

Small Business and Entrepreneurship (SBE): An Analysis of Publications and Implications for the Development of the Field

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Introduction and Context: A Young But Maturing Field

As the area of ‘business and management’ develops, it brings with it new fields of investigation. The field of small business and entrepreneurship (SBE) is an example of a relatively new domain within business and management studies (Cornelius et al., 2008; Kuratko, 2006). However, there is widespread evidence that the field has expanded rapidly in the past four decades and has achieved some maturity (eg. Blackburn and Brush, 2008; Katz, 2003; Short et al. 2010; Welter and Lasch, 2008). ‘Entrepreneurship’ and/or ‘small business’ studies, are now found in most business and management schools’ curricula across the globe. For example, in 2010 the Universities and Colleges Application Service (UCAS) website had 285 courses in UK institutions of higher education, with ‘entrepreneurship’ in the title. Most of these were joint with other courses, such as ‘entrepreneurship and geography’ suggesting that some form of the concept was achieving recognition across the social sciences. The field is sufficiently developed to have six ISI ranked journals with good impact factors, special interest groups in both the American Academy of Management (Meyer, 2009) and the British Academy of Management and attractive enough to carry numerous well attended, large-scale conferences that have now been running for decades. For example, the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) has been running a conference since the late 1970s with attendance at over 500 delegates; and the European influenced Research in Entrepreneurship (RENT) conference for over 20 years. Globally (though originally US in origin) the International Council for Small Business (ICSB) has been running an annual conference for over 50 years.

In short, enough time has elapsed for researchers to reflect upon the purpose of SBE research, its main ontological and theoretical underpinnings, focus of investigation, levels of analysis, and methodologies employed. Such key issues have exercised the minds of academics trying to take stock of ‘where the field is’ and ‘where it is going’ (eg. Davidsson et al., 2001; Landström, 2005). These reflective analyses and debates have revealed a variety of origins, agendas and methods from a range of disciplines, such as economics, psychology, and sociology as well as intersections with other applied fields (eg. HRM, Storey et al., forthcoming). Such has been the diversity of SBE that this has been as depicted as fragmented, lacking focus and struggling to develop what they term ‘a distinct domain’ – an intellectual *potpourri* (Low, 2001). This has led to arguments for a narrow definition of entrepreneurship and a focus on what is distinctive about it (Gartner, 2001; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). This is summarised by Bruyat and Julien (2000) who argue that:

A research field can only be built and win legitimacy if it is differentiated from neighbouring fields. It can only impose its presence in the long term if it is able to establish its boundaries with other fields, even if those boundaries are, to some extent, fuzzy (p. 166).

Whether or not this is considered a suitable path for the development of an academic field is open to debate and such a position is by no means universally accepted. As Brush et al., (2008) argue, whilst a narrow focus permits scholars the opportunity to compare and contrast studies; this limits the breadth of topics studied. Others have argued that the field should be regarded as a 'border zone' and avail itself to the variety of contributions and richness of different disciplinary approaches (Steyaert, 2004; 2005). Immigrants to the field bring with them their own intellectual foci, adding to the richness and diversity of debates and development of SBE as a domain. Zahra and Newey (2009) examine the case of the intersection between fields and theories. They caution against merely borrowing and extending core theories to new phenomena. Instead, researchers should make sure that they understand the fundamentals of the original theories to avoid misunderstandings and also facilitate an effective contribution back into core theories thus adding development. Whether or not SBE is at this stage is also open to debate.

The methodologies used in SBE, in particular, have been subject to scrutiny. We regard this as significant in that it is the ontological assumptions and methodologies which make a field what it is: an area of academic study rather than an applied trade (Kuratko, 2006). It appears that SBE has achieved status as an academic field of investigation, but it is the level of development that is now an issue. Whilst most researchers would agree with the call for more rigour in approaches (Cooper, 2003; Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009), others demonstrate that the field has been dominated by a functionalist paradigm and argue for methodological pluralism (eg. Grant and Perren, 2002). This is regarded as a 'paradigmatic cage' (p 202) from which researchers should seek to break out. Methodological pluralism, it has been argued, is axiomatic for the enhancement of knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurship (Jennings et al., 2005).

As with most academic fields, several assessments of the progress have been undertaken. Evaluations from HEFCE's Research Assessment Exercise indicate that the field has developed significantly between 2001 and 2008, from one that was assessed as having a low proportion of output of international standard, to one that had a significant proportion classified as world leading. Academic assessments have included reference to ontological issues, levels of theorising, research design and alternative, critical perspectives (Low, 2001; Gartner, 2001; Aldrich & Martinez, 2001; Chandler & Lyon, 2001; Bruyat and Julien, 2000). The journal *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice* has published two special issues in 2005 and 2008 whose aim was to discuss the state of the SBE field by respectively: (a) trying to encourage methodological openness in papers by Nicholson and Anderson, Perren and Jennings, Downing and Goss and (b) by understanding national differences in SBE research in papers by Lasch and Yami (France), Schmude, Welter and Heumann (Germany), Blackburn and Smallbone (UK), Hjorth (Scandinavia), Brush, Manolova and Edelman (America), and Gartner. In addition, as Brush et al. (2008) argue recurrent special issues about certain topics are evidence of a dialogue on similar research interests and an evolution of the field of SBE into what Gartner (2001) has called 'informal homogenous communities'.

