

Suggested citation:

Nowaczyk, G., Sobczak, A. (2016). Role of entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions in the process of business development in Poland. In: M. Kosała, M. Urbaniec & A. Żur (Eds.), *Entrepreneurship: Antecedents and Effects* ("Przedsiębiorczość Międzynarodowa", vol. 2, no. 2). Kraków: Cracow University of Economics, pp. 43-52.

Role of entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions in the process of business development in Poland

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to evaluate the range and methods of teaching entrepreneurship in higher institutions in Poland in fields of studies related to business, economics, finance, accounting, or management. The paper presents results of an analysis of curricula and of the carried out qualitative researches (FGI) among university students. Findings present that universities teach entrepreneurship on multiple types of courses and in different ways. Contents which shape entrepreneurial attitudes are taught in various courses. In curricula most courses teach entrepreneurship, by being applicable to particular spheres of business activities, but mostly shaping those competences that are useful in large firm environment. Recommendations suggest that higher education institutions should emphasize the teaching of practical skills, which support business development. Universities, through teaching entrepreneurship, are supposed to encourage their students to undertake business activities, including the ones which aim at opening own business by students which is why universities should emphasize the teaching of practical skills and entrepreneurship should be taught based on real-life examples.

Keywords: business studies; entrepreneurship; teaching; competences

JEL codes: I250

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is an element of the economy and it influences the level of innovation in the economy. The level of business development in a given country depends on many factors, but it also depends on the business attitude. A big role in building a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship is played by activity that promotes entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial attitudes, as well as by competences which are acquired during studies (Wach & Wojciechowski, 2016). According to the European Commission entrepreneurship is a skill which can be learned and

therefore it is necessary to support this type of education in all EU countries (European Commission, 2016). European Commission has recognized entrepreneurship education as a basic feature of education system in Europe (European Commission, 2016; Sadowska, 2016).

Research conducted by the Amway and carried out together with the Technische Universität München (TUM) and the Institute GfK SE in several dozen of countries all over the world show that most of the respondents (in 2005, 3 out of 4 respondents in the world and 71% of the respondents in Poland) have a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship (Amway, 2015). At the same time, a little less of the respondents thought that entrepreneurship can be taught (among all the respondents it was 63% and 68% of Polish respondents). The respondents indicated that entrepreneurship should be taught by schools, including higher education institutions, but also that there should be special programmes led by non-profit organisations, chambers of commerce, or government and private companies (Amway, 2014).

The aim of this article is to evaluate the range and methods of teaching entrepreneurship in higher institutions in Poland with reference to the fields of studies which seem to be preparing for business practice, such as economics, finance and accounting, or management. The paper presents results of an analysis of curricula and qualitative research among university students.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship is one of key competences which is being taught on different levels of education, including higher education. Teaching entrepreneurship in higher education institutions is supposed not to only develop various skills, but also to develop students' competences in the spectre of entrepreneurship, as well as it should inspire the business spirit (Komisja Europejska, 2008, pp. 8-9). The necessity of development of students' business competences and, related to that teaching of business in its' multiple aspects, is connected with the realization of several strategies accepted in the time perspective of 2020 within the European Union (Europe 2020) and within particular countries (in Poland the National Development Strategy 2020, the Strategy of Human Resources Development, the Social Capital Development Strategy, the Strategy of Innovation and Economic Efficiency), which highlight the significance of entrepreneurship with regard to socio-economic development of a country. Simultaneously, the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQF), determined by the Minister of Science and Higher Education by way of regulation in most of fields of study learning outcomes for the general academic profile and for practical profile on first and second-degree studies show the outcomes that concern entrepreneurship (Rozporządzenie Ministra ..., 2011). In the NQF, the entrepreneurship education usually emerges among knowledge outcomes and in the frame of social competences. The first ones refer to the knowledge of rules of starting and developing different forms of enterprises, while the second ones refer to thinking and acting in an entrepreneurial way. In the

rest of the descriptions of the discipline learning outcomes (in humanities, art, and in the description of engineering competences) do not include extended content regarding entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship education is limited to the studied field and refer to running a business activity within that field (Nowak, 2016).

Entrepreneurship education, in particular education for entrepreneurship, seems to be strongly connected with teaching economics or business. However, entrepreneurship itself is of interdisciplinary character, and its research ranges of from economics, management, finance to sociology, psychology, pedagogy, law and other scientific disciplines (Wach, 2014, pp. 20-24).

