Entrepreneurship Education and Employability: Insights from UK

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Abstract

This article aims to provide insights into how employability skills, career development and entrepreneurial mind-sets are embedded into entrepreneurship education to enhance graduate employability in tertiary education. Recent initiatives in United Kingdom universities respond to the calls from The Association of Business Schools to incorporate more practice into the teaching, learning and assessment of entrepreneurship curricular. The calls aim to encourage the development of entrepreneurial skills and mind sets relevant for graduate employability. One of the most appropriate approaches for designing such practice-based curricular is Problem-based learning (PBL). The authors reviewed the literature on entrepreneurship education and also drew on constructivist theories of teaching and learning based on two case studies to demonstrate how entrepreneurship curricular development could enhance graduate employability. Case story approach was used to accurately report the full extent of the knowledge of entrepreneurship educators. The findings showed a critique and rethinking of current university education in the United Kingdom. Instead of the traditional teaching and learning methods, entrepreneurship educators use a portfolio of practice-based pedagogies including starting businesses, design thinking and reflective practice to embed practice into learning and assessment. The findings therefore show how the choice of teaching, learning and assessment focus on enhancing the development of entrepreneurial mind-sets and employability skills in learners. The article analysed practices and techniques for embedding entrepreneurial skills, mind-sets and employability in entrepreneurship education. It therefore highlights the processes through which practice-based curricular design enhance entrepreneurial and employability skills among university graduates.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Employability, Skills, Higher Education, Curricula Development

Introduction

Entrepreneurial education programmes have a strong measurable impact on entrepreneurial intention of learners (Fayolle et al, 2006) and enterprising graduates are regarded to be more employable. Therefore, there are undeniable benefits in integrating enterprise enhancing themes into HE curricula (Rae, 2007). In particular, training students to become entrepreneurial is currently touted as the key to addressing the changing needs of learners, including the acquisition of life skills that enhance employability (Tan and Ng, 2006; Rae, 2007). Nonetheless, there could be challenges in training students to become entrepreneurial.

While education to be entrepreneurial, requires constructivist approaches (e.g. Tenebaum et al, 2001) and problem-based learning (PBL), currently, most entrepreneurship educators predominantly use traditional classroom delivery due to a lack of knowledge and skills needed to facilitate student-centred learning in the teaching of entrepreneurship (e.g. Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Co and Mitchell, 2006). This challenge is due to the lack of knowledge on how to embed entrepreneurship education and learning into the curricular and this article aims to provide conceptual and practical examples of creative and innovative practices. To understand current practices in enhancing entrepreneurial education and employability, two case studies from the UK are analysed in this article.
The two cases in the UK are chosen for this study because entrepreneurship education is well recognised and supported (Fallow and Stevens, 2000). The two UK universities have also undergone transformations and refocused on entrepreneurship education as a key element of their curricula.

This article is organised as follows: The next section presents the research aims and objectives, followed by the discussion of the statement of the problem. The literature on entrepreneurship education and employability is undertaken to provide conceptual and practical examples of creative and innovative practices in embedding entrepreneurship education and employability into pedagogy. Afterwards, the methods and approaches used in the study are discussed and the findings and discussions presented. Finally, the conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research are presented.

**Research Aim and Objectives**

This article aims to investigate how entrepreneurial and employability skills are embedded into entrepreneurship pedagogy in higher education in order to enhance graduate employability. The objectives are as follows:

1. To conceptualise the linkages between entrepreneurship education and employability.
2. To identify practical approaches to embedding entrepreneurial and employability skills in higher education pedagogy.

**Statement of the Problem**

Historically, entrepreneurship has played a major role in the creation of new jobs (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999; Koellinger and Thurik, 2012). Entrepreneurial processes may result in a business start-up in the form of a small business and thereby the entrepreneur will own and manage the small firm or may undertake entrepreneurial activities in an existing firm leading to the creation of new products and services through innovation (Schumpeter, 1934). However, the number of jobs with traditional career paths for graduates has disappeared while new emerging jobs require flexibility and new skills (Fallow and Stevens 2000). Therefore, the number of graduates who get employment based on traditional academic content has become very limited. Consequently, The Association of Business Schools (ABS, 2013), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2012) and Scottish Qualifications Framework (SCQF, 2014) all emphasise the need to design practice into business and management curriculum to enhance employability. One tested approach is to embed entrepreneurial skills to enhance employability (Yorke, 2004).

However, there are a number of challenges to integrating entrepreneurship education and employability skills into higher education curricular. While education to be entrepreneurial, requires constructivist approaches (Tenebaum et al, 2001) and problem-based learning (PBL), currently, most entrepreneurship educators predominantly use traditional classroom delivery due to a lack of knowledge and skills needed to facilitate student-centred learning in the teaching of entrepreneurship (e.g. Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Co and Mitchell, 2006). The next section reviews the literature on entrepreneurship education and employability.