Other analyses suggest that the field has moved from one which experienced rampant empiricism to one that is much more reflective and theoretical, although researchers need to be much more critical

of the agendas and methods employed (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009). Linked to this is the ability of researchers to question ‘taken for granted’ assumptions in the field, including for example, being prepared to criticise the often held assumption that entrepreneurship and small business promotion is desirable in contemporary economies and societies (Blackburn and Ram, 2006), or indeed question the fundamental underpinnings of the notion of entrepreneurship (Jones and Spicer, 2009).

The above issues are most probably challenges linked to the growth pains of a relatively new domain. For example, similar debates regarding scope and methodological issues have been addressed in the field of HRM (Martin-Alcazar et al., 2008; Keegan and Boselie, 2006) and strategic management (Fuerrer et al., 2008). Nor do such debates and challenges diminish with the maturation of a field (eg Kaufman, 2008).

The main aim of this Chapter is to review and analyse the development of the field of small business and entrepreneurship (SBE). It will seek to take stock of where it is with respect to the main topics and methods employed. Specifically, we seek to examine the extent of variety of interests, plurality, diversity of research and internationalization by exploring:

- (i) Focus of the topics in the field of SBE.
- (ii) Types of research design used in the field.
- (iii) Geographic focus of research.
- (iv) Origins of the lead authors in the field.

In a sense, an analysis of articles from leading journals in the field, as undertaken in this Chapter, provides readers with a critical perspective of how SBE has developed in terms of agendas and methodological approaches. Given their relatively high status, it is these articles which demonstrate the condition of the field. It is these articles, their agendas and methodologies which will, in turn, influence subsequent academic agendas, teaching content and public policy debates. The analysis of these articles also provides a case example of the way in which an academic field of enquiry develops, as well as the challenges and controversies in that development.

We begin by explaining the methodology undertaken in the Chapter and the underlying rationale for our approach.

Method of Analysis and Classification

This review is focused on 696 papers about entrepreneurship and small businesses published in six main ISI ranking journals in the past six years (Table 1). We concentrated on these journals not only because of their high profile in the field but also because of their wide international appeal. This would allow us to discuss the internationalisation of entrepreneurship and small business studies. We estimate that there are over 50 journals in the field of small business and entrepreneurship.¹ Admittedly, a focus on six journals is only a partial basis for an assessment of the development of the field, since it does not cover all journals and nor does it include key texts and edited collections which have also mushroomed in the past 40 years. However, a focus on the leading six journals in some ways is

¹ The ABS Journal Guide ranks 26 journals within SBE (http://www.the-abs.org.uk/files//abs_web_subject.pdf). We estimate that there are over 50 journals of which 6 have an ISI impact factor. An interesting feature of the field is the rise in the number of journals – many of which do not survive beyond their first years.

representative of the best work in the field. It also helped us to keep the process manageable and allowed some depth of analysis.

Our initial process of sifting through the papers involved developing a suitably robust classification of topic areas. Specifically, 29 topics were developed both, deductively and inductively, which provide a clear demonstration of the diversity of issues discussed within the field. Initially, the number of topic areas was larger but these were rationalised on the grounds of keeping the system manageable and there being too few papers in some topic areas. The papers were also classified by the main type of methodology employed. This allows us to test the assumptions of an overemphasis on positivistic ideological stances in the field. We are also able to see how this varies across the journals that have been analysed for this review as well as trends over time.

Table 1: Number of papers reviewed

Journal	Year						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	11	14	19	21	36	35	136
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	18	15	9	11	14	10	77
International Small Business Journal	14	20	24	25	25	24	132
Journal of Business Venturing	19	22	17	18	24	16	116
Journal of Small Business Management	16	12	11	23	22	23	107
Small Business Economics	17	12	28	21	22	28	128
Total	96	95	108	119	143	136	696

To identify relevant articles, we conducted a keyword search in ISI Web of Knowledge, within these journals, encompassing the period 2003-2008. Keywords included ‘*entrepreneurship*’, ‘*entrepreneurial*’, ‘*small businesses*’, ‘*small firm*’ and ‘*SME*’. This search was complemented by a manual review of all the six journals to ensure thorough coverage. Afterwards, each article was classified on the basis of:

- Main topic
- Geographical context of the study for the empirical papers
- Country affiliation of the main (lead) author
- Research design, its methods and the techniques used for the analysis of the data.

This process involved a combination of initial classification and then cross-checking between authors’ judgements. We discuss this process in more detail together with the presentation of the findings.

Main findings

Topics of research in entrepreneurship and small business studies

Developing the topic classification initially involved referring to previous efforts by colleagues in the field (eg Coviello and Jones, 2004; Brush et al., 2008) as well as creating topic headings which appeared logical having read the abstracts and papers. All of the abstracts and selected parts of the articles were read to allow classification and where clarification was needed, full papers were read in

detail by the authors and then classified according to a main topic heading. This process required a number of iterations before all papers were classified satisfactorily. In this process, both authors sought to independently classify papers according to the main subject matter. This was straightforward but in some cases, this was more problematic and a judgement call on classification was made following more detailed examination. For example, where papers overtly spanned the boundaries of topics, their final classification was a result of discussion. A good example here would be a paper by Anderson et al. (2003) in the *Journal of Small Business Management* entitled '*The Increasing Role of Small Business in the Chinese Economy*'. After discussion, we decided to classify it as a paper that looks at the 'contributions of small businesses in the economy'. An alternative, but plausible, classification would have been 'entrepreneurship and small business in developing and transition economies'. Our final decision was taken on the grounds of the contents of a paper's substantive contribution to the field.

