



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EDUCATION

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. Entrepreneurship is a combination of mindsets, knowledge and skills. At higher education level, the primary purpose of entrepreneurship education should be to develop entrepreneurial capacities and mindsets. Crossing boundaries between disciplines, and multidisciplinary collaboration, are essential elements in building enterprising abilities. In terms of entrepreneurship, this socially formed world favors the masculine ideal over the feminine, and while the impact is powerful, most people are not aware of its creation, refreshment, and/or use. Social construction is not a deterministic process; it is perpetuated by institutions and institutional forces but what is socially constructed can change. There is a need for greater flexibility in course design. Work placements, alternation between full- and part-time study, organization of intensive courses, and accreditation of informal and non-formal learning all have a role to play.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, Teaching Methods

The domain of entrepreneurship education is now faced with ever more interesting choices about what to be, who to serve and from what principles to profess. Opportunities and challenges in teaching and training related to globalization, technology, political organization and shifting demographics and social views have created entirely new understandings of what is important and where attention should be directed. Entrepreneurship is exciting and valued and most agree that while academics and others can't help every person to be an entrepreneur, but can help those who are interested with tools, skill acquisition and ideas. The emergence and growth of women-owned businesses have contributed to the global economy and to their surrounding communities. The presence of women around the world driving small and entrepreneurial organizations has had a tremendous impact on employment and on business environments worldwide. Women-owned firms comprise between one-quarter and one-third of all the businesses in the formal economy, and are expected to play an even larger role in informal sectors (Delaney, 2002).

Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives.

To achieve success, growth and employment, we need to stimulate the entrepreneurial mindsets of young women, encourage innovative business start-ups, and foster a culture that is friendlier to entrepreneurship and to the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The important role of education in promoting more entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors is now widely recognized. Entrepreneurial programmes and modules offer students the tools to think creatively, be an effective problem solver, analyze a business idea objectively, and communicate, network, lead, and evaluate any given project. Students feel more confident about setting up their own business as they can now test their own business ideas in an educational, supportive environment. However, the benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to boosting start-ups, innovative ventures and new jobs. Entrepreneurship is a competence for all, helping young people to be more creative and self-confident in whatever they undertake.

Few Schemes by the Government to Promote Women Entrepreneurship: Some important schemes by the government are-Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD)

The main objectives of the scheme are - To provide assistance to women entrepreneurs through NGOs.; To build up capacity of Entrepreneurship Development Institutions like National Institute for Small Industry Extension & Training (NISIET), Small Industries Service Institutes (SISI), State level EDIs, etc., by providing financial support in the form of Government of India grant; To create entrepreneurship development training facility through NGOs by providing financial support for conducting training programmes.

Mahila Udyam Nidhi-An exclusive scheme for providing equity to women entrepreneurs implemented by the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI).

Mahila Vikas Nidhi - It offers developmental assistance for pursuit of income generating activities to women.

Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY)- During 2006-07, the participation of women in terms of employment generation under Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY), was 16.5 per cent. The government made several relaxations to women to facilitate the participation of women beneficiaries.

Changes in Women Entrepreneurs in India

In the fifties compulsive factors led to the creation of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs of the sixties began to aspire but also accepted the social cultural traditions. The women in seventies opened up new frontier. They had not only aspiration but ambition. Women entrepreneurs of the eighties were educated in highly sophisticated technological and professional education. They became equally contributing partners. During the nineties, this was the first time when the concept of best rather than better than the male heir was talked about and the women entrepreneurs of the 21st Century have become the Jill of all trades.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education should not be confused with general business and economic studies. Its goal is to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment, and may include the following elements: developing personal attributes and



skills that form the basis of an entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour (creativity, sense of initiative, risk-taking, autonomy, self-confidence, leadership, team spirit, etc.); raising the awareness of students about self-employment and entrepreneurship as possible career options; working on concrete enterprise projects and activities; providing specific business skills and knowledge of how to start a company and run it successfully

Entrepreneurship and Higher Education

Higher education is not isolated from previous levels of education. It should reflect what is done at school. Entrepreneurship is a combination of mindsets, knowledge and skills. As mindsets take shape at an early age, entrepreneurship is something that should be fostered already at school. At higher education level, the primary purpose of entrepreneurship education should be to develop entrepreneurial capacities and mindsets. In this context, entrepreneurship education programmes can have different objectives, such as: a) developing entrepreneurial drive among students (raising awareness and motivation); b) training students in the skills they need to set up a business and manage its growth; c) developing the entrepreneurial ability to identify and exploit opportunities.

