

## Needs and Perspectives of Entrepreneurship Education for Postgraduate Students. A Romanian Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

*Entrepreneurship education is essential in supporting the main goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. Also, the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan states that it is entrepreneurship that makes the European economy more competitive and innovative.*

*Despite the fact that entrepreneurs create jobs and bring contributions to the economy, their successes are not presented as role models in the media. For young people, this makes an entrepreneurial career rank rather low in the list of attractive professions and it is a deterrent to those who might want to become entrepreneurs. Therefore, this article will present the results of a survey conducted among postgraduate students from 2 masteral programs at University of Bucharest. The opportunity to be involved in a mentoring activity with a successful entrepreneur was presented as a concept and tested. The need for role models and building a network with entrepreneur mentors are few of the research findings.*

**KEYWORDS:** *entrepreneurship, online mentoring, soft skills, personal development.*

### 1. SOCIAL CONTEXT AND REQUIRED SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

According to EU Skills Panorama (2014) Romania Analytical Highlight [1], in Romania, job opportunities for young people are much scarcer than for those aged 30 and over. This results in the employment rate for persons under the age of 25 being three times lower than 25-34 and 35-54 age groups and twice lower than those aged 55-64. Concerning unemployment, the rate for young people is four times higher than the rate for persons aged 25 or above and, in some regions, even 5.5 times higher; 41.5% of the young unemployed have been in unemployment for a year or more [2].

While unemployment rates for the low-skilled and medium-skilled have remained constant in the last years, unemployment among the high-skilled workforce, most of which are young people, has increased. This imbalance is illustrated also by the sharper fall in employment rate for higher education graduates, which is steeper than the EU average. An even clearer picture is given by the fact that in the 2000-2010 period although the total number of those unemployed fell by about 50,000 people, the number of unemployed with a university degree increased by about 50,000 people [3]. This high imbalance is explained by the increase in 2000-2010 in the number of university graduates, hence stronger competition for the relatively limited number of vacancies for the high-skilled. To remedy this situation, local and regional public employment services have been working with local employers to design appropriate training courses for the unemployed so as to improve their skills and access to the labour market [4].

Up to 2020, graduates from the following five fields of study are expected to experience the highest growth in demand by employers: information technology (18% increase in demand),

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health (16%), architecture and construction (13%), business and administration (11%) and engineering (11%) [5].

Starting to develop the entrepreneurship competences for youngsters could be a way of decreasing the unemployment rate and to generate a sustainable growth of society. Entrepreneurship competences can be used across people's personal and working lives [6] as they encompass creativity, initiative, tenacity, teamwork, understanding of risk, and a sense of responsibility [7]. Entrepreneurship competences are not related to a specific occupation, discipline or qualification. The OECD has identified three main groups of skills required by entrepreneurs [8]:

- Technical – communication, environment monitoring, problem solving, technology implementation and use, interpersonal, organizational skills.

- Business management – planning and goal setting, decision making, human resources management, marketing, finance, accounting, customer relations, quality control, negotiation, business launch, growth management, compliance with regulations skills.

- Personal entrepreneurial – self-control and discipline, risk management, innovation, persistence, leadership, change management, network building, and strategic thinking.

Almost twice as many people who regard self-employment as a feasible prospect in the next five years had followed an entrepreneurship course (34% compared to 18%). However, less than half of EU citizens feel that their school education helped them to better-understand the role of entrepreneurs in society (47%) or gave them the skills and know-how to enable them to run a business (41%). Only 28% of Eurobarometer respondents agreed that their school education made them interested in becoming an entrepreneur; although this figure ranged from 65% in Portugal to 17% in Germany and the United Kingdom [9].

Engendering entrepreneurship skills involves developing:

- Specific, technical business-running skills e.g. developing and implementing a business plan, accounting, budgeting;

- Transversal or strategic skills associated with entrepreneurship: an ability to take decisions based on balanced risk assessment and information analysis; recognising and implementing opportunities for business growth; following market developments and managing the products and services offer [10].

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND KEY FACTS ABOUT HOW ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS PERCEIVED**

Between December 2014 – January 2015, applying a non-probabilistic sampling, a research based questionnaire was conducted among students enrolled to the “Mentoring in education and Management” and “Evaluation of educational programs” from University of Bucharest.