This process led to all papers being placed within a classification system of 29 topics. The initial rationalisation of our classification system meant that some papers in niche topics, such as research methods and discussing the conceptual development of the field were combined. For example, Cope's paper on '*Researching entrepreneurship through phenomenological inquiry- philosophical and methodological issues*' published in the *International Small Business Journal* in 2005, was initially classified as a paper on 'discourses and critiques of the field'. This classification was later merged with 'methodological issues and debates' principally on the grounds of an insufficient number of papers in that group. We accept that the method of classifying the papers by the main topic is not perfect in that the level of aggregation may mask the diversity of some papers and the field more broadly. However, the approach taken does allow for diversity through 29 topics, as well as allow analysis by methodology, country of study and main author.

A first look at the data (Table 2) suggests that some recurring topics have dominated the field of entrepreneurship and small business research. In this respect, it is interesting to notice that over 50 papers in the past six years have discussed issues related to the development and performance of the business (57), networking and external relations (57) and public policy and state intervention (55). The number of papers on business development and performance excludes those papers that are purely focused on business growth issues (24). We judged as more appropriate to have 'growth' as a separate classification considering the attention that has been given to it in the small business and entrepreneurship literature although it could be argued that it is a variant of development and performance.

The predominance of business development and performance (57 papers) together with public policy and state intervention (55 papers), is an indication that the field is still in search of answers about the problems of development faced by small businesses and the role that governments can play in facilitating their activities. Moreover, this finding gives support to the argument that researchers in the field continue to be policy orientated. As Blackburn and Kovalainen (2009) argue for the case of the UK, much research has been embedded in policy rather than theory which in turn, have influenced the research skills base since many government departments operate from a quantitative research paradigm.

The high number of papers on networking and external relations (57 papers) demonstrate the broadness of the topic area and include contributions for example, from those studying owner-manager external relations, geographical clusters through to inter-firm connections.

Table 2: Classification by topic

Main topic of research	Year						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
challenges of development and performance	9	9	9	12	9	9	57
networking and external relations	16	3	6	11	11	10	57
public policy and state intervention	14	8	9	4	9	11	55
new venture creation	7	6	7	9	10	7	46
contributions to the economy	3	6	7	1	9	14	40
finance and financial management	6	4	4	10	11	4	39
the developing domain of entrepreneurship and small business	1	6	4	8	7	8	34
family business	3	7	2	7	3	11	33
international business	8	8	4	2	5	5	32
human resource management and employment relations	2	3	8	3	10	4	30
Strategy	4	6	6	4	3	5	28
methodological issues and debates	2	6	10	0	8	0	26
Growth	4	2	4	7	3	4	24
gendered entrepreneurship	2	0	1	9	9	1	22
owner-managers and entrepreneurs	3	1	3	6	5	3	21
entrepreneurial behaviour	1	2	2	6	2	4	17
Innovation	1	2	2	4	2	6	17
immigrant and ethnic minority businesses	2	2	3	2	5	2	16
entrepreneurship and small firms in transition and developing economies	1	2	0	1	3	8	15
Learning	1	0	6	3	1	1	12
Franchise	1	0	2	0	4	4	11
self employment	2	3	2	1	1	2	11
Cognition	0	6	1	0	3	0	10
entrepreneurship education	2	0	1	1	3	2	9
business exit and transfer	0	1	2	2	1	2	8
corporate entrepreneurship	0	0	2	0	3	3	8
marketing and marketing strategies	0	1	1	0	2	3	7
trust and ethics	0	0	0	5	1	0	6
social enterprise	0	1	0	1	1	2	5
Total	95	95	108	119	143	136	696

Other analyses of the literature on entrepreneurship and small businesses have emphasised that the agendas have been subject to a long standing influence of functionalist arguments on the economic and societal roles that small businesses and entrepreneurship play (Perren and Jennings, 2005). Accordingly, the field has been strongly linked to economic development, represented by an unquestioning need to increase employment levels, innovation, competitiveness and by a reduction of regional disparities (Audretsch and Keilbach, 2004, Fritsch and Mueller, 2004). Our data suggest that these arguments are still strong, as evidenced by the large number of papers that look at the topics of ‘contribution to the economy’ (40) and ‘new venture creation’ (48).

The principal research design of and small business and entrepreneurship studies

The methods employed and the underlying methodological assumptions underlying these have been subject to criticism by numerous commentators (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Grant and Perren, 2004). Others have pointed out the idiosyncrasies of undertaking research on small firms, particularly in data collection (Curran and Blackburn, 2001) and specific challenges regarding sampling (Short et al., 2010). In discussing the research design of papers in the entrepreneurship and small business, we divided papers into:

- (i) conceptual papers, as papers that independently from the research paradigm they ascribe to, offer insights into important theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship and small business research;
- (ii) empirical papers, as those that use a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method design to discuss their issue(s) of interest in (a) particular context (s). We excluded from the analysis, editorials, introduction to special issues and book reviews. Moreover, journal reviews have been classified under the respective categories described above.

In addition, we distinguished between the large number of techniques for analysis of quantitative and qualitative data available to researchers. For the purpose of this paper we differentiated between:

- i. case study, thematic analysis and discourse and narrative analysis for qualitative empirical papers
- ii. descriptive (i.e. frequencies, cross tabs, t-tests, Anova) and multivariate techniques (Manova, different regression types, SEM, time series) for quantitative empirical papers, and
- iii. the combination of the above for mixed method design papers.