**Literature Review**

**Employability and Higher Education**

Employability has become a key issue in higher education due to the increase in accessibility and the accompanying higher financial burdens on students (Yorke, 2004). The graduate employment market is also changing very fast and many graduates struggle to find their first jobs (Rae, 2007). Since the financial crash of 2008, graduate employability has decreased dramatically due to the lack of
traditional jobs in most countries (Cairns et al., 2014). Consequently, many graduates end up not getting appropriate jobs or even remain jobless for a significant number of years. Employability is defined as the set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that enable an individual to secure an occupation and be successful to benefit them, the workforce, community and the economy (Moreland, 2006). Employability skills include the ability to retrieve and handle information, communication and presentation, planning and problem solving and social development and interaction (Fallows and Stevens, 2000). Others include management skills, creativity and risk taking (Fallows, 1995). However, students often show lack of these basic employability skills. This article therefore argues that career planning, personal development and employability should be core to academic provision and this could be achieved through entrepreneurship education (Rae, 2007).

Entrepreneurship Education

The field of entrepreneurship education has been characterised by explosive growth and entrepreneurship is taught to students at different levels and across many different disciplines (Jones and Iredale 2010; Katz, 2003; 2008). However, entrepreneurship education is in its infancy and hence there is a lack of typical teaching strategies and most entrepreneurship education research focus on the actions of instructors without much reflection on the pedagogical implications and the use of the literature on teaching and learning from education or psychology (Albornoz and Rocco, 2009).

Primarily, entrepreneurship education could focus on education for and about entrepreneurship or education to be entrepreneurial (Biggs, 1999; Fayolle and Gailly, 2008). Interestingly, education to be entrepreneurial which allows students across all disciplines to benefit from entrepreneurship education however, requires constructivist approaches (e.g. Tenebaum et al, 2001) and problem-based learning (PBL). Constructivist and PBL approaches enable students to learn more by gaining entrepreneurial skills by doing rather than only listening (Kemp, 1995; Kolb, 1984). Entrepreneurial skills include the application of initiative, independence, creativity, problem-solving, identifying and working on opportunities, leadership, acting resourcefully and responding to challenges (Rae, 2007). These approaches converge with employability skills and enable learners to be prepared to be leaders, creators and risk takers and ready for both industry and academia (Kemp, 1995). However, studies that evaluated teaching and learning in entrepreneurship show that teachers predominantly use traditional classroom delivery due to a lack of knowledge and skills needed to teach entrepreneurship (Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Co and Mitchell, 2006). This article therefore argues that to implement enterprise education it is important for universities to become entrepreneurial organisations that are learning rather than learned organisations (Gibb, 2002, Gibb, 2005). Hence, entrepreneurship education, should encourage enterprising learning based on both the individual learner and the university as a learning organisation (Rae, 2007). Hence, the rethinking of entrepreneurship education requires the engagement of higher education institutions and learners in the teaching and learning process.

Basically “a good teaching system aligns teaching method and assessment to the learning activities stated in the objectives so that all aspects of this system are in accord in supporting appropriate student learning” (Biggs, 1999 p.25). Methods and materials of entrepreneurship education should therefore be consistent with the original intents and specific programme objectives (Biggs, 1999). Student-centred non-traditional teaching and learning techniques and assessments are known to enhance students’ learning, concentration, motivation and skills based on activities such as teamwork, practical tasks, presentations and open class discussions. These activities recognise the role of students as active reflective, self-managing agents and the lecturer as a caring coordinator and facilitator of student learning (Gibb, 1996; Mathieson et al, 2015).

At the institutional level it is important to establish linkages between leadership, marketing and communications, career services, staff development, building of employer and commercial relationships to facilitate work placements, part-time work and work-based learning. The curricula design should also focus on employability and connecting theory to practice (Rae, 2007).
Figure 1 presents a conceptual model on the linkages between entrepreneurship education, employability and higher education institutions. The model suggests that leadership is required at the highest level to initiate, motivate and ensure that the existing resources and culture support the transformation. The individual programmes and modules should be designed to focus on student-centred learning by incorporating entrepreneurial activities to enhance the development of skills such as creativity and opportunity recognition. The student-centred curricula and extra curricula activities should also encourage students to take personal responsibilities for their own learning. Academic and support staff should also be trained to facilitate curricula design as well as offer support services to students respectively. To enhance practice, it is equally important to engage with industry to facilitate student placements, part time jobs and interaction with entrepreneurs and practitioners.