The research objectives were:

- to identify the topics to be treated in a mentoring program;
- to find out the entrepreneurial interest of students;
- to identify the usefulness and relevance level of the mentoring program

which were sustained by the following hypothesis:

- more than 70% of students would be interested to be part of the mentoring program;
- the concept of mentoring in entrepreneurship is not so clear for postgraduate students;
- the focus should be more on practice.

38 students answered to an online questionnaire, developed in Google forms, with a gender distribution of 97% females and 3% males. 40% of respondents were aged between 20-25 years old, 21% were between 26-35 years old and 39% above age of 36.

Students are active and present in social media, which is a facilitating factor for organizing the second part of the research, an online mentoring activity with students and entrepreneurs from different business areas. 95% of respondent have a Facebook account and 68% use Google+, which means they have an active Gmail account. Moreover, the interaction between mentor and mentee is appreciated to be realized via email (89%) and via Facebook (58%).

The laptop would be the most used device for accessing and interacting with mentors but 24% of students would use also their smartphones. The score is quite low from our point of view, meaning that communication won't be instant and this might cause some frustration for those who are using smartphone and are able to share a response, a point of view, immediately, in comparison with those who will be in the front of their laptops after a couple of hours.

Asked about what is a mentoring program and what a mentor should in order to develop the entrepreneurship competences of postgraduates students who are studying educational sciences, the top 3 activities associated with this are: counselling and guidance, personal development and training.

Education, IT and human resources are the most important domains where mentoring programs should be offered. Regarding mentoring programs for developing entrepreneurship competences, facilitated by entrepreneurs mentors, students expressed their interest in a higher proportion and more than 55% of them would allocate up to 3 hours/week for this activity. They consider that such a program should focus more on practice than theory.

The results also show that a mentoring program in entrepreneurship should offer examples and practical experiences, to help you learning what is the best from entrepreneurs, to help you transforming your ideas into practice and to offer collaboration/networking opportunities with all entrepreneurs (mentors) involved in the program and also with all the other students (mentees).

Personal development, communication and negotiation, what is doing concretely an entrepreneur and concrete steps in starting a business are the most required topics to be treated during the mentoring sessions.

For the next 12 months, 68% of students expressed the intention to develop their entrepreneurship competences and only 8% want to start a business, to be entrepreneurs. Those who have friend or relatives active in the business field are more tempted to develop their entrepreneurship competences.

The online mentoring program for postgraduate students in educational, facilitated by entrepreneurs mentors, was tested afterwards as a concept, based on the following KPIs: interest, uniqueness, relevance and credibility. All respondents considered such a program would be very interesting and 97% said this is relevant as a top 3 score. 87% see this concept as a credible one and 74% as a unique one, which could be organized by university.

44% of respondents would act as promoters, they would recommend this program also to other students from other specializations and only 27% would act as detractors. The net promotion score is 17% with a 7.7 mean score. We observed also a significant difference on the mean score of those aged 36-40 (8.8) and those between 31-35 years old (5.6), which means that the last group is not very convinced about the advantages of this program.

### 3. WHAT'S NEXT? RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The results of this research are confirming a higher interest of postgraduates students in developing entrepreneurship competences and an online mentoring activity could be a suitable idea in this respect. All our objectives were met and also the hypothesis were confirmed. Before such a program will be started, a clear difference between the following concepts: training, counselling, guidance and mentoring should be realized from the very beginning. It could be that students will have different expectations during the process which won't be met at the end of the program. Then can associate the mentoring with a training session, it could be that they will expect to attend some formal training sessions considering the lack of knowledge in entrepreneurship but mentoring means combining self-study and then coming in a discussion with the entrepreneur who will help you clarify and consolidate some concepts. Also, the role of the entrepreneur mentor is to guide you in taking some decision, in putting on paper some ideas to be followed.

The online community where the mentoring activities will happen should accomplish the following characteristics:

- to encourage commitment;
- to encourage contribution;
- to have a community manager who will act as entertainer and facilitator of interactions between mentors and mentees.

The next step it to facilitate an online mentoring program with students selected among the respondents of this study and with entrepreneurs who will act as mentors for students. A special attention should be paid and some answers to the questions below are needed:

- How the matching between mentor-mentee will be done? How the mentors will be selected? Will they receive some training in mentoring?
- What mentoring platform will be selected? What are the main features needed on it? How will be integrated Facebook features on it?

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