started their business. There were students from business, forestry and hospitality management programmes. During the autumn period the students formed teams in which they started to develop and do business. Some students found the companies individually, others in teams. The process proceeds in a way that in the middle of the course, students have their companies founded, business plans ready, and possess the abilities to sell their product or service. The students participate in different kinds of activities and events. In the meanwhile, they gain valuable knowledge of running a business, cooperation with other members of the team, the potential customers, and the financial management of their companies. As the course gets closer to its end, the operations of the companies are ended carefully under control and the experiences are assessed – what were the success factors and what were the learned lessons. The business ideas and activities can also be continued into real companies with the support of the coaches.

3.2 *Innovate or die – innovation competition*

Innovate or Die (IOD) is an innovation competition for students. The competitions have been organized since 2013. IOD opens a door to innovative thinking and entrepreneurship. The programme is arranged in Finland and in Spain. There have been four events in Finland and two in Spain, Barcelona. (Innovate or Die, 2018). Students from a Finnish University of Applied Sciences had a unique possibility to take part in IOD Finland 2017 training and competition. In the competition, the students had a chance to network with companies and other higher degree students from other Finnish Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences.

IOD is open for all fields of study and the working language is English. Most of the Universities grant 2 ECTS for participating in the competition. The participants have a training day before the main event and the main event that lasts for approximately 24 hours. Pre-coaching gives the students all the necessary information concerning innovating in the main event. For the main event, all the students and company representatives gather together. In the competition, the students work with the company representatives and take part in developing the case companies by solving real working life problems. The teams work their ideas and solutions during 24 hours, competing with the other teams. In the end of the process, the teams can sharpen their pitches at the pitching corner before the final presentations for the client companies. (Innovate or Die, 2018).

3.3 *Entrepreneurship events*

During one week each November, thousands of events and competitions in 170 countries inspire millions to engage in entrepreneurial activities while connecting them to potential collaborators, mentors and even investors. Powered by the Kauffman Foundation, the initiative is supported by dozens of the world leaders. There are more than 15,000 partner organizations in the network. (Gen Global, 2018.) As a part of the case project, Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) was arranged in a Finnish University of Applied Sciences for the first time. The week included several entrepreneurial programmes for students, companies and anyone interested in entrepreneurship. During the week, the students had the ability to give feedback on the entrepreneurship education, to meet and greet with company representatives, and take part in multiple entrepreneurial events. The purpose is to make GEW a yearly event in the Finnish University of Applied Sciences.

To motivate and arise curiosity towards the EE, *entrepreneurial lectures* (personal entrepreneurship stories) and *events* are organized to promote and share experiences and knowledge of entrepreneurship. As an example, a former successful country manager, who had chosen to make a career change and establish an SME, gave a lecture for 50 students. 36 of the lecture participants gave feedback from which it can be generalized that real-life

stories are a great way to give students entrepreneurial motivation, new perspectives, new thinking and the possibility to see entrepreneurship as a future career possibility.

4. Promoting entrepreneurship for HEI students

To develop EE in a Finnish University of Applied Sciences, data was collected from the students. During the GEW week the students were asked to share their thoughts and ideas about the question "What can a Finnish University of Applied Sciences do to promote student entrepreneurship". The data was collected during the GEW week at the Finnish University of Applied Sciences and by collecting feedback from the participants of Innovate or Die –innovation competition. The research material and results have been analyzed and concluded by an R&D Advisor involved in the project.

There were 50 (30 respondents during GEW, 20 during IOD) respondents and altogether 91 suggestions were given. In the following picture (Figure 1), the answers are themed up and results presented quantitatively. The conclusions and suggestions also encompass interpretations that are based in empiricism and conversations with the students.

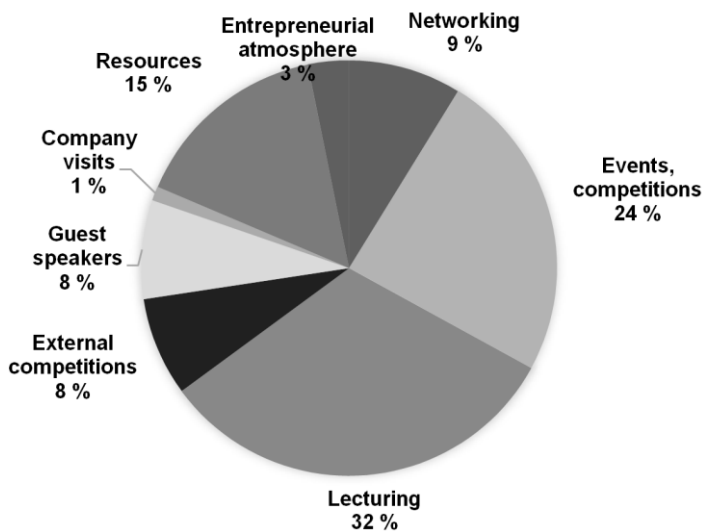


Figure 1. How can the HEI promote student entrepreneurship. Source: START IT UP – Support for young entrepreneurship project study (2017).

The collected data was themed up and organized by the answers. 32% of the respondents mentioned more lecturing as the tool to promote EE. The students suggested optional courses and entrepreneurship lectures with themes such as entrepreneur process, business models and practicalities of entrepreneurship. 24% of the respondents mentioned that there should be more events and competitions on entrepreneurship. The respondents suggested

entrepreneurship events for students, such as innovation and a entrepreneurship week or a course.

Resources were mentioned as supporting actions by 15 % of the respondents. Financial support and guidance in entrepreneurship, such as providing offices and resourcing for successful startups, and providing scholarships for the best start up ideas were suggested. Some (9 %) raised up networking – such as introducing suitable partners for cooperation of students and companies. A small part (3 %) of the respondents mentioned entrepreneurial atmosphere and suggested encouraging students to come and join entrepreneurial activities and overall producing a creative, friendly and productive atmosphere.

Guest speakers (8 %) and external competitions (8 %) were mentioned as a development method in the answers. The stories of successful entrepreneurs and workshop days with local entrepreneurs were suggested as well as external competitions such as innovation competitions and hackathons. In addition, introducing project opportunities for students to learn by doing. Only 1% of the respondents suggested company visits and fieldtrips to local companies.

4. Conclusion

To conclude the case study, 32 % of the respondents suggested simply increasing the teaching of entrepreneurship. In this case, entrepreneurship studies are already available for students. The assumption is that the communication involving the opportunities of entrepreneurship studies have been ineffective. It can also be discussed whether the students are actually given the opportunity to choose these courses as a part of their studies. With self-organized entrepreneurship and innovation events, 49 % of the suggestions concerning networking, events, external competitions and guest lecturers can be covered. In the Start It Up – Support for young entrepreneurship project, the aim is to continue arranging entrepreneurial activities through GEW, entrepreneurial events, NY Start Up course and by continue to offer the inputs and support for student entrepreneurship.

In the Finnish University of Applied Sciences the aim is to develop a community, an incubator, from where the students gain the guidance and support to work and develop their entrepreneurial ideas. 15 % of the case study respondents hoped for financial support and guidance in entrepreneurship, such as providing offices and resourcing successful ideas and startups. The results of the case study show that to promote entrepreneurship and enhance students' awareness and motivation towards the entrepreneurship in a Finnish HEI, actions such as offering entrepreneurship teaching, events and competitions for students should be increased and promoted more effectively. The results give ideas on how to develop

entrepreneurship in the Finnish HEI. Creating an entrepreneurial support community for students bolsters the development of the entrepreneurial spirit and atmosphere.

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