A dominant approach to undertaking research on entrepreneurship and small businesses is what Blackburn and Kovalainen (2009) call ‘scientism’, underpinned with the search for objective truths. More than half of the papers (59%) that were reviewed for this chapter have a quantitative design. These papers seek to measure changes and identify associations between variables. In all, the majority of research published is quantitative. As Table 3 shows, Small Business Economics and Journal of Small Business Management have a clear bias towards quantitative research.

Table 3 Principal Research Design of Papers by Journal 2003-2008

	conceptual paper	mixed method	qualitative	quantitative	Total
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	46	0	14	76	136
Entrepreneurship and regional development	5	7	36	29	77
International Small Business Journal	12	12	45	63	132
Journal of Business Venturing	30	3	18	65	116
Journal of Small Business Management	1	2	12	92	107
Small Business Economics	17	1	8	102	128
Total	111	25	133	427	696

However, the evidence summarised in Table 3 masks the specific type of data analysis. Historically, the field has tended to rely on the analysis of cross-sectional data from surveys and one-off interviews. More recently, there is a growing trend in the use of longitudinal secondary datasets, such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) datasets, or national datasets in the quantitative research published. This may indicate that the volume and quality of secondary datasets is improving but also that certain variables for study are commonly used, thus, easily available for quantitative research designs. Our analysis also shows that GEM data has been used in papers whose main focus is the contribution of entrepreneurship in the economy, or the role of public policies and public intervention. Similar findings on the increased use of secondary longitudinal datasets in the SBE field were also presented by Brush et al. (2008) and Coviello and Jones (2004). Nevertheless, the majority of papers still rely on cross sectional surveys, primary and secondary, in researching small business issues.

Table 4: Data analysis in published papers

	case study	descriptive	descriptive/ thematic	discourse & narra- tive analysis	multivariate	multivariate/ thematic	thematic analysis	Total
mixed method	0	0	19	0	0	6	0	25
Qualitative	31	4	3	26	0	1	67	132
Quantitative	0	92	0	0	336	0	0	428
Total	31	96	22	26	336	7	67	585

Table 5: Techniques of analysis of data by Journal

	case study	descriptive	descriptive/ thematic	discourse & narrative analysis	multivariate	multivariate/ thematic	thematic analysis	Total
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	4	20	0	4	56	0	6	90
Entrepreneurship and regional development	9	5	7	6	27	0	18	72
International Small Business Journal	8	25	12	5	39	2	29	120
Journal of Business Venturing	2	7	3	9	59	2	4	86
Journal of Small Business Management	4	27	0	2	65	2	6	106
Small Business Economics	4	12	0	0	90	1	4	111
Total	31	96	22	26	336	7	67	585

Table 6: Techniques of analysis by year

	Year						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
case study	6	9	0	4	7	6	32
Descriptive	25	10	12	21	17	13	98
descriptive/thematic	2	4	6	3	2	3	20
discourse & narrative analysis	0	2	6	5	9	4	26
Multivariate	35	37	52	64	71	76	335
multivariate/thematic	1	1	1	1	2	0	6
thematic analysis	14	8	8	8	12	14	64
Total	83	71	85	106	120	116	581

Table 6 presents evidence on the type of techniques that are used for data analysis in the sample of papers under study. Quantitative designed papers rely heavily on multivariate techniques (78% of papers) whilst qualitative papers are more inclined towards the use of a thematic analysis (51%). Multivariate techniques outweigh the use of more descriptive approaches across all the journals we have studied, although there are some variations between journals. In the Journal of Business Venturing and Small Business Economics, 91% and 88% of quantitative papers use multivariate techniques compared to 73% and 71% in Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice and Journal of Small Business Management, respectively. The use of sophisticated statistical techniques may be an indication of requirements for scientific rigour in the field. The statistical analysis of survey material show a high level of rigour, including structural equation modelling (SEM), which include both national and inter-

national analyses. Examples are to be found in all the six ISI rated journals but particularly in Small Business Economics, reflecting the tradition in economics-based studies (see Table 5). However, we would suggest that there is a need for further development across all study types. Breakthroughs need to be made, especially in terms of the use of longitudinal studies which as mentioned earlier, are still limited in numbers although increasing and plenty of opportunities are available.

Our detailed investigation found that the qualitative research published in the journals is mainly reported as in the form of case studies. However, the case study method is frequently used to describe an interview design, and too often based on single interview approaches. Longitudinal studies in the case of qualitative research are very limited, though there have been calls for such designs by many scholars (RAE 2008 feedback). Within the qualitative research category, a detailed examination shows a limited use of alternative methods of research, such as discourse analysis, narrative analysis and so on. For example, only 12 papers in our dataset use narrative in their research. Seven of these papers were published in 2007 in a special issue of Journal of Business Venturing, on “Old questions, new research-Narrative”. The other five are published in the International Small Business Journal and Entrepreneurship and Regional Development by European researchers. The analysis also suggests an Atlantic divide: only four of all the narrative papers are published by North American based authors. Similarly, across the sample as a whole, European researchers have published 2.5 times more qualitative papers than their North American colleagues. This finding gives some support to earlier studies that consider European researchers to be more open towards alternative methodological approaches compared with their American counterparts (Davidsson, 2008; Welter and Lasch, 2008). It also suggests that the picture presented by Aldrich (2000) almost a decade ago, that European researchers are more likely to use fieldwork and qualitative methods has continued.

