

THE ENTRECOMP CERTIFICATE PROJECT – A BRIDGE BETWEEN SCHOOL EDUCATION AND THE WORLD OF WORK

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Abstract

The article is based on the EntreComp Certificate project (Erasmus+ Programme - 2019-UK01-KA201-062076) as it is being developed within a partnership of educational (universities and schools) and IT institutions and organizations from the United Kingdom, Romania, France, Italy and Cyprus. The EntreComp Certificate project focuses on the importance of entrepreneurship in social and economic development and individual growth nowadays. The project relies on the EntreComp Framework established by the European Union; it aims to enhance Europe's entrepreneurial potential by supporting individuals to acquire and develop the skills and the key competencies detailed in the EntreComp Framework. The article presents the project's objectives, methodology and main outputs. The study gives insights into how the partnership adapted the EntreComp Framework to meet teachers' needs and enable them to use the EntreComp Framework in their school contexts. To this end, an e-learning platform was created. Its suggested activities and guidance curriculum are meant to enable educators to develop and then assess the fifteen competences of the EntreComp Framework that their students acquired in their activities at Intermediate and Advanced Levels.

Key words: entrepreneurship education, the EntreComp Framework, e-learning platform

Introducing entrepreneurship into education has been one of the key objectives for the European Union and its member states (European Union, 2006; European Commission, 2016). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent almost 99% of the total number of businesses providing jobs for two-thirds of the people (European Commission, 2020).

Entrepreneurship is perceived as having a great impact on social and economic development and individual growth and acting as a major engine for economic growth and job creation (European Union, 2006). It has become an agent of change requiring people and organizations to update and upgrade their competencies. Entrepreneurial education demonstrates to students the link between school education and the world of work, enhancing their interest, engagement, creativity and motivation in both education and work life.

Focus on improving entrepreneurship education would help young people to acquire the needed entrepreneurial skills and to create jobs for others (European Commission, 2020). However,

there are significant challenges alongside the stated positive effects: teachers' lack of time, resources and training, insufficient educational infrastructure and assessment difficulties (European Commission, 2016).

The EntreComp Certificate project (developed within a partnership of educational and IT institutions and organizations from the United Kingdom, Romania, France, Italy and Cyprus) raises awareness of the importance of entrepreneurial education. The project relies on the common European definition of entrepreneurship as a key competence, which focuses on the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes covering a wide range of areas of life and society. The project aims to enhance Europe's entrepreneurial potential by supporting individuals (students and teachers) to acquire and develop the skills and key competencies detailed in the EntreComp Frame.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

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The European Commission developed a common reference framework with learning outcome descriptors as well as a user guide to support the promotion of entrepreneurship competence across the world of education and work (Bacigalupo M et al, 2016; McCallum E et al, 2018). The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework or EntreComp is a tool meant to improve the entrepreneurship competence of European citizens and organizations. To this end, the European Commission establishes a common understanding of entrepreneurship competence; thus, entrepreneurship competence is a transversal competence covering all areas of life enabling citizens to project and pursuit their personal development, to actively participate in the social development and job market, and to contribute to cultural, social or commercial enterprises. The framework aims to establish a bridge between education and the world of work and provides a standard reference to any initiative fostering entrepreneurial learning.

The framework is based on three competence areas, which include five competences, 442 learning outcomes and four proficiency levels (Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced and Expert). The EntreComp model has two main dimensions: three tightly intertwined competence areas and fifteen competences defining entrepreneurship as a competence for all citizens (figure 1). The three competence areas, 'Ideas and opportunities', 'Resources' and 'Into Action', highlight the idea that underlies the entrepreneurship competence: all citizens can turn their ideas and opportunities into action by activating and making use of their resources, be they personal (self-awareness and self-efficacy, motivation and perseverance), material (production means and financial resources) or non-material (specific knowledge, skills and attitudes). The fifteen competences are also interrelated and interconnected and should be treated as parts of a whole.