3. ANALYSIS OF CURRICULA IN ECONOMICS FIELDS OF STUDIES

According to Valerio, Parton and Robb (2014) the field of studies and related profile of the graduate are the key factors affecting interest in entrepreneurship. Simultaneously a positive correlation between attending entrepreneurship courses and new venture creation was found. Thus a positive correlation between entrepreneurship education and future entrepreneurial behavior was determined (Valerio, Parton & Robb, 2014). For the above reasons this study is focused on the curricula of business studies. For the purpose of analysing the range of business studies in higher education in the economic fields of studies, 15 curricula were analysed in 5 higher education institutions, both public and private, on first and second-degree studies in management, economics, and finance and accounting. The researched sample covered:

- 2 curricula on first-degree studies in economics,
- 1 curriculum on second-degree studies in economics,
- 5 curricula on first-degree studies in management,
- 3 curricula on second-degree studies in management,
- 2 curricula on first-degree studies in finance and accounting,
- 2 curricula on second-degree studies in finance and accounting.

The conducted analysis found that all the analysed curricula provided knowledge and shaped competences connected with entrepreneurship education. On average, courses corresponding to entrepreneurship education constituted almost one fifth of all the courses taught in a given field of study and made it possible to gain 16 ECTS credits. Range of courses, form of classes and purpose of those courses were quite different. The smallest number of entrepreneurship courses was found in finance and accounting and in economics. In the curricula of finance and accounting and the ones of economics on both first and second-degree studies there were no courses directly connected with the entrepreneurship education, that is to say courses which would enable their students to gain knowledge in, for example, starting a business or which would shape entrepreneurial attitudes. Entrepreneurial competences were shaped, among others, during courses in the fields of:

- economics – management, accounting, market surveys, or business communication,

- finance and accounting – management, accounting, business finances, cost accounts, or risk management.

Those types of courses represented 17% of all the courses and enabled gaining 15% of ECTS credits in economics; in finance and accounting – 14% of courses and 11% of ECTS credits.

In management the situation was different. In this field of study, contents shaping business competences among students constituted around one fifth of both the number of all courses and the number of ECTS credits. At the same time, in the curricula of the universities having this field of study on first and second-degree studies, there was always at least one course that directly corresponded to the entrepreneurship education, such as business studies, introduction to business studies, or business training. Along these courses students were required to develop a small enterprise management or business-plan, which shapes skills that are helpful with newly established business activities. During those courses there are usually carried out such issues as, for example:

- role of entrepreneurship,
- pros and cons of owning an enterprise,
- entrepreneurial personality – qualities and predispositions of an entrepreneur,
- developing ideas for one's own business,
- shaping organization's identity,
- communication between an enterprise and the market,
- business resources,
- analysis of available sources of financing of new enterprises,
- making business-plans,
- starting an economic activity,
- organizational and legal forms of enterprises,
- taxation rules of economic entities.

In management programmes curricula include courses connected with management, human resources management, project management, accounting, enterprises' finances, economics, marketing, and marketing strategies, market research and analysis, civil and commercial law, leadership, creative thinking in an organization, motivating oneself and other people, communication, and negotiations.

Comparing these results with analyses by Płaziak and Rachwał (2014) for a non-economic study program (geography), one can conclude that the focus on entrepreneurship education in economic study programs is greater than in non-economic study programs. Nevertheless one must also admit that the scope of entrepreneurship education in study programs related to economics and business is small and insufficient for the development of entrepreneurship in Poland. Thus, changes are needed to overcome barriers which according to Pietrzykowski (2011) hinder the development of entrepreneurship education, particularly in economics and business oriented study programs.

4. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACCORDING TO STUDENTS OF ECONOMIC FIELDS

The main purpose of the presented research was to identify the most important skills which should be possessed by students of economics and which will help them to start their own enterprises and to identify which forms of classes are best of use in teaching entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the influence of entrepreneurship education to students on shaping entrepreneurial attitudes and on supporting entrepreneurial initiatives undertaken by students on regional, national, or global level was diagnosed. Moreover, the purpose was to collect opinions and suggestions of changes that can be made by universities in order to better prepare young people for entrepreneurship. The research was conducted with qualitative research methodology, using the Focus Groups Interviews technique, which involves a discussion of respondents on a given topic. The research was conducted between June and September of 2015. The FGI scenario GGI was prepared in cooperation with experts from V4 countries and drawing upon literature in the field of entrepreneurship education (Cope, 2007; Shinnar, Pruett & Toney, 2009; Bell, 2015; Sirelkhatim & Gangi, 2015). 39 students of full and part-time economic studies met in a study of 4 focus groups in four Polish cities. Students of management and economics took part in the study. 4 students who are currently running their own enterprises took part in the study, as well as 3 students who help their relatives to run their enterprises. Other students were either common employees or unemployed (only studying).

In relation to the growing amount of voices speaking about the necessity of even greater commercialization of scientific research and their usage in business, it is natural that students of all the fields should be equipped with competences related to undertaking economic initiatives. There still is a lack of studies which would research the influence of the entrepreneurship education on the amount of new enterprises that are set up by university graduates who have passed a business course. However, such a dependence seems natural and this is why an attempt to diagnose that problem had been undertaken on few focus groups.