Figure 1: Linkages between Entrepreneurial and Employability Skills and Institutions in Higher Education
While there is widespread acknowledgement of the importance of entrepreneurship education in incorporating practice into higher education (Rae, 2007; QAA 2012; ABS, 2013), most teachers of entrepreneurship lack the knowledge on how teaching and learning methods could be adapted to achieve this. This study therefore draws on constructivist approaches to teaching and learning to show that none traditional student-centred teaching and learning approaches are appropriate for teaching entrepreneurial and employability skills to enhance graduate employment.

This article draws on the literature to present an analytical framework to show how to embed entrepreneurship education and employability skills in higher education curricula. The two cases were selected because they were seen to be successful. Case descriptions provide information that help to unravel patterns that will otherwise be difficult to understand using other methods. Comparative analysis of cases is also seen as a useful way of understanding complex phenomenon (Yin, 2012). The approach does not aim to test hypothesis but to generate an analytical framework to help understand the phenomenon. However, the use of case approach limits the ability to generalise the findings.
Findings and Discussion

Practical approaches to integrating entrepreneurial and employability skills in higher education
This section draws on the conceptual model (Figure 1) to analyse two cases that have been successfully used to link entrepreneurship education to employability. These two case studies are set in the Business Schools of two UK Universities based in Scotland and England respectively. For ethical reasons the universities and the names of the modules are anonymised.

In both institutions, the aims of entrepreneurship education were to develop entrepreneurial and employability skills and consequently increase the job opportunities for students and or enhance self-employment as a viable option for graduates. Even though, the integration of entrepreneurship and employability skills were implemented through a number programmes and modules in the two universities, this article focuses on one level 6 core enterprise and a Level 6 optional social enterprise module.

Case One: Enterprise Module

Organisational Leadership and Culture
From 2012-2016 academic year, the structures and culture of a Scottish university were changed to reflect the university’s focus on entrepreneurship education. The new strategy included the appointment of a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Engagement who also doubled as the Dean for the School of Business and Enterprise. His duties included overseeing all engagements with business and enterprise activities across the university. Existing units that focus on careers development and enterprise were all strengthened by hiring new staff. Some spaces in the university were created as enterprise hubs to provide creative and innovation teaching spaces to enhance innovative teaching and learning. The new culture aimed at encouraging students and the university to embrace creativity and innovation. Consequently, staff and students were all encouraged to generate business ideas and enter into enterprise competitions to show case their ideas.

Staff Development
A team of academics and practitioners were hired to teach entrepreneurship in the school. As part of the staff training, a number of them were sent to Babson College in the USA to attend workshops and seminars so that they would in turn train their colleagues. Upon their return to Scotland, they organised a number of workshops for their colleagues and shared resources and techniques in teaching entrepreneurial skills.

Curricula design
The delivery of the module was based on a weekly one-hour lecture and three hours’ workshop. The core skills developed included teamwork, practical tasks, presentations skills, networking, opportunity recognition, creative problem solving and personal development. The assessment included an individual reflective log and a group business plan presentation. The group presentations were assessed by a panel of academics and practitioners from industry including entrepreneurs who provided feedback to enhance the viability of students’ business ideas. Not surprisingly, some of the students’ projects spurned into start-ups that were supported by the university and enterprise supporting institutions in Scotland. Students’ evaluations ranked the module among the best in the university.

Student-Centred Learning
Student-centred non-traditional teaching and learning techniques were introduced. The teaching methods included teamwork, practical tasks, presentations and open class discussions. Students in groups (4-5) were given a pound to invest in trading over a period of four weeks and the group that earned the highest amount was awarded a price. Students were encouraged to work on the trading activities outside of class sessions and the university provided support by providing introduction
letters to businesses and space on campus if needed. Students were also required to include their reflections on the trading activities as part of their personal development log for the assessment.

**Links with industry**

As part of the focus on enterprise education, the university partnered with a number of local and distant renowned companies to offer placements to students in a number of companies and professions. Entrepreneurs were also invited as guest lecturers and assessors of student’s business plan presentations. The modules also encouraged taking students on trips to visit enterprises in order to familiarise with how enterprise operate in the real world.

**Case Two: Social Enterprise Module**

**Organisational Leadership and Culture**

The entrepreneurship education strategy in Case Two involves the appointment of Pro Vice-Chancellor to spearhead External Engagement in the university. He oversees the business engagements and employability activities across all the schools in the university. The university also has a Centre for Entrepreneurship located at the School of Engineering in line with the view that entrepreneurship education should not be confined to business schools only but rather should be a university wide discipline. The centre organises workshops for students to help generate business ideas and explore how to develop businesses out of those ideas. The university also has staff for Careers Services as well as Employment Engagement services. As a modern university, the culture focuses more on enterprise and employability. The new culture aims at encouraging the generation and development of creativity and innovation.