Universities and technical institutions (e.g. polytechnics) should integrate entrepreneurship as an important part of the curriculum, spread across different subjects, and require or encourage students to take entrepreneurship courses. Students in all fields, including Humanities, Arts and Creative studies, may greatly benefit from learning about — and gaining experience of — entrepreneurship.

A perceived lack of relevant experience and a lack of self-confidence are two often cited reasons for new graduates not engaging in entrepreneurship soon after graduation. The university experience should be capable of addressing both these needs. The learning experience needs to build depth and breadth in awareness, understanding and capacity. Although not applicable in all cases, the general approach would be to provide broad exposure and positive and motivational experiences during the early stages of university life. This then provides a platform from which to build depth and capability in preparation for an entrepreneurial career at the point of exit. The important point here is one of progression, not only through university, but also through the whole education system at all levels. Integration of entrepreneurship into the curriculum needs to be the vision for a higher education institution as part of its wider mission. Provision should be accessible for Arts and Humanities students as it is for Business/Social Science and Science/Engineering students. Educators should be comfortable and skilled in addressing a diversity of student groups, from different cultural backgrounds, by providing examples and role models that relate to their contexts.

Available data show that the majority of entrepreneurship courses are offered in business and economic studies. However, it is questionable whether Business Schools are

the most appropriate place to teach entrepreneurship: innovative and viable business ideas are more likely to arise from technical, scientific and creative studies. So the real challenge is to build inter-disciplinary approaches, making entrepreneurship education accessible to all students, creating teams for the development and exploitation of business ideas, mixing students from economic and business studies with students from other faculties and with different backgrounds.

Most of the possible contents of entrepreneurship courses are relevant for students from all fields of studies. However, in order for the teaching to be tailored to the specific needs of different categories, more emphasis is placed on one aspect or another.

The demand for learning about entrepreneurship is increasing. However, there is a shortage of human resources and funding for this type of education; therefore it is not possible to meet this demand fully. Action-oriented teaching is labour-intensive and costly, and requires specific training. There are currently too few professors of entrepreneurship. There is a need to graduate enough PhD students in entrepreneurship who can become teachers. Moreover, there is very little in terms of incentives to motivate and reward teachers for getting involved in entrepreneurial teaching and interaction with students. It is currently difficult to build a career in entrepreneurship, as research remains the main promotion criterion.

Teaching Methods for Developing Entrepreneurship

The best way to encourage entrepreneurship among students is by giving examples from the relevant technical area. As regards current teaching methods, there are a wide range of techniques to supplement lectures as the most basic teaching tool. However, there seems to be a gap between the methods actually used and those that are viewed as the most effective and appropriate. Using experience-based teaching methods is crucial to developing entrepreneurial skills and abilities. Traditional educational methods (like lectures) do not correlate well with the development of entrepreneurial thinking. There is a need for more interactive learning approaches, where the teacher becomes more of a moderator than a lecturer. Crossing boundaries between disciplines, and multidisciplinary collaboration, are essential elements in building enterprising abilities. Getting real entrepreneurs involved in the teaching can make up for the current lack of practical experience among professors. Although entrepreneurs and business practitioners are in general involved in the teaching, there are few examples of entrepreneurial practitioners engaged in the full curricula experience. Most frequently, they come to give short presentations to students (e.g. as personal testimonials or guest lecturer) or as judges in competitions.