The tested students of economic studies, highlighted that business studies are necessary, especially in economics, because this field is studied by a group of students who is supposed to engage in business in the future. According to the respondents, entrepreneurship education should be treated as a priority at all the universities, because implementing knowledge of this kind in other fields of studies could result in greater supply of new enterprises. All the tested groups indicated that entrepreneurship education, even though it is taught as early as secondary schools, focuses mainly on learning different notions and rules, rather than on shaping an appropriate attitude among young people. According to the respondents, the same situation occurs during studies and although they are all studying economics, they do not share the feeling that they are being taught 'practical business studies'.

This notion raised by two focus groups and the tested students understand it as knowledge and skills enabling them, after finishing the course entitled 'business studies', to start their own economic activity. The students indicate shortcomings in their competences and in their knowledge when it comes to filling in documents or tax and legal matters, which are indispensable when setting up a new enterprise. 'Even though we take up business studies as early as secondary school, I still do not know what to do first when starting my own business. We are given different examples and definitions of particular legal forms, but if I was to start an online shop right now, I would not know where to start and this itself is an obstacle for me.'

Students who run their own economic activities indicated that it is necessary to teach entrepreneurship, because it is an only way to encourage new people to take up individual initiatives and to stimulate them towards greater economic activity. Entrepreneurship education should be present at every level of education and, as far as economic studies are concerned, it should be compulsory and universities' authorities should take special care of it, as on its level depends taking up decisions about starting own economic activities by students.

According to the respondents, knowledge about setting up your own enterprise is very important, as well as the skills to run it. The students underlined that they are taught with great detail on how to start an enterprise on different courses, but most of the students indicate lack practice connected to it. The students indicated that they do not know to which departments they have to go, which documents they have to fill in, where and who to ask for advises, or which form of activity to choose. A few other highlighted problems as planning of actions, analysing competitors' offers, product's or service's marketing operations, personnel and financial part.

Among the students who gave the aforementioned answers there were none who already run their enterprises, because the latter already knew the answers to the asked questions and they implicated that while setting up their businesses they used other people's help – they turned to external companies or to people who had already taken that road and who could be their guides and be of help. Most of the students indicated family help in this field. Among other answers concerning entrepreneurship education, some pointed to universities and professors as those who should guide, motivate, and strengthen them in aspirations to set up new businesses. In two groups there were suggestions that lecturers do not motivate their students to actions in real business, but very often just pass on their knowledge. Furthermore, the students often mentioned lecturers' purely theoretical preparation, pointing out that without practice in business, they are neither prepared to sufficiently interest students with that subject, nor to motivate them to set up own enterprises, because they themselves often have no such experiences. 'I should finish my studies and graduate being highly motivated, believing in my skills. Professors should guide students so that they leave the university and think: yes, I can do this, I am ready to have my own enterprise, I am strong, I can and I will be able to set it up.'

The respondents highlighted that the knowledge of management (of human resources, costs, revenues, and time), accounting, finance, or law fields is important, but the practical knowledge, through which observations can be drawn, is

no less important. The students indicated that visiting companies, meeting successful people or people who have their own enterprises and are willing to share their experiences are all very valuable to them, because it provides practical knowledge and it teaches them how to act in various situations. The students pointed out that being successful on the market not only requires knowledge and ideas, but also time-planning skills, time management skills, creativity, ability to work in a group, stress management, and risk-taking. The students indicated that during their studies they had very few possibilities to practice the above-mentioned skills during courses, they indicated more theoretical character of their studies, where greater emphasis was put on definitions and calculations rather than on creative problem solving. The respondents pointed out lack of courses during which they could use their knowledge and skills from various other classes – what is, in fact, happening while setting up own business – ‘we manage people, finances, information, we do not act alone, but we cooperate or compete with our environment’. Each group paid attention to the risk connected with running an enterprise and to the responsibility for made decisions in the context of running a company. ‘An entrepreneurial person, when starting an economic activity, is aware of consequences resulting from it. And aware people also realize risks to which companies are exposed. That is why the feeling of responsibility is connected to business. A person running their own enterprise has to be responsible, they have to know that by becoming an employer they also take up the responsibility not only for themselves, but also for their employees, clients, and suppliers.’

Students who are currently running their own business activities stated that if they attended only business courses and if they took advantage only of them, they would not had made the decision to set up their enterprise. In their opinion, those courses only provide information, but they do not make it possible to practice the whole process. The information acquired during courses were, according to them, too theoretical and those courses did not explain step by step how from having an idea a person can start a business. The students also implicated that the number of course hours was insufficient to make such an exercise. Moreover, the subjects stated that the knowledge required to run a business is divided between several or even a dozen or so courses, but there were no courses which would put together all the information.