The model presents the main threads of each competence. For instance, the main building blocks of Creativity are 'Be curious and open', 'Develop ideas', 'Define problems', 'Design value', and 'Be Innovative'. Concrete learning outcomes are progressively associated with each thread, helping students to develop along an entrepreneurial learning pathway. Thus, for the 'Be curious and open' thread, the student progresses from 'I can show that I am curious about new things and I can explore new ways to make use of existing resources' to a much more complex level: 'I can combine my understanding of different contexts to transfer knowledge, ideas and solutions across different areas', the latter showing an increased level of autonomy (McCallum E et al, 2018).

The EntreComp does not propose a linear sequence of steps necessary for citizens to become proficiently entrepreneurial or to start-up a

business. The EntreComp offers a tool that can be adapted to different needs. It starts from value creation achieved through external support (Foundation level) and progresses by increasing autonomy (Intermediate), responsibility (Advanced) and transformative impact (Expert) in its reference domain. As not all citizens are interested in developing all the competences to the highest level of proficiency it is expected that institutions, intermediaries and initiative developers who are willing to adopt EntreComp as a reference framework adapt it to their own purposes and to the needs of their target groups.



Figure 1 The entrepreneurship competency

The framework is a flexible source of inspiration to be used or adapted to support different contexts. EntreComp can be used in different contexts and is suitable for teachers and educators interested and working in formal education, non-formal learning and inclusion activities. For instance, EntreComp could inspire the reform of curricula in the formal education and training sector, the design of practical entrepreneurial experiences in non-formal learning contexts, or the development of tools for students/citizens to self-assess their entrepreneurial proficiency.

EntreComp and its guide offer a consistent set of competences and learning outcomes, which can be at the basis of future programs and extra-curricular activities relevant to the students. EntreComp enables educators to create new or enhance existing teaching and learning activities to develop entrepreneurial competences and design assessment strategies of entrepreneurial learning. The tool also helps them to understand, value, implement, assess and recognize their students' entrepreneurial competences.

EntreComp can help bring stakeholders on board to school and show them how entrepreneurship education is central not only to school but also to their work. Thus, it establishes a bridge between the worlds of education and work where entrepreneurship is a competence for life (Seikkula-Leino et al, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The project created an online platform, based on the clear set of competences necessary for entrepreneurial education established by the EntreComp Framework. The partnership focused on the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ of the EntreComp Framework with a view to engaging students and teachers in understanding entrepreneurship and the benefits of integrating it into education. To this end, the partnership carried out a survey on 50 teachers per country to have a realistic perception of how familiar teachers are with the EntreComp Framework and its benefits.

In Romania, most of the respondents heard about EntreComp but stated that they were not familiar with it.

No	Question	Answers	Percentage
1	How familiar are you with EntreComp?	-heard about it-30 -not too familiar-34	60%
2	How do you appreciate it?	-raise their awareness and understanding of the entrepreneurial competencies -potential to inspire and engage educators into entrepreneurial education	84%
3	What are its challenges?	-difficult to understand -too theoretical	36%
4	What are your suggestions?	-full explanations of competencies -resources -practical examples -online training/tutorials on EntreComp -demonstration of the value of entrepreneurial learning -sharing good examples, consulting, networking -recognition for using EntreComp at individual and organizational levels	40% 42% 86% 80% 30% 60% 86%
5	Is it relevant to your work? Are you motivated to use it?	YES	96%

Figure 2 Survey findings

Most of the respondents appreciated EntreComp for raising their awareness and understanding of entrepreneurial competency and its potential to inspire and engage educators or organizations into entrepreneurial education. However, some of them found the framework difficult to understand or too theoretical. As for their suggestions to improve it, they suggested simplifying it so that it can turn into an invaluable tool that can be used directly by teachers in their work. They also proposed: full explanations of the fifteen competences included in entrepreneurial competency, resources that explain the value of entrepreneurial competences, practical examples of how to include EntreComp in their area of work, online training on how to use EntreComp, demonstrations of the value of entrepreneurial learning, the possibility of sharing good practices, consulting, and networking, etc. The respondents also highlighted the need for standardized assessment of the outcomes and the impact of entrepreneurial teaching/learning processes. They stated that having guidance on how to use it and assess progress in the EntreComp competences would contribute to the effectiveness of the tool.