The large number of conceptual papers published in the study period suggests a maturation of the field, with researchers now focusing on conceptual rather than empirical issues. In Table 7, there is a very strong (though not surprising) overlap with the papers on ‘methodological issues and debates’, ‘the developing domain of entrepreneurship and small business’ and ‘conceptual papers’. Examples of such papers include Gartner on *Variations of Entrepreneurship*, which employs narrative and is published in Small Business Economics in 2005; and the one by Levesque on *Mathematics, Theory and Entrepreneurship* which looks at the use of mathematical models to develop theories on entrepreneurship, published in Journal of Business Venturing in 2003. These two examples illustrate the recent openness of the field towards different ideological assumptions and also its links with mainstream disciplines. There is a noticeable reliance on economics and management disciplines although some papers also rely on psychology, sociology and anthropology. Most of the papers are positivist in nature, as noticed for the sample as a whole. However, there are papers with a clear social constructivism inclination (10 papers), phenomenology (9 papers) and few papers that call for multi paradigmatic use in entrepreneurship research. Interestingly, when it comes to conceptual papers, North American researchers are more dominant. This finding is consistent with Brush et al., (2008), who found that American research shows a higher incidence of grounded theory development and theory testing rather than original fieldwork.

Table 7: Research design by topic

Main topic of research	Research design				
	conceptual paper	mixed method	qualitative	quantitative	Total
challenges of development and performance	0	1	6	50	57
networking and external relations	11	6	20	20	57
public policy and state intervention	3	5	19	28	55
new venture creation/opportunity recognition	9	0	6	31	46
contributions to the economy	3	0	6	30	39
finance and financial management	1	0	2	36	39
the developing domain of entrepreneurship and small business	17	0	8	9	34
family business	9	0	4	20	33
international business	3	2	4	23	32
human resource management and employment relations	2	2	10	16	30
strategy	2	0	4	22	28
methodological issues and debates	14	0	8	4	26
growth	0	0	2	22	24
gendered entrepreneurship	1	0	3	18	22
owner-managers and entrepreneurs	4	1	1	16	22
entrepreneurial behaviour	5	0	2	10	17
innovation	4	0	3	10	17
immigrant and ethnic minority businesses	1	2	4	9	16
entrepreneurship and small firms in transition and developing economies	1	1	3	10	15
learning	4	1	2	5	12
franchise	0	1	4	6	11
self employment	1	1	0	9	11
cognition	8	0	0	2	10
entrepreneurship education	1	0	3	5	9
business exit and transfer	0	0	1	7	8
corporate entrepreneurship	2	0	1	5	8
marketing and marketing strategies	1	1	2	3	7
trust and ethics	1	1	3	1	6
social enterprise	3	0	2	0	5
Total	111	25	133	427	696

Our data provides us with some clear, though not surprising, links between the topic of the research and the research design used (Table 7). As shown earlier there is an inclination towards quantitative papers across the whole sample. However, for some topics the ratio of quantitative papers to the total of papers under that classification is much higher than the 61% for the sample as a whole. For example, for papers covering the topics ‘finance and financial management’ and ‘growth’ a large

percentage of all papers are quantitative in design at 92% each. Topics on ‘gendered entrepreneurship’, ‘challenges of development and performance’ and ‘self employment’ are also predominantly quantitative.

More specifically, under the classification ‘finance and financial management’, only two out of 39 papers have used a qualitative research design. Further investigation shows that even these tend to utilise a positivist methodology. One of the papers published in *Journal of Business Venturing* in 2004 by Gorman, Rosa and Fasurek entitled ‘*Institutional lending to knowledge-based businesses*’ uses quantitative multivariate techniques to analyse the large volume of data that was generated for their study. The same applies to papers under the growth classification. Out of the only two papers that employ qualitative methodologies, one uses a case study and the other one published in the *Journal of Business Venturing* in 2004 by Barringer, Jones and Neubaum and entitled ‘*A quantitative content analysis of the characteristics of rapid-growth firms and their founders*’ uses their qualitative data in a positivist approach.

Not surprisingly, the two paper examples are also published in the *Journal of Business Venturing* that, as mentioned earlier, tends to favour positivist, quantitative approaches (Perren, 2004). These two examples further illustrate the dominance of quantitative research designs in entrepreneurship and small business studies and the difficulty of researchers to pull themselves out of a mind frame that seeks generalisation, causality and replication rather than engage in what Cassell and Symon (2005) term ‘pure’ qualitative research.

On the other hand, for some topics such as ‘networking and external relations’, ‘entrepreneurship education’, ‘human resource management’ and ‘marketing’ it is difficult to define what methods they mostly relied on, since the number of qualitative and quantitative papers is either equal or similar as shown in Table 7. This is probably a reflection of the breadth of the area and the interest from a variety of researchers.

Geographical focus of small business and entrepreneurship studies

In our review we looked at both: (a) the geographical context of the study for empirical papers; and (b) the country affiliation of the main authors. An analysis of the context of study shows that most research is focused on single countries: predominantly the UK (94 papers) and the USA (147 papers). Other single country contexts worth mentioning are Australia (18 papers), Belgium (10 papers), Canada (20 papers) Germany (27 papers), Spain (19 papers) and Sweden (21 papers). 88 papers study multi country contexts. Clearly, the field is international, and there has been a rise in the amount of international based topics.

