Creating knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity for HE students with digital education methodologies: Differences in the perceptions of students and entrepreneurs

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\ABSTRACT

This main paper goal is to propose a model of digital education methodologies and tools to develop knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity in Higher Education (HE) students. Digital education is increasingly influencing both classroom/campus-based teaching, but more impact is leading to new models or designs for teaching and learning.

The paper makes a literature review on e-education, start-up stages and e-education methodologies and tools to develop the entrepreneurial capacity and uses quantitative methodology based on an online questionnaire applied to a sample of 75 HE Students and 75 Entrepreneurs in order to identify differences in their perceptions regarding the stages of the start-up process and also the most relevant methodologies to develop the entrepreneurial capacity of a potential entrepreneur.

The paper is structured of the following research questions: RQ1. What are the most important stages of the entrepreneurial start-up process? Moreover, RQ2-Which methods and methodologies can be employed to promote the entrepreneurial activity?

Besides the analysis of the methodologies and the tools of digital education, the research will also propose a model of E-Education methodologies for entrepreneur's strategic knowledge and skills development in each stage of the start-up process.

1. Introduction

Academics and policymakers agree that entrepreneurs, and the new businesses they establish, play a critical role in the development and well-being of their societies. As such, there is increased appreciation for, and acknowledgment of the role played by new and small businesses in an economy.

(GEM, 2017).

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs have become increasingly important worldwide considering the positive impact in employment, productivity, innovation and economic growth, by analysts, economic theoreticians and researchers (Ahmad & Hoffmann, 2008; Reynolds, Carter, Gartner, & Greene, 2004) and by Policymakers and international organizations. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor\textsuperscript{1} points out, in its 2008 Executive report, that is worldwide consensual that entrepreneurship plays a critical increasingly role in economic development. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its Entrepreneurship at Glance 2012 report quote that the global crisis heightened interest in entrepreneurship as an essential element to foster economic recovery and employment growth (OECD, 2012); Other the European Commission (EC) in the Employment and social situation in Europe - Report 2013 and the International Labour Organization (ILO) throughout the ILO Global employment trends 2014 report and the Global employment trends for youth 2015 report also recognize the potential of entrepreneurship to help regions and countries to overcome socio-economic issues such as...
unemployment, namely youth unemployment, poverty and slow economic growth which are fundamental to promote and support a sustainable development of the economies (local, national and regional), increase competitiveness, creating economic wealth and social equity.

The extended benefits to society have been raising the interest of economic and political decision-makers in the promotion of entrepreneurship being entrepreneurship education (EE) one of the most important tools to foster entrepreneurship and develop an entrepreneurial culture. For example, in Europe, the EC, has been supporting the development of entrepreneurship education and training programs in higher education institutions (HEI) and other training and educational organizations, within the framework of structural funds such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, and programs like Erasmus+. EC aims to disseminate entrepreneurship and subsequently the emergence of nascent entrepreneurs.

In the last two decades, EE also attracted the attention of researchers with the aim to understand EE phenomenon and the associated factors - the principles, frameworks, programs, pedagogy, agents' characteristics, learning effectiveness and programs effectiveness - to raise more and better entrepreneurs. For example, the first report launched by GEM in 1999 was based on ten economies. Seventeen years later, 2016, the report was based on 65 world economies, and the research team exceeds 400 researchers from all around the world.

To become a successful entrepreneur requires more than an identified set up of competencies or skills ( Gonçalves, Sousa, & Cruz, 2017). Even the combination of opportunity, capabilities and resources may not necessarily be sufficient to lead to entrepreneurship if opportunity and start-up costs outweigh the potential benefits (Ahmad & Hoffmann, 2008). A favourable business climate (e.g., tax regime, low inflation, low interest rates, competitive banking system and environment, flexible labour market, savings, etc.) combined with an integrated framework of motivation, skills and opportunity, is therefore relevant for entrepreneurs to be successful in the three stages of an entrepreneurial project - pre-start, the start-up and the post-start up (Stevenson & Lundstroem, 2001). According to Samuelsson (2004), who is in line with the works of Paul D. Reynolds and his team based on The panel study of entrepreneurial dynamics2 In the United States, much of normative entrepreneurship claims are vague and unspecific. Other studies reflecting EE state of the art reveal the existence of gaps about what EE is and its objectives "considerable conceptual confusion regarding what [entrepreneurship] education is and what it aims to accomplish" (Gibb & Cotton, 1998; Maritz & Brown, 2013) and in what concerns entrepreneurship knowledge base, fragmentation of the research base; lack of consensus regarding definitions, weaknesses in the quality of empirical research, and a lack of longitudinal studies NGCE (2004)3. In 2012, OECD still outlined in the Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2012 report a lack of definition consensus in the field of entrepreneurship. One of the examples given is the difference between enterprise "creation" and "failure" concepts across countries.

