

Journal of Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics

ISSN 2345-4695

2014, 2(1): 63–73

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING COURSES IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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Received September 2013; accepted June 2014

Abstract

Purpose- Today, entrepreneurship has become a necessity for economic development in different countries. Therefore, entrepreneurship training could be a solution in order to reach this goal. But it should be considered that for being more successful, these courses should be effective and efficient.

Design/methodology/approach- In this study, a survey is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these courses between 265 trained individuals between in a two years period. Random sampling is done and then 113 individuals were selected to conduct the survey. Cronbach's alpha was calculated (0.967) and some hypotheses were tested.

Findings- Results reveal that output effectiveness was significant, and the courses were considered to be at an acceptable level. But there were some limitations as follows: (i) lack of access to a large number of trainers, which might affect the generalization level of the findings; and (ii) finding appropriate measures to test the mentioned hypotheses.

Research Implications- The findings of this research might be used by policy makers, trainers and even tutors in the field of entrepreneurship.

Originality/value- The research is among the first studies in the area of evaluating entrepreneurship training courses conducted in Iran.

Research Paper

Keywords: Effectiveness, Output, Training, Entrepreneurship.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Hosseinzadeh, M., Razavi, S. M., Hosseinzadeh, D. (2014). "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Training Courses in a Developing Country", *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Business and Economics*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 63–73.

Introduction

Since the 70s, we have seen uninterrupted growth and a very significant development of entrepreneurship training programs in the US, and increasingly in other countries too (Fayolle, 1998). Entrepreneurship education and its role have been highlighted in the 80s, and then more specialized entrepreneurship education courses/programs commenced in 90s. This, in turn, led to prevailing developments in this field (Kuratko, 2003; Salamzadeh, 2012, 2014; Guerrero et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship education has progressed in great strides, following Ronstadt's (1990) prediction, and spread widely around the world over the last decades. The proliferation of courses in U.S. business schools and worldwide, from the time the first MBA entrepreneurship course was proposed in 1947 at Harvard Business School has been supplemented by an increasing diversity in pedagogic approaches and an increasing number of courses addressing special subjects within the entrepreneurial process (Baptista, et al., 2012; Salamzadeh et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship is now a well-established academic discipline and a legitimate course of study (Salamzadeh et al., 2013a). Various theories of market failures and targeting motivate the promotion of entrepreneurship training programs throughout the world (Fairlie et al., 2012; Farsi et al., 2014).

On the other hand, evaluating such courses/programs is of paramount importance, since it guarantees the effectiveness and efficiency of these plans. In last few decades, significant developments and improvements presented in this field; yet concentrating on feedback is a new approach. Research on pedagogy in entrepreneurship training appears to focus mainly on program design and implementation than on the efficacy of assessment practice (Pittaway et al., 2009). When exploring the research bibliography of the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCGE), a similar conclusion can be drawn. Pittaway et al. (2009) further posted that despite a database of over 700 citations, including recent working papers, there are only three papers listed that have a specific interest in assessment practice. While the limitations of systematic literature review and the NCGE's bibliographical database are taken into account, it does seem that there is a scarcity of work specifically addressing assessment practice in enterprise education published in entrepreneurship journals (Lekoko et al., 2012).

Therefore it seems to be necessary to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship training courses in different countries and institutions. A good assessment/evaluation considers a series of criteria, such as: level of satisfaction, level of improvement in learning, skills learnt, etc. The results of this study focus on these elements and suggest different recommendations to those institutions which are engaged in such activities. In this paper, we firstly review the existing literature in this field. Then methodology is discussed, and results are drawn. Finally the paper concludes with a set of findings and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurship Trainers

Entrepreneurship has emerged over the last two decades as perhaps the most potent economic force the world has ever experienced. With that development, a similar growth in the field of entrepreneurship education has occurred. The recent growth and development in the curricula and programs devoted to entrepreneurship and new-venture creation have been remarkable. The number of schools and universities that offer courses related to entrepreneurship has grown from a few ones in the 1970s to over 1,600 in 2005 (Kuratko, 2005; Salamzadeh et al., 2013b; Kawamorita Kesim et al., 2013). It must not be assumed that entrepreneurship education is solely about encouraging “students” to set-up and run their own businesses. While there is some evidence that experience in a small firm can help the development of more enterprising individuals (Kirby, 2004; Salamzadeh et al., 2011, 2013a; Radovic Markovic et al., 2012 a, b).

Entrepreneurship and business education have emerged in different countries as a method to develop entrepreneurial cultures, to create new businesses, to promote entrepreneurship, and to foster entrepreneurial mindsets via education and learning. Encouraging business education all around the world, the development of entrepreneurship education has led to varied socioeconomic developments in different countries. In last decades, these education developments have evolved to more than hundreds of programs in thousands of institutions around the world (JafariMoghadam et al. 2012; Tanha et al, 2011). Yet, research about the effects of entrepreneurship education is still in its infancy. Many studies to date simply describe entrepreneurship courses, discuss the content of good entrepreneurship education or evaluate the economic impact of courses by comparing takers and non-takers. Some researchers have proposed a positive link between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial attitudes, intention or action, but the evidence is still not strong (von Graevenitz, et al. 2010; Shabani, 2013; Radovic Markovic et al., 2012 c; Radovic Markovic and Salamzadeh, 2012).