At the researcher level, the data suggest a dominance of USA and UK authors, a finding which may be also affected by the fact that the journals selected are either American or British. Out of 130 papers that are authored only by British based researchers, 57 have been published in the *International Small Business Journal*. 239 papers are authored by USA based researchers and these have been mainly published in US journals: *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Business Venturing* and the *Journal of Small Business Management*. These figures, for UK and USA researchers, exclude studies where they are lead researchers in collaborations with researchers in other countries, 12 and 25 studies respectively (Table 8). It is notable that there are a low number of lead authors from

France and Italy in these journals. This may be a reflection of the existence of prominent entrepreneurship and small business journals located in these countries and using their own language: *PME* in France and *Piccola Impresa* in Italy. However, this ‘partial isolation’ as Aldrich (2000) would call it whilst helping in the creation of national research identities (Welter and Lasch, 2008), may inhibit the international exchange of ideas from these countries.

On the other hand, there has been a rise in the amount of international collaboration between researchers (Table 9). German researchers are authors in 23 collaboration studies followed by Dutch researchers whose names appear in 20 collaborations. The finding for German researchers is quite interesting considering that earlier studies (Schmude et al., 2008) characterised the German entrepreneurship research community as inward looking and not very active in building and gaining legitimacy internationally.

Whilst only 15% of all papers in our sample are a result of international collaboration between authors, it is interesting to discuss the research topic differences in this trend. In this respect, 40% of the papers under topics such as ‘contribution to the economy’, ‘entrepreneurship in transition economies’ are international collaborations. This is related to the comparative nature of most of these studies. Above average figures also apply to topics such as international business, networking and external relations and entrepreneurial behaviour which are research topics in need of a diversity of perspectives and further theoretical advancement.

This section on the geographical focus of research on entrepreneurship and small businesses showed that US researchers dominate the field. This brings with it a focus on quantitative research designs that, more often than not, appear to be the method of choice for American researchers. It is also evident that four of the journals under study are American journals and this may have biased our findings. An important finding is that certain topics really require a diversity of perspectives and methodological stands which is best achieved in comparative studies or research collaborations that tend to benefit from these differences.

Limitations of the Review

The aim of this Chapter is to assess the condition and developments of SBE research by looking at papers that have been published in six ISI ranked journals in the past six years. 696 papers were analysed across a range of aspects including topic of discussion, methodology employed and level of internationalisation. As with all research, this Chapter has limitations. A key limitation of the review is the classification of topics discussed. We accept that the classification is subjective and as such may not be replicable, thus leading to questions regarding the validity of the exercise. However, we counter this accusation by reference to other similar exercises in other fields which are no more objective than ours. However, whilst this diversity of topics in SBE research reflects the complexity and heterogeneity of entrepreneurship itself, space and time limitations meant that we were not able to reflect the full diversity of topics. Examples of more detailed topic-specific studies are, for example reviews by Coviello and Jones (2004) for international business studies; and Cassell and Symon (2005) on industrial organisation psychology studies. The review is also limited to six journals that are published in English language and have an ISI ranking. We defend this on the grounds of focusing on the leading journals in the field. Despite the pressure and appeal for researchers to publish in

these top journals, we recognise that there are other country-based publications and non-ISI rated journals. If we are concerned about the status and rigour of the field, then work also needs to be pursued in relation to the diffusion of entrepreneurship and small business studies into mainstream journals.

Our analysis does not consider the publication of small business and entrepreneurship outputs in mainstream management journals or the social sciences more broadly. These would provide the field with much higher esteem, demonstrate that scholars are engaged in mainstream debates and show legitimacy and maturity amongst the academic community (Short et al., 2010). Engagement with core social science disciplines would also allow the field to develop a more critical edge, for example, in terms of questioning the norms or homogeneity of agendas pursued by researchers. There is evidence that this is now happening as shown by a number of papers, for example, in the mainstream business and management journals such as *British Journal of Management* and the *Academy of Management Journal*. However, the ability and extent of research from the field of SBE to impact upon what Zahra and Newey (2010) term 'core theory' remains unexplored.

Conclusions and Implications

In this Chapter, we have sought to review and analyse the development of the field of small business and entrepreneurship (SBE) by taking stock of where it is with respect to the main topics and methods employed in journal articles. The analysis in this Chapter has emphasised a number of issues related to research in the field of SBE. We conclude with a number of key findings from our review and their implications and some implications for other developing fields in the business and management area.

It is fair to argue that SBE displays the characteristics of a field that has achieved a certain level of maturity in terms of scale, quality and pedagogic embeddedness in academic curricula. The debates and reflections by academics on SBE, illustrate that there is a body of knowledge which demonstrates that the field has now come of age. However, the evidence also show that the field is permeable from other mainstream and applied fields and that this adds to its methodological preferences and intellectual dynamism.

The focus of the topics in the SBE field continues to be broad. This is reflected in the large number of classifications that emerged from this research and has been emphasised in previous analyses (eg. Kuratko, 2006; Brush et al., 2008; Welter and Lasch, 2008). Nevertheless, despite this engagement with numerous research topics, the data in this Chapter suggest that not much has changed in terms of theorising. Much research is still employing an ideological position that links entrepreneurship, and especially venture creation, to economic development. This position continues also to 'fuel' policy related work sometimes to the detriment of establishing a link between theory and policy. This outcome, we would argue, is a weakness and requires addressing if the field is to raise its significance as a field of academic study.