Also, mobility of teachers and researchers between higher education institutions and business is in general very low, and this practice is not actively encouraged. There are in many cases few or no incentives, and in some cases outright disincentives.

Most appropriate or effective techniques in delivering entrepreneurship programmes and courses, in particular to non-business students are methods based on “group and team techniques for creating new business ideas” and for the use of “case studies”. Following these two main categories, other tools highlighted as particularly effective were “business planning workshops”, “inviting guest speakers” (namely entrepreneurs) and “business simulations”. Also, methods based on undertaking some practical entrepreneurial activity and creativity exercises leading to the development of ideas were among other tools whose effectiveness was underlined.

Through appropriate methods of delivery, programmes and courses should be geared to the acquisition of generic and horizontal skills, aiming to make students: more creative/innovative; highly motivated; pro-active; self-aware; self-confident; willing to challenge; better communicators; decision-makers; leaders; negotiators; networkers; problem solvers; team players; systematic thinkers; less dependent; less risk averse; able to live with uncertainty; capable of recognizing opportunities.

Experts emphasized the importance of crossing boundaries between disciplines, and of working in teams. Whatever the level of students, a powerful way of teaching entrepreneurship is to mix business and non-business students. This is always valued by the participants, who consider that they learn from each other and discover new ways of thinking.

Presentations by entrepreneurs in lessons are not only important because they impart knowledge, but also because they provide an example which can be followed by students. It is therefore very important that as many student entrepreneurs as possible (or at least those who started their enterprise as students) report on their successes at higher education institutions. It is harder for some students to imagine becoming the next famous entrepreneur. However, it is much easier for students to imagine that they can also do that which other students succeeded in doing several years ago.

The Difference between Women and Men

If what we teach is based on what we know, we must begin with the state of the art in research on women and entrepreneurship. Conclusions now being drawn on more than a 20 year history of research show that overall: Women entrepreneurs are very much like men entrepreneurs: within-gender differences are more meaningful than between-gender differences (Ahl, 2002; Brush, et al, 2004); In terms of new and early stage high growth ventures, there are some documented facts that correlate the gender of the lead person (male or female) with certain variables of interest as regards business launch, ownership and growth. Such facts include, for example: more men than women own businesses; women and men-owned ventures are distributed unevenly as a percentage of businesses across industry sectors, with women-owned businesses concentrated in the services sector; and women-led ventures receive less venture capital funding than men-led ventures.

Entrepreneurship Education for Women (and Men)

If teaching is based on good research, synthesis and a point of view, then as regards women and entrepreneurship education, following points should be considered: Women and men should be taught the same knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship; Women and men should be informed about the gendered landscape and its norms of Masculinity and femininity, and associated implications; Careful analysis should be conducted to determine how gendered institutions influence women in regard to their preparation for and activities of entrepreneurship, including business schools and other learning environments; The findings of research on differences between the decisions, behavior and outcomes of men and women entrepreneurs and their businesses should be thoughtfully considered and presented in a fashion cognizant of the tendency to impose stereotypical views; New research to expose women’s experience of the gendered landscape should be undertaken; Women, in particular, should be informed and helped to strategize how to negotiate the gendered landscape they will encounter as entrepreneurs, given their institutionalized “onedown” position in the world of work.

Sociologist Joan Acker (1990) tells us that in modern Western society, men have charge of production and women of reproduction. With this simple phrase Acker calls out the social construction of men and women’s expected place in life. When women “cross over” into the world of production, they are different than the norm, and to a greater or lesser degree, unexpected. Understanding the social construction of gender is a powerful tool for our age as it allows us to place both men and women as actors in the creation of the taken-for-granted. In terms of entrepreneurship, this socially formed world favors the masculine ideal over the feminine, and while the impact is powerful, most people are not aware of its creation, refreshment, and/or use. Social construction is not a deterministic process; it is perpetuated by institutions and institutional forces though what is socially constructed can change (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). That means by calling out current patterns and norms and instilling new ones, we can change the landscape and its assumptions over time.