As von Graevenitz, et al. (2010) discuss: some empirical studies verify that there is a positive impact of entrepreneurship education courses/programs at universities on perceived attractiveness and feasibility of new venture creation (Fayolle et al., 2006). Reviews of literature on enterprise/entrepreneurship education (Dainow, 1986; Gorman et al., 1997) and of particular entrepreneurship programs (McMullan et al., 1987) give evidence that these programs encourage entrepreneurs to start a venture. But usually, there are serious methodological limitations. For instance, studies rarely involve control groups or a form of stochastic matching (Block and Stumpf, 1992), basic controls as pre and post testing are not employed and most studies survey participants with an existing predisposition towards entrepreneurship, biasing the results in favor of educational interventions (Gorman et al., 1997; Shabani, 2013; Radovic Markovic et al., 2013).

In the midst of this huge expansion remains the challenge of complete academic legitimacy for entrepreneurship. While it can be argued that some legitimacy has been attained in the current state of entrepreneurship education, there are critical challenges that lie ahead (Kuratko, 2005). Moreover, Comparisons in the field of entrepreneurship education are complicated, over and above a low generalizability in research findings, also by the differences in objectives and meanings associated with the words used to describe educational programs and initiatives. Both in literature and practice there is sometimes confusion between the terms ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘enterprise’ and ‘small business’ (Alberti et al., 2004).

On the other hand, entrepreneurship trainers assist individuals to assess their entrepreneurial orientation and potential. Some entrepreneurship trainers acknowledge the need to help future entrepreneurs explore their business ideas in more depth before they embark on a more systematic search for detailed, rational information (ille Carrier, 2007; Salamzadeh et al., 2014 b). Pretorius et al. (2005) argue that entrepreneurship education challenged the functioning of traditional management programs’ pedagogical teams, who classically distinguished between academics and business experts. Entrepreneurship pedagogical teams introduce a new role, that of the “facilitator” standing at the core of the entrepreneurial educational system. Ideally, a good facilitator should increase the students' motivation and entrepreneurial intentions, as well as develop the students' entrepreneurial and business skills according to market, social and cultural requirements. In reality, the facilitator's role is often achieved not by a sole isolated individual but rather by an entire group of academics, business professionals and coaches (Radu and Redien-Collot, 2012).

Effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Training Courses

A next step for entrepreneurship education research has begun with the study of the effectiveness of the various contextual methods employed with entrepreneurship education programs (Vanevenhoven, 2013). There has been very little research into the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education (Lange et al., 2010). Then, assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education. Well-designed assessment sets clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload and provides opportunities for students to self-monitor, rehearse, practice and receive feedback. Assessment is an integral component of a coherent educational experience (Pittaway et al., 2009). It has been observed that impact assessment in entrepreneurship education is currently receiving increasing attention from various stakeholders (Mwasalwiba, 2010).

Little attention has been dedicated to how to measure the overall effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs for individuals and society (Alberti et al., 2004). Niyonkuru (2005) argued that there are no standardized methods for assessing the results of entrepreneurship education programs for individuals and society. It is highly advocated that the main problems relating to the assessment of entrepreneurship education may lie in measuring output from the entrepreneurship

education process (Lekoko et al., 2012). Alberti et al. (2004) assert that the lack of generally accepted measures is due to different factors characterizing entrepreneurship education, such as target groups, university/schools vs. entrepreneurship education/training focus, objectives of entrepreneurship education, levels of analysis and time dimension (Lekoko et al., 2012; Salamzadeh et al., 2014 a).

Still little attention has been dedicated to how to measure the overall effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs towards individuals and society (McMullan and Gillin, 2001). The main problems related to the assessment of entrepreneurship education may lie in measuring output from the entrepreneurial education process. Although it seems difficult to determine causality, some output measures (such as changes in entrepreneurial values, in orientation towards entrepreneurial careers, in personal assessment of entrepreneurial skills and so on) could also be examined (Wickham, 1989). The methods for assessing the results of entrepreneurship education are not well-defined, neither are any standardized means for measuring the results generally accepted. The lack of generally accepted measures is due to the heterogeneity of a number of factors characterizing entrepreneurship education, such as: Target groups, University/school vs. entrepreneurship education/training focus, Objectives of entrepreneurship education, Levels of analysis, and Time dimension (Alberti et al., 2004).

Another assessment process is modeled on the assessment model proposed by Pretorius (2008). This Entrepreneurship Education Assessment Model (EEAM) considers five key constructs, as postulated by Pretorius (2008). These constructs are composites of many factors and related issues of entrepreneurial education, which are: Context of the education program, Entrepreneurial success themes, Business knowledge and skills, Learning approaches, Business plan utilization, and the facilitator.