On the other hand, the number of conceptual papers and their emphasis are a good omen for the maturation of the field towards developing a theoretical framework or a range of frameworks. We are aware that a unified theoretical framework will most probably be impossible to achieve since, as Davidsson (2008) argues:

“...when there is a large number of factors involved, which have variable measurability and effects, our analysis techniques and cognitive capacities may not suffice to disentangle the true nature of the relationships. Hence the many confusing, apparently conflicting results and lack of cumulative growth of knowledge in many areas of entrepreneurship research”
(p. 17).

An analysis of the type of research designs used in the field continues to emphasise the paradigmatic dominance of functionalism. This observation is especially for those SBE topics that are of policy interest, such as business growth, public intervention, contribution to the economy or new venture creation. As a whole the SBE field is dominated by quantitative research designs and by a need to prove that research can be generalised. As we showed in some cases even those researchers that collect qualitative data rely on quantitative analysis of them. There have been frequent calls by researchers for multi paradigmatic approaches in entrepreneurship research which have been accompanied by the use of alternative methodologies in SBE research. However, this needs to be developed further.

One aspect of research on SBE studies that is worth mentioning relates to the need to embrace longitudinal designs that would study a phenomenon over time. Whilst in some of the quantitative designs this has been possible due to the improvement of national datasets, or GEM datasets, in qualitative research this design is almost absent. Most of the SBE topics that we discussed in this review have a ‘time’ specificity dimension. Thus, they should be conceptualised as a process and studied accordingly, with the use of longitudinal designs.

There has often been a debate in the literature on the methodological focus of the journals and how it affects the type of research that is being produced. The bulk of research in journals tends to be quantitative and this is especially so in some journals. In their efforts to have their work published in top journals, researchers have tended to conform to these methodological straightjackets. According to Schmude et al. (2008), the focus on what is publishable and what is not, is going to diminish national differences in entrepreneurship research, as younger entrepreneurship researchers are most likely to focus on quantitative studies. Our review showed that American based journals, including Small Business Economics, Journal of Business Venturing and Journal of Small Business Management, have a clear inclination towards quantitative research. We could argue that this positioning of journals or, perhaps, the perception of researchers about the methodological position of journals, has hampered the efforts of many researchers to experiment with methods and contribute to the methodological development of the field.

The geographic focus of the research showed that despite an American and British domination of the field, not only in terms of the context studied but also the affiliation of researchers, SBE research has been also enriched by the perspectives of researchers in European countries. We refer not only to native English speakers such as Canadian or Australasian researchers but also researchers in other countries. This is very important finding considering the view that small firms are omnipresent and entrepreneurship is embedded in society and the knowledge of contextual differences is helpful in engaging in the construction of a comprehensive theoretical framework. However, it is important that the internationalisation of entrepreneurship research does not lead to the disappearance of country specific research traditions that have enriched the field to date.

Overall, we can conclude that the SBE literature has developed significantly as a major field for study in business and management more broadly. This concurs with analyses elsewhere (eg Kurakto, 2006; Short et al., 2010; Welter and Lasch, 2008). A number of research communities have been developed with each of them pursuing the agenda of strengthening their sub-field of interest. The nature of this study did not permit the study of the progress of such communities but we believe a main challenge stands in establishing convergence of these studies and the possible conceptual links or constructs they use. There is reason to believe that, in many research communities, the journey towards convergence has already started (Gregoire et al., 2008; Brush et al., 2008). However, research should develop further in assessing the status of research in each of them and their links with wider research agendas.

In addition the field is slowly progressing towards becoming more paradigmatically diverse and international in nature. These two characteristics are also crucial in gaining diverse perspectives and understanding contextual differences. Journals have also a role to play in this respect since calls for special issues have generated paradigmatically diverse publications. Future studies should focus on establishing bridges amongst these various sub-fields within entrepreneurship and small business research, in order to move towards a more comprehensive field and well as engage more directly with mainstream disciplines such as psychology, economics and sociology.

For the main stakeholders of SBE, the analysis has a number of implications. For those involved in enterprise education, the review demonstrates that there has been a rise in the volume and quality of the research base, providing them with an increasingly rigorous base for teaching materials. For those involved in public policy critiques and development, the research base also demonstrates a growing significance. However, care should be taken to assume that SBE is necessarily a desirable route for economy and society. For those undertaking research in the field, the Chapter shows that although SBE has come of age, a much more critical perspective is required for the field to achieve greater originality, significance and rigour as an academic area. This, we would argue, not only requires theorising and conceptual development within itself, but also requires engagement with a wider, rather than narrower, range of disciplinary fields. This will facilitate the drawing upon state of the art concepts and approaches in the social sciences more broadly.

The field has come a long way in the past 40 years and arguably has been one of the most dynamic in business and management more broadly. However, as the field has developed and continues to do so, care should be taken to avoid a slippage towards a homogenised community, pursuing narrow 'pro-entrepreneurship' agendas. It is the outputs of this community which ultimately provide the 'bedrock' of the SBE knowledge base. With this comes a responsibility to be critically reflective, question taken for granted assumptions and pursue agendas using appropriate methodologies. It is this critical awareness and understanding of alternative approaches which will allow researchers to be able to make their strongest contributions to theory and practice in the field of SBE.