The high majority of participants appreciated the EntreComp Framework as a necessary tool relevant to their work and, thus, stated that they are motivated to integrate it into their schools. International recognition for using EntreComp would also contribute to the massive integration of entrepreneurship education into schools. All teachers admitted that developing entrepreneurial competences is essential nowadays and, therefore, fully supported the integration of the EntreComp Framework into education.

Based on the survey results, the partnership used the ‘EntreComp into Action User Guide’ (McCallum et al, 2018) to create an e-learning platform having three main objectives:

1. adapting entrepreneurial learning outcomes to a specific context
2. suggesting challenging teaching and learning activities to develop entrepreneurial competences
3. designing the assessment strategies of entrepreneurial learning.

The e-learning platform promotes activities and created a guidance curriculum to develop the fifteen competences established by the EntreComp Framework at Intermediate and Advanced Levels. The material addresses school and college students aged 14-20. The project also produced assessment instruments leading to a certificate endorsed by Lancaster University and Europass. Thus, each of the fifteen competences (at Intermediate and Advanced Level) are described and explained by:

1. a short introductory video explaining the competence
2. PowerPoint presentations and information screens providing students with simple guidance for each competence.
3. suggestions of activities for each competence (such as membership of a team, club or organization, participation in a school project or in an international exchange project, work experience, leadership roles in or out of school, participation in a school competition, participation in a business or enterprise project, etc).
4. a list of approved qualifications demonstrating the competence: e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award, Music, Drama and Dance Grades or Coaching Awards, etc.
5. models of good practice in the competence
6. online quizzes for some of the competences to help prove completion and understanding.

The first part of the platform consists of innovative guidance materials aiming at making the EntreComp Framework accessible to students.

All fifteen competences are presented through simple PowerPoint presentations and illustrative videos. The presentations are accessible and attractive explaining to students how the competence can be applied to employment and social entrepreneurship and how they can relate it to their learning. They are grouped into the three areas identified by the EntreComp Framework: Ideas and opportunities, Into action and Resources, and encourage students to work autonomously and independently at either intermediate or advanced level. The presentations include links to other resources on the topics available on the internet if students wish to further develop their knowledge. The video clips accompanying the presentations are created and produced by students participating in the project; they illustrate and familiarize students with each competence and demonstrate practically what one needs to do and what techniques to tackle to achieve it.

The second part of the platform includes a list of suggested activities students can participate in to achieve the competency of the EntreComp Framework. The list offers a varied range of enticing opportunities which students can choose from according to their context, level of challenge they like to embrace and preference. The list gives guidance on the length of time each activity should be carried out (up to one year) to be considered to reach the required level as well as examples relevant to each partner country.

The third part offers models of evidence of suggested assessment for each competence; students can upload all 15 pieces of evidence to the platform in any order to prove they have achieved the competence they have been working on. Some of the competences can be completed through online quizzes. Students are required to carry out the experiential tasks suggested independently and autonomously in the true spirit of entrepreneurship. Schools provide the curriculum, framework and support for the award but they expect students to conduct the tasks in their own time. Once a student has uploaded all 15 pieces of evidence, they are assessed internally by the school at an either intermediate or advanced level. The assessment also requires the students to reflect on the skills acquired through participation in a particular activity and how they relate to the workplace (based on a short questionnaire). The 'Validate' program developed by Lancaster University helps in the assessment of the Award. This is a key part of the EntreComp Certificate participants get at the end of the program. This experience is excellent preparation for university and employment, creating responsible and socially aware citizens

who can use their initiative, be creative and see things through to completion.

The new developments related to the pilot of the platform will go further into the understanding of the competency and will mark an increase in the number of suggested activities.

CONCLUSIONS

As the project's implementation is not completed yet we expect that the new developments related to the pilot of the platform will go further into the understanding of the competency and will mark an increase in the number of suggested activities meant to develop entrepreneurial competency. The findings of the project's development show that the EntreComp Framework model can offer positive learning experiences in schools and universities and enables educators to bridge the existing gaps between school and the world of work motivating thus students to learn.

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