Most of the students, when asked about whether or not they are ready and whether or not they plan on setting up their enterprises after graduating, answered no. Among the arguments against starting an enterprise they indicated lack of appropriate finances, fear of the unknown, and the ‘easy way’ – it is better to work as someone’s employee and not to have any worries, to do the work and to have some free time. The students also mentioned that they do not have the support of their families or friends (who already have a full-time job), who advise them against taking up such initiatives. Some students responded that they are too young to run their own business, because they want to have the time to relax and to lead a social life. The presented attitudes point towards irrational excuses and resentment to take

up a new initiative. Looking for disadvantages can be analysed as looking for an excuse for some kind of laziness, to which young people condemn themselves.

Respondents already running enterprises did not speak on that subject; they, however, discussed the arguments for and against setting up own enterprise. People who already run their companies pointed out the possibility to decide about themselves, to build something lasting for their families, the flexible working hours and the finances as the most important factors which motivated them before they started a business.

All the students who are currently helping their relatives with running a company were thinking about setting one up on their own. From among the tested group, 7 people want to start a business, but firstly they want to gain some experience while working for somebody else; part of them indicate that they want to save some money for their enterprises.

Students whose relatives or friends are running their businesses can count on help from their families and friends. Good practices and examples of people who were successful with starting their companies and with running them are very motivating for the subjects. The latter very often indicated that they talk to and watch people run their enterprises and from those experiences they take the motivation to set up their own business. 'I consider starting my own enterprise, because my parents and my uncle have their own companies and I already have the basics to set one up (an idea and a plot). I am not afraid to analyse what would be if. I found an area which suits me in every aspect. The knowledge acquired at the university revealed an idea to start my own business.'

All students who do not run a business alone when asked if they have enough information to start a company answered no. As main information sources, where they would look for information on this subject, they indicated the Internet, books, workshops, courses, and training, as well as family and friends' experience. Only two groups answered they would contact their university lecturers while setting up a company.

Among the respondents, opinions about ideas on how to improve the entrepreneurship education at universities and how to inspire entrepreneurial spirit in students were divided. One group indicated a greater number of exercises which students should carry out on their own at the university in order to learn on 'live' examples how to work on particular tasks and how to make decisions, whose results they could discuss during classes. Another idea was to make a course about running a small enterprise, either in a paper form or in a form of a computer game. The second group mentioned making study visits in different companies and institutions, as well as meeting entrepreneurs who could talk about running a company, with the possibility to ask questions. 'There lacks a typical practice during classes, so that we could perform particular tasks on our own, and not only to listen, look at the blackboard, and write down the given solution.'

It seems that a combination of the two above-mentioned forms should give the best results when it comes to the entrepreneurship education. Students who would have a possibility to combine the theoretical knowledge with practice and exercise,

supported by meetings with entrepreneurs, could take up initiatives concerning starting companies more eagerly. In reality, it is quite difficult to persuade good managers or companies' owners into sharing their experiences with students, because they are very busy and it is difficult for them to find some spare time for this kind of activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the presented analysis of curricula and Focus Groups Interviews show that higher education institutions should emphasize the teaching of practical skills, which support business development. Courses dedicated to entrepreneurship education are a very good solution, but they have to be made more practical. Besides, a greater emphasis can be put on functioning of the aforementioned areas in small enterprises on different courses, such as planning, communication, negotiations, finance, accounting, marketing, or even management. It is recommended that all possible active forms and methods of teaching, which are focused on practice such as: meeting with successful entrepreneurs, lessons with experts from business, projects and simulation of fictitious business, case studies etc. should be applied. Moreover, entrepreneurship should be taught on real-life examples, maybe even in reference to the graduates who already set up their own business activities. Only thank to such actions and a proper motivation of students universities can, through their lecturers, motivate students to start companies and to try their hands at business. Without a proper stimulation on the part of the university, the percentage of students (graduates) who will be willing to decide to set up their own enterprise will always be low. This is because according to substantial part of students they do not feel ready to become entrepreneurs. Young people will be full of fear of the unknown and instead of entrepreneurial students we will be educating students who are afraid of taking the risk to run a business. If someone is afraid of risk-taking, then their path onto their own company can be very long. University's great responsibility is to motivate their students to take up challenges connected with setting up new enterprises, and at the same time, to develop innovative solutions in business.

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Acknowledgement and Financial Disclosure

This work was partly supported by Visegrad Fund Strategic Grant " Innovative entrepreneurship education – necessary precondition for future prosperity of V4 region". We thank Aleksandra Litawa, Witold Nowiński and Tadeusz Leczykiewicz for their help in data collection.