The development of the SBE, as a legitimate field of study, raises a series of issues for researchers in both nascent and already established areas of investigation within business and management more broadly. First, the rise of SBE demonstrates the dynamism of business and management as an area of study more broadly: researchers are engaged in relevant research, reflecting the changes in economy, work and society more broadly. However, although the field of study is now well-developed with its own coterie of world-class scholars, whether there is sufficient recognition or engagement by the

mainstream 40 years or so after the field took-off, remains open to question. In other words, the case of SBE shows that it takes time to infiltrate and then influence the direction of the mainstream. Second, there appears to be a continued debate regarding the scope of the field. Other new areas of study may go through a similar questioning of the focus of their subject. Our analysis suggests that progress is not contingent on tightly limiting the focus of the field of study. Indeed, legitimacy seems to have been achieved by the acceptance, rather than rejection, of different agendas, methodological approaches and audiences. This helps in connecting with mainstream agendas and ensuring research that is relevant and rigorous. Whether or not, or the extent to which the field is now transforming the core of business and management research, however, remains open to debate. Third, although ostensibly scholars in the field use a range of methodological approaches, detailed analysis shows a tendency for the field to be dominated by a positivist research paradigm. Whilst the reasons for this are not immediately apparent, it may be speculated that this may be a result of the broader criteria used for publication in 'leading' journals. We would encourage key researchers to embrace experimentation rather than merely going with convention and tried and tested approaches. This includes those pursuing research in business and management, editors and referees of field and mainstream journals, conference organisers and those designing research programmes. Fourth, the field of SBE is international. It appears that the internationalisation of the field has helped in the maturation process. Although this has led to a domination of some areas by US journals and their methodological preferences on balance, this internationalisation is regarded as critical to achieving legitimacy. Indeed, it could be argued that this process is axiomatic to the recognition process of the field. In discussing these broader implications it must be pointed out that the development of this field does not provide a blueprint for others. Instead, it shows a pattern of development leading to a range of landmarks that are important for the legitimacy of a field. We would also argue that the future of SBE, to continue as an exciting and vibrant field of study, depends on the ability of researchers within the field. It is important that they utilise a variety of methods available in the broader social sciences if they are to exert influence on the debates and direction of the area of business and management.

Table 8: Publications by Journal and Researcher's Country

Researcher's Country Affiliation	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	Entrepreneurship and regional development	International Small Business Journal	Journal of Business Venturing	Journal of Small Business Management	Small Business Economics	Total
USA	75	7	9	61	55	32	239
UK	19	24	57	7	4	19	130
Canada	6	0	4	8	6	4	28
Germany	3	2	3	2	1	10	21
Sweden	4	5	4	3	2	3	21
Spain	2	5	4	0	5	4	20
Australia	3	1	6	1	6	0	17
Netherlands	1	4	3	0	3	4	15
Belgium	0	2	0	1	2	6	11
Italy	1	2	2	0	0	3	8
Norway	2	4	2	0	0	0	8
France	1	1	3	0	1	1	7
USA/Canada	3	0	0	3	1	0	7
New Zealand	0	1	2	0	2	1	6
Singapore	0	1	0	3	1	1	6
Denmark	2	0	1	2	0	0	5
Ireland	0	0	2	0	2	1	5
Japan	0	0	1	0	1	3	5
Switzerland	0	2	1	2	0	0	5
Total	122	61	104	93	92	92	564

Note: This table excludes different country collaborations and countries that have published less than 5 papers

Table 9: Research collaborations across countries

Country of lead author	Countries of collaboration	Total of papers in collaborations
USA	Belgium/USA (1); Bulgaria (2); Canada (7); Chile (1); France (1); Germany (2); Germany/Chile/Spain (1); Germany/Ireland/Hungary/Australia (1); Italy (2); Israel (1); Spain (1); Turkey (2); UK (1); Singapore (1); UK/Switzerland (1);	25
Canada	Belgium (1); India (1); Israel (1); Netherlands (2); Switzerland (1); Taiwan (1); UK (2); USA (4)	13
UK	Finland (1); France (1); Germany (2); Greece (1); Ireland (1); Malaysia (1); Netherlands (4); Sweden (1)	12
Netherland	Sweden (1); Germany (4); Germany/USA (1); Italy (1); New Zealand (1); UK (1); UK/Germany (2)	11
Germany	Canada (1); Denmark (1); Netherlands (1); Netherlands/UK (1); UK (1); USA (1); USA/Hungary (1)	7
France	Canada (1); Germany (2); Peru (1); Slovenia (1); Sweden (1)	6
Sweden	Finland (1); Germany/USA (1); Israel (1); USA (3)	6
Switzerland	Belgium (2); Finland (1); Germany (1); USA (2)	6
Finland	South Africa (1); Sweden (1); Switzerland (1); USA (1)	4
Australia	Sri Lanka (1); Sweden (1); USA (1)	3
China	Canada (1); USA (1); USA/Canada (1)	3
Norway	Australia (1); UK (1); USA (1)	3
Singapore	Canada (1); Finland (1)	2
Spain	Netherlands (1); UK (1)	2
Denmark	Sweden (1)	1
Hungary	Australia/Germany/USA (1)	1
Italy	UK	1
Mexico	Canada	1
New Zealand	UK	1
Turkey	UK	1
Vietnam	USA	1
Total		110

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