Suggestions for Developing Entrepreneurship Education

Considering the importance and lack of awareness about entrepreneurship education we need to take certain urgent steps like setting up a task force to determine how entrepreneurship can be integrated into primary, secondary, and higher education, adopting legislation, supporting relations between private business and universities, allowing professors to work part-time with business; help develop an accreditation system to validate non-formal learning and practical activities that favor entrepreneurship development; establishing awards for entrepreneurial universities, teachers and students, and promote positive examples of academic spin-offs.



Higher education institutions could set up a strategy and an action plan for teaching and research in entrepreneurship, embedding practice-based activities, and for new venture start-ups and spin-offs, create an entrepreneurship education department, which would serve as an entrepreneurial hub within the institution and spread the teaching of entrepreneurship across all other departments, offer an introduction to entrepreneurship and self-employment to all undergraduate students during their first year. In addition, give all students the opportunity to attend seminars and lectures in this subject, set up incentive systems to motivate and reward faculty staff in supporting students interested in entrepreneurship, and acknowledge the academic value of research and activities in the entrepreneurial field, award academic credits for practical work on enterprise projects outside the established courses. Business associations could help to get their members more involved in teaching entrepreneurship at educational establishments.

Educational Requirements of Women already in Entrepreneurship

In a study of the information needs of 311 women entrepreneurs (Gundry, 1997), those who were just starting their ventures requested assistance and training in implementing the business idea, identifying initial sources of financing, and advertising/promotion. The entrepreneurs who were already established had a somewhat different set of needs, including identifying financing for expansion and increasing sales. Sexton et al. (1997) identified the ten most important areas for further learning needed by fast-growth entrepreneurs: using cash flow to make operational decisions; financing growth; increasing the value of the business; compensation for self and associates; hiring, training, and motivating for growth; succeeding in a rapidly changing world; successful selling; sales force management; management success; and problems and pitfalls of growth.

In summary, the literature seems to suggest that the learning needs of women entrepreneurs in growth firms differ from the needs of women entrepreneurs in start-up or slower-growth firms.

Conclusion

An important conclusion is that traditional educational methods do not correlate well with the development of entrepreneurial traits and attributes, and that multi-disciplinary collaboration is an essential element of building enterprising abilities. There is a need for greater flexibility in course design. Work placements, alternation between full- and part-time study, organization of intensive courses, and accreditation of informal and non-formal learning all have a role to play.

Regardless of this emerging dialectic on the actual state of sameness and difference in entrepreneurship engagement by gender, there is still a pervasive and unsubstantiated story

that continues to influence entrepreneurship research and education succinctly titled by DuRietz, and Henrekson (2000) as: “The Female Underperformance Hypothesis”. As Ahl (2002, p. 603) recounts the story lines: women have less motivation for entrepreneurship and/or for growth of their businesses, less desire to start a business, less self confidence, less preparatory education and more risk aversion; they use less optimal feminine management practices, behave irrationally by turning to unqualified family members for help and they do not network optimally. But this overall picture of women entrepreneurs and students of entrepreneurship is not based in a science of truth, but in perspective, social construction and research process. We argue that rationalism roots our field in a foundation that postures the masculine man entrepreneur as an ideal: decisive, ambitious, courageous, risk embracing. Once such a foundational view is in place, comparisons to the feminine or woman, and in fact to many men, are by definition less than the ideal.

Considering this, we realize that the posture for education not only concerns successful entrepreneurship, the differences exist between men and women entrepreneurs and their ventures, but also the perception of differences and the values that direct the investigation and evaluate outcomes determined. We turn again to the facts that distinguish women led businesses from men led businesses in meaningful ways. How do we explicate them? Feminist analysis offers a liberal and social construction framework to examine found differences that still allows for men and women to be considered mostly the same. In the first case, women and men are equal but barriers prevent women from full expression. In the second case, what humans do and how we perceive is enacted socially – we create the “truth” through convention and social experience; we act continually though institutional forces to sustain historical views.

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