**Staff Development**

The Centre for Entrepreneurship offers a CPD to a number of academics who come from all the schools in the university through its Enterprise Educators Academe. The training aims at introducing academics to entrepreneurship education and the techniques for integrating enterprise activities into existing programmes and modules across the university.

**Curricula design**

The Level 6 Social Enterprise module aims to equip students with a critical understanding of social enterprise, through the exploration of range of perspectives including sociological, political, environmental, historical and ethical. The module also provides an understanding of social enterprises position within the wider economy. The core skills developed include decision-making, creative thinking, teamwork, practical tasks, presentations skills, networking, opportunity recognition, creative problem solving, critical analysis and personal self-development. The module is delivered year-long via 90 minutes’ interactive lectures and 90 minutes’ workshops during which practical exercises are undertaken. The assessments included a poster presentation, an individual report and an individual pitch to a panel made up of academics and entrepreneurs. Similar to Case 1, the feedback is aimed at enhancing the viability of students’ business ideas. The assessment also leads to a professional award with the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). Students’ evaluations on this module were also very high.

**Student-Centred Learning**

Two entrepreneurs and an academic are invited to deliver three sessions of the lectures and students pay a visit to a local social enterprise to familiarise themselves with how social enterprises work. In the workshop sessions, student-centred non-traditional teaching and learning techniques are mostly used. Students are organised into “Create a Social Enterprise Groups” to work on exercises including identifying an opportunity for the creation of a social enterprise. The focus of the exercises was how students create social value through their enterprises.
Links with industry
Similar to Case One the university works closely with industry and has collaborations with a number of companies and professions that offer placements and employment opportunities to students. There is also collaboration with the Social Enterprise Network which serves as the umbrella body for social enterprises in the North West of England. A visit to a local social enterprise forms one of the focal points of the module.

Discussions
The two case studies clearly show the need for a leader at the top of the university hierarchy to spearhead the integration of entrepreneurship education and employability skills remains (Gurol and Atsan, 2006). However, the two cases also emphasise that the success of linking entrepreneurship education to employability depends on change of culture to encourage creativity and innovation in pedagogy (Galloway and Brown, 2002). While most entrepreneurship educators cling to traditional teacher-centred approaches, the two cases presented show how non–traditional, student-centred teaching and learning are being used to enable students focus on the development of personal development based on reflections and the development of entrepreneurial and employability skills (Gibb, 1996; QAA 2012; Mathieson et al, 2015). These approaches are appropriate because they motivate students to be active, reflective, self-managing agents and the lecturer as a coordinator and facilitator of student learning (Gibb, 1996; Mathieson et al, 2015). Activities such as trading and pitching used by Case One and Case Two encourage students’ learning, concentration, motivation and skills development through activities such as teamwork, practical tasks, presentations and open class discussions. These skills do not necessarily aim to make students entrepreneurs, but rather entrepreneurial and that is critically important to enhance employability of learners (Biggs, 1999; Fayolle and Gailly, 2008). This approach to teaching and learning in entrepreneurship education remains critical to the development of employability skills due to the convergence of the two set of skills and the changing student needs (Kemp, and Seagraves, 1995; Yorke, 2004).

Conclusions and Recommendations
This article has presented a conceptual framework based on a review of the literature on entrepreneurship education and employability and also presented practical approaches to illustrate how to integrate entrepreneurship education and employability skills in university curricula. The case studies suggest a wholistic approach involving university leadership at the highest level to initiate, motivate and ensure that the existing culture support the integration of entrepreneurial and employability skills into pedagogy. Constructivist and PBL approaches to teaching and learning that allow students to learn entrepreneurial skills such as leadership, creativity, problem-solving, identifying and working on opportunities and acting resourcefully have been shown to be more appropriate than traditional teacher-centred approaches. One other critical factor is the building of linkages with industry to facilitate placements, part-time work and guest lectures by entrepreneurs and practitioners.

Conceptually and practically, this article illustrates how organisational and practical approaches to entrepreneurship education are being used to link entrepreneurship education to employability through a number of initiatives. The challenge therefore is for universities to provide leadership, train staff, develop student-centred pedagogy, build collaborations with businesses and offer creative and innovative learning that impart entrepreneurial and employability skills for the increasing number of students. The approach could ultimately facilitate graduate employability and job creation.
Suggestions for future Research

The findings of this study cannot be generalised due to the limitations based on the case narrative approach. Future research can therefore focus on testing hypothesis on the linkages between entrepreneurship education and employability based on a survey of both teachers and students.

References


