

## **Development of business students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship between 2017–2018**

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### ***Abstract***

*This article presents the results of the development of the students' entrepreneurial attitudes between the first and third semester. According to the findings, the attitudes towards entrepreneurship were quite positive in the beginning of the studies, and it seems that they remained at the same level during one year. Based on the findings, as a practical implication there is a need for monitoring pedagogical approaches and methods of the programme to make sure that they support enough the development of entrepreneurial attitudes. The entire development of entrepreneurial competences will be revealed by the next annual studies.*

**Keywords:** *Attitudes; Entrepreneurship; Business students; Perceptions.*

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## **1. Introduction**

At the university level, the main objective of entrepreneurship education is to increase students' awareness and to highlight the entrepreneurial path as a viable career option (Fayolle & Gailly 2015, 77). According to a study that examined the impact of different pedagogical approaches on the development of personal attributes and perceived skills related to entrepreneurship, it was noticed that an active-based entrepreneurship pedagogy (i.e. a mix of project-based learning and traditional lectures) seemed to have an influence on attitudes, and therefore, instead of a direct effect, to have only an indirect effect on the development of entrepreneurial intentions (Varamäki et al. 2015, 574).

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 promoting the students' entrepreneurial behaviour during the studies. In addition, the new curriculum aims at supporting better 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 are examined by a follow-up study. It consists of three annual sub-studies related to entrepreneurial attitudes, generic entrepreneurial competences, and business-related entrepreneurial competences during the degree studies.

This article introduces the results of the development of the business students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship between the first and third semester. A survey including 27 variables of four main themes: Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior, Interest in one's own enterprise, Entrepreneurial motives, and Barriers of entrepreneurship was conducted in September 2017 and then repeated in September 2018. The findings of these two surveys create a starting point for examining the impact of the entire education on the attitudes.

## **2. Attitudes towards entrepreneurship**

In general, an attitude represents an 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. (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, starting 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. (Ajzen 2001; Krueger & Carsrud 1993)

According to the theory of planned behavior, a positive attitude towards an entrepreneurial activity should contribute to forming entrepreneurial intentions, and past empirical studies have shown that the link between the attitude towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention is significant (Nowinski & Haddoud 2019, 184). Earlier studies indicated that changes in attitudes had a significant and positive impact on the development of entrepreneurial intentions (Varamäki et al. 2015, 575).

Further, attitudes, perceptions, and intentions towards entrepreneurship may vary over time (Fayolle & Gailly 2015, 78). According to earlier studies, entrepreneurial attitudes can become more negative during the studies in higher education, when the students' general awareness of entrepreneurship is increased (Pihkala 2008), and when the students will learn more entrepreneurial competences in higher education (Kakkonen 2012a; 2012b).

### **3. Implementation of the study**

This study focused on a student group in Finland, and it was conducted in the beginning of the first semester (September 2017) and repeated in the beginning of the third semester (September 2018). An invitation and a link for the Webropol questionnaire was sent by email to the students who studied on a full-time basis on the campus (N = 65). In 2017 there were 61 respondents, and in 2018 there were 60 respondents.

The questionnaire was created based on existing theory of entrepreneurial behaviour and characteristics (eg. Gibb 2005) and it was used in a sub-study of a PhD (Kakkonen 2012a). 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 their gender, and academic year as a control variable.

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. Finally, the findings were compared between the years 2017 and 2018.

#### **4. Findings**

The results of the two annual studies are presented by comparing the means of the variables (statements), and the means of the combined variables of each year. In 2017, there were 61 respondents of which 34 were male students and 26 female students (one student did not inform the gender). In 2018, there were 60 respondents of which 27 were male students and 28 were female students (5 students did not inform their gender).

##### **4.1. Entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviour**

In both years, the lowest mean of the statements of the theme Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior related to the statement "The entrepreneurial risk is not for me" and the highest mean related to the statement "An entrepreneur can affect his success with his own actions". The mean of all the means of this theme (the combined variable) was 3.61 in 2017 and 3.57 in 2018. Table 1 introduces the means of the statements of this theme.

**Table 1. Entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviour**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>2017 Mean</b>	<b>2017 St. Dev.</b>	<b>2018 Mean</b>	<b>2018 St. Dev.</b>
The entrepreneurial risk is not for me	2.9	1.0	2.9	1.0
I like to work in changing circumstances	3.6	0.8	3.7	0.8
An entrepreneur can affect his success with his own actions	4.5	0.6	4.4	0.7
I cannot tolerate financial uncertainty	3.1	1.2	3.1	1.1
As an entrepreneur I have a chance to succeed	4.0	0.8	3.8	0.9
In my work I want to advance resolutely towards the goals I have set	4.1	0.8	4.1	0.8
If you work hard, you can make it as an entrepreneur, too	3.9	0.9	3.8	0.9
I want to work in a familiar and safe environment	3.2	1.0	3.2	0.9
Entrepreneurs are usually doing quite well financially	3.2	1.0	3.1	0.8

#### 4.2. Interest in one's own enterprise

There were six statements about the interest in one's own enterprise. 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 in 2017 and 3.50 in 2018. Table 2 presents the means of all the statements of this theme.