This paper will be focus on the gap identified by the above mentioned studies and also for the research developed along the last ten years, which is focused on the entrepreneur's skills and characteristics and also the contexts, but not on the education and learning process (Henry, Hill, & Leitch, 2005; Roy & Das, 2016), in the opinion of the authors, the consensus gap around entrepreneurship - definitions, comparisons, purposes, and evaluation, among others - may be the basis of differences in the perception of different agents, namely the students and entrepreneurs. The paper to accomplish this goal begins with a literature review on the background and previous research on e-education and on digital learning methodologies (Sousa and Rocha, 2017 & Sousa, Cruz, and Martins, 2017) which could contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial capacity. Then it will be presented the methodology and the results of the data collection through an online questionnaire with HE students and with the young entrepreneurs about those methodologies and tools, and finally, it makes the presentation of a model of E-Education methodologies for entrepreneur's strategic knowledge and skills development in each stage of the start-up process.

2. Literature review

2.1. Entrepreneurship education

The relevance of entrepreneurship education (EE) to foster entrepreneurship culture and activity is widely recognized. Kuratko (2005) deems that the increasing number of entrepreneurship programs and courses, either in the educational or training systems, and the subsequent increasing number of entrepreneurship teachers and trainers is a clear evidence of that recognition, and simultaneously proves that entrepreneurship, or at least certain aspects of it, can be taught. Hindle (2007) agrees with Kuratko and defends that, from a fundamental logic perspective, there is no a priori reason for entrepreneurship not being taught proposing three approaches in EE: Teach it; Teach about it; Teach it in lots of different ways and places. More recent studies in the EE field, as per example Raposo and do Paço (2011), Maritz and Brown (2013), Maritz (2017) and Zeng and Honig (2016) are also based on the premise that entrepreneurship can be taught.

EE is also assuming extraordinary relevance within academic programs all over the world, but there is very little known about it from a research perspective (Alberti, Sciascia, & Poli, 2004). This may explain why the conceptual confusion about what entrepreneurship education is and what it aims to accomplish referred by Gibb & Cotton, 1998 is still perceived by Maritz & Brown, 2013, and according to our belief and experience is still valid in the present days.

Most research on entrepreneurship education has been focused on elements of the entrepreneurship education program (EEP) as the own program, the participants and the effect of the EEP on self-efficacy or entrepreneurial intentions (Matlay, 2008, Lewrick, Omar, & Williams, 2011, O'Connor, 2013). However, the diversity of EEPs with a broad range of short term objectives, target audiences, format and pedagogical approach (Arasti, Falavarjani, & Imanipour, 2012), goals, designs and philosophies that arise in the HEI (Paço, Ferreira, & Raposo, 2016), turn up practically impossible to compare programs, namely regarding the effectiveness of methodologies, resources, achievement of objectives and learning outcomes.

The lack of consensus is extensible to other dimensions of entrepreneurship like entrepreneurship intentions (EI) as highlighted by Liñán and Fayolle (2015) in a systematic literature review over EI. These authors noticed that although EI is being used as a robust theoretical framework, there is a lack of systematization and categorization in the research analyzed (409 papers, published between 2004 and 2013) which leads to researchers to start anew with every study (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). This hinders the work of researchers, namely in research aiming to validate or evaluate the impact of EE on EI. Maritz and Brown (2013) argue that academic literature calls for more appropriate evaluations of entrepreneurship programs and greater contextualization of the programs to facilitate research into the effectiveness of EEPs.

One of our objectives is that our present work contributes for the creation of knowledge on course designs, namely on the relevance of involving the students in the process, as according to Gerba (2012) it is
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