

The Role of Formal Education in Promoting Entrepreneurial Spirit Alakhawayn University as a Case Study

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Abstract

This study is carried out with students of the School of Business Administration in Alakhawayn University, Ifrane (AUI), Morocco, with the aim of exploring their attitudes and mindsets towards entrepreneurship. To this end, a questionnaire was administered to 150 students including current and graduated students. Semi-structured interviewing was also adopted as a data collection tool to get an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the respondents' attitudes and lived experiences vis-à-vis entrepreneurship education. This study concluded that entrepreneurship education promotes the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship, fosters entrepreneurial mindsets and forms well-prepared individuals to overcome the obstacles lurking in the entrepreneurial route. In addition, it not only provides students with adequate knowledge and skills required to build a successful start-up but also boosts their entrepreneurial awareness.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, university-educated entrepreneurs, students' perceptions.

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1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, a growing interest in the field of entrepreneurship development has gained considerable attention in many corners of the world. Smart government leaders and policymakers have invested a considerable amount of time and effort to introduce and nurture entrepreneurship. Nowadays, the terms 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship' have become widely overspread among people of different walks of life and dramatically depicted by media.

Entrepreneurship is a social phenomenon that has baffled hundreds of researchers and scholars worldwide (e.g., Gartner, 1990; Peneder, 2009; Moroz & Hindle, 2012; Smith & Anderson, 2007). It is an elusive concept that has been defined and approached differently. One of the most prominent definitions that exists in literature is the one made by Timmons (1989) who defines it as "the ability to create and build something from practically nothing" (p. 1)

Nowadays, entrepreneurship is internationally chosen by a large number of people more than ever before. Some pursue the entrepreneur's career for vocational reasons while others as a necessity for self-employment. One of the reasons that drives them to follow the path of the entrepreneur is that the latter's route is tremendously attractive and offers an incredibly interesting package of benefits that includes an inner desire to control one's own personal destiny, maintain easy access and direct control over one's finance, shun any sort of economic crisis that befalls an ordinary monthly-salaried individual, and the need to reach one's full potential and contribute to society. Apparently, the freedom of the life of an entrepreneur is but a luring experience and a pleasant