**Table 2. Interest in one's own enterprise**

Statements	2017	2017	2018	2018
	Mean	St.Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
An entrepreneur holds an esteemed position in the society	3.7	0.9	3.5	0.8
Entrepreneurship is interesting and challenging	3.6	1.0	3.7	0.9
I would like to utilize my education in my own enterprise	3.5	1.1	3.4	1.0
Entrepreneurship just does not interest me	2.9	1.4	2.7	1.3
As an entrepreneur I can take responsibility for my work	4.3	0.7	4.3	0.7
I would become an entrepreneur, if a suitable opportunity appeared	3.5	1.2	3.4	1.3

#### 4.3. Entrepreneurial motives

The questionnaire included four statements 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 and the statement "An entrepreneur has the chance to be independent. his/her own master" scored the highest mean of all the statements. The mean of all the means of the statements of this theme was 3.65 and 3.58 in 2018. Table 3 presents the means of all the statements in 2017 and 2018.

**Table 3. Entrepreneurial motives**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>2017 Mean</b>	<b>2017 St.Dev.</b>	<b>2018 Mean</b>	<b>2018 St.Dev.</b>
An entrepreneur has the chance to be independent, his/her own master	4.4	0.6	4.2	0.8
My income level is better as an entrepreneur than in paid work	3.1	1.0	3.2	0.9
As an entrepreneur the quality of life is better than if I would work in a paid job	2.8	0.9	2.6	1.0
As an entrepreneur I can make independent decisions	4.3	0.6	4.3	0.7

#### **4.4. Barriers of entrepreneurship**

There were eight statements 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 in 2017 and 2.54 in 2018. Table 4 shows all the means of the theme.

**Table 4. Barriers of entrepreneurship**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>2017 Mean</b>	<b>2017 St.Dev.</b>	<b>2018 Mean</b>	<b>2018 St.Dev.</b>
It is no use becoming an entrepreneur without practical experience	3.4	1.1	3.1	1.1
You cannot educate yourself for entrepreneurship; it is a native talent or a trait learned at home	2.1	0.9	2.1	1.1
Entrepreneurship takes all of the time, and there is not enough time left for the family or my own hobbies	3.2	0.9	3.0	1.0
As an entrepreneur I cannot develop myself enough	2.2	0.9	2.2	0.9
My education does not support becoming an entrepreneur	1.8	1.0	1.9	1.0
I do not master the skills required in business	3.0	1.0	2.7	1.1
I do not want to be responsible for the enterprise and its employees	2.7	1.2	2.5	1.0
An entrepreneur's life is nothing but toil	2.9	1.0	2.8	1.0

## 5. Summary and conclusions

This study aimed at finding out the development of business students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship between 2017 and 2018. The study was conducted in the beginning of the first semester (September 2017) and in the beginning of the third semester. The questionnaire consisted of 27 statements as the variables related to four main themes. 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**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>2017 Mean</b>	<b>2018 Mean</b>	<b>2017 Highest mean</b>	<b>2018 Highest mean</b>	<b>2017 Lowest mean</b>	<b>2018 Lowest mean</b>
1. Entrepreneurial characteristics and behavior	3.61	3.57				
•An entrepreneur can affect his success with his own actions			4.5	4.4		
•The entrepreneurial risk is not for me					2.9	2.9
2. Interest in one's own enterprise	3.58	3.50				
•As an entrepreneur I can take responsibility for my work			4.3	4.3		
•Entrepreneurship just does not interest me					2.9	2.7
3. Entrepreneurial motives	3.65	3.58				
•An entrepreneur has the chance to be independent, his/her own master			4.4	4.4		
•As an entrepreneur the quality of life is better than if I would work in a paid job					2.8	2.8
4. Barriers of entrepreneurship	2.66	2.54				
•It is no use becoming an entrepreneur without practical experience			3.4	3.1		
•My education does not support becoming an entrepreneur					1.8	1.9

The findings of this study indicated that the attitudes towards entrepreneurship remained almost at the same level between the first and third semester of the degree studies. In addition, there were very weak indicators related to the findings that the attitudes towards entrepreneurship could even decline to some extent. The findings of the next annual study will reveal the trend of the development in September 2019.

Further, besides individuals' own abilities, skills and evaluations of probability of a failure, several studies indicate also how their shift to entrepreneurial actions is consistent with the culture dominating in their society (Bogatyreva et al. 2019, 310). Therefore, future studies could take into account the current entrepreneurship climate in Finland (eg. push and pull factors of entrepreneurship) as well as other cultural aspects related to the Finnish entrepreneurial society.

All in all, since the impact of the entrepreneurship education is connected to its pedagogical approaches and implementation (Fayolle & Gailly 2015, 77), there is a need for monitoring the pedagogical methods of the programme during the studies. Therefore, a practical implication for the degree program is to assess that the content and pedagogical approaches support and promote the development of the attitudes towards entrepreneurship. The final results of the competences will be revealed by the next annual studies, and thus the impact of the education will be shown then.

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