

Transferable entrepreneurial competences: Assessment issues and proposals

Research background

An increasing number of entrepreneurship educational programs is offered around the world, accompanied by growing demands for accountability from educational stakeholders (Duval-Couetil 2013). However, research about the assessment of entrepreneurship educational programs outcomes is still lacking, despite its recognized importance (Fayolle 2013).

Assessment in education is defined as a process of systematic gathering evidence, review, and use of information to judge and infer about student's performances and potential improvements (Palomba & Banta 1999). Assessing entrepreneurship education is particularly difficult because it is a relatively young discipline, characterized by conceptual and methodological debates (Duval-Couetil 2013; Fayolle 2013). An important issue in this regard is that entrepreneurship education does not only entail focusing on technical contents related to venture creation and small business management, but on a wider set of skills, knowledge, and experiences aiming at the development of enterprising people (Gibb 1993). Taking this perspective, the assessment of entrepreneurship education at the student-level should be based on appropriate tools to evaluate transferable entrepreneurial competences¹ (IBE 2016). To date, this is problematic because there is a lack of standardized tools and methods available to teachers and instructors to systematically assess these competences².

Entrepreneurial competences describe something which a person should be able to demonstrate or achieve to successfully exercise entrepreneurship (Mitchelmore & Rowley 2010). The notion of competences is complex—comprising components that are deeply rooted in a person's background (e.g., traits, personality, attitudes) as well as those that can be

¹ In this paper, we use the term transferable as interchangeable with 'soft' or 'transversal' competences (IBE 2016)

² For some noteworthy exceptions trying to address this gap, see the works reviewed by Komarkova et al., 2015.

acquired (e.g., skills, knowledge) (Man et al. 2002). The concept of entrepreneurial competences has been extensively adopted by both policy-makers (e.g., Komarkova et al., 2015) and researchers (e.g., Morris et al., 2013) because they are key to career and work—both in a corporate and in a self-employment context and they correlate with business performance.

Research design

Working in an interdisciplinary team formed by education and management scholars, we organized our research design around three phases. In the first phase, we identified what are the transversal competences relevant for entrepreneurship and the available tools to assess them, through a two-pronged approach: (1) an extensive literature review of academic literature and of policy documents; (2) interviews to experts and educators in five European universities involved in a project regarding the assessment of entrepreneurial competences (SOCCES – <http://www.socces.eu/>). At the end of this phase, we identified five areas of competences to be included in our assessment framework, i.e., positive attitude and initiative; critical and analytical thinking and problem solving; communication; team-work and collaboration; creativity and innovation. Within these areas of competence, we identified 17 specific competences and assessment tools – including qualitative, quantitative; and self-, etero-assessment.

In the second phase, we pilot-tested the identified tools on 71 students involved in a 5-weeks international on-line business model competition. We administered a pre- and post-test of selected entrepreneurial competences, finding no significant change in the results. The selected tools showed good reliability. Given the transversal and applied nature of the selected competences, the pilot suggested to reduce the number of psychometric tools and include more qualitative and “situated” tools (e.g., using scenarios or practical exercises).

In the third phase we reviewed the assessment tools and formulated a proposal for a standardized, mixed-method set of tools responding to the needs of an active, development-oriented assessment of entrepreneurial competences.

Conclusions

Entrepreneurial competences have been acknowledged as key for individuals living and working in a knowledge society and policy-makers recommend their teaching at any level of education (EACEA/Eurydice 2012). However, the transversal nature of entrepreneurial competences poses several challenges to educators in regard to the teaching and the assessment side.

In this paper we tackle the issue of assessing transferable entrepreneurial competences at the student level. We provide several contributions to the literature. First, we review and systematize the state-of-the-art on measurement and assessment of transversal entrepreneurial competences. Second, we present an assessment framework on transversal entrepreneurial competences and suggest a practical, self-standing assessment tool to be used by teachers and instructors.

Our interdisciplinary study highlights that the assessment of entrepreneurial competences needs to be based on the integration of different epistemological approaches to education, thus adopting mixed-, multi-source, and real-life methods, aimed not only at summative but also formative purposes. We therefore wish that our findings will stimulate new directions of research and practice aimed at introducing a game-changing approach to learning, teaching, and assessing entrepreneurship as a set of transferable competences.

Selected references

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