Methodology

This research is an applied research which is based on a survey. The research population is a set of trainers who are trained in the entrepreneurship training courses between year 2010 to 2012 (N=265). Based on Cochran's formula for random sampling, 113 respondents were selected and a series of questionnaires were distributed among them. The questionnaire includes 39 questions about three output variables: Motivation, knowledge, and Skill. Table 1 shows the calculated Cronbach's alpha for these variables. As it is shown in the Table, the Cronbach's alpha for all the variables is greater than 0.7, and then the reliability of the questionnaire is confirmed. It should be mentioned that the validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts (expert/face validity). The questionnaire was revised for three times and then used as the main instrument in this research. The authors used SPSS software to test the hypotheses.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training courses positively affects the motivation of trainers.

H2: Effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training courses positively affects the knowledge of trainers.

H3: Effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training courses positively affects the skills of trainers.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
Motivation	.897
Knowledge	.843
Skill	.944
Total	.967

Results

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the variables. Based on the figures, all the mean values are above 3.5, but the highest figure is for motivation (3.82). It implies that the trainers believe that the courses mostly affect their motivation.

Table 2. Descriptive data for variables

1.

Variables		
	M	SD
Motivation	3.82	0.64
Knowledge	3.64	0.61
Skill	3.74	0.62
Total	3.74	0.58

H1: Effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training courses positively affects the motivation of trainers.

Based on the figures in table 3, t value is 5.3, which is greater than the standard t-value, and significant at 0.01 level. Then we could conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed, and therefore entrepreneurship training courses positively affect the motivation of trainers. This finding is in line with prior research. For instance, Galloway and Brown (2002) find that entrepreneurship education has given trainers information about, as well as the motivation to start, high quality, growth businesses. Moreover, Lee et al. (2005) mention that entrepreneurship education provides trainers motivation, knowledge, and skills essential for launching a suc-

successful venture company. Rodrigues et al. (2010) believe that entrepreneurship training courses have an important role in shaping the motivation to start up a business. Some scholars believe that trainers are assumed to gain self-confidence and motivation, become proactive, creative and learn how to work in a team after such courses (e.g. Oosterbeek et al., 2008).

Table 3. t test results for "motivation"

Variable	Theoretical mean	Mean	s.d.	d.f.	Observed t	t	Sig.
Motivation	3.5	3.82	0.64	112	5.3	2.33	0.01

H2: Effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training courses positively affects the knowledge of trainers.

Based on the figures in table 4, t value is 2.48, which is greater than the standard t-value, and significant at 0.05 level. Then we could conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed, and therefore entrepreneurship training courses positively affect the knowledge of trainers. While some researchers argue that entrepreneurship education involves the use of the knowledge acquired in many different business school courses such as accounting, financial analysis, marketing, information systems, leadership, and general management (Jack and Anderson, 1999; Lee et al., 2005), still this knowledge might be gained through other channels. Fayolle et al. (2006) argue that these courses aim to develop knowledge or skills that enable a trainer to achieve an effective performance. Some other authors believe that academics in the field of entrepreneurship education are increasingly aware that while class-based knowledge input is a vital component of learning, the traditional lecture-based, didactic methods of teaching and learning alone are insufficient (Cooper et al., 2004).

Table 4. t test results for "knowledge"

Variable	Theoretical mean	Mean	s.d.	d.f.	Observed t	t	Sig.
Knowledge	3.5	3.64	0.61	112	2.48	1.96	0.05

H3: Effectiveness of the entrepreneurship training courses positively affects the skills of trainers.

Based on the figures in table 5, t value is 4.05, which is greater than the standard t-value, and significant at 0.01 level. Then we could conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed, and therefore entrepreneurship training courses positively affect the skills of trainers. Gorman et al. (1997) mention that entrepreneurship education should include skill-building courses such as negotiation, leadership and creative thinking and exposure to technological innovation and new product devel-

opment. Some authors highlight the need for skill development in entrepreneurship education courses (see, Wee, 2004; Lee et al., 2005). Alberti et al. (2004) argue that these courses would have different learning objectives, focusing on skill development, attitude changes, entrepreneurship empathy development, etc.

Table 5. t test results for "skill"

Variable	Theoretical mean	Mean	s.d.	d.f.	Observed t	t	Sig.
Skill	3.5	3.74	0.62	112	4.05	2.33	0.01

Conclusions

As discussed earlier, entrepreneurship education is an influential tool for improving entrepreneurship. These educational services could be rendered in different programs and courses, which should be effective and efficient. This will help students in improving their motivation, skills, and knowledge. According to our findings, these hypotheses were supported through a survey on trainers. But there were some limitations as follows: (i) lack of access to a large number of trainers, which might affect the generalization level of the findings; and (ii) finding appropriate measures to test the mentioned hypotheses. Future authors are invited to test the sub-elements under each variable, such as skill, etc. Moreover, it is suggested that authors take into account the rank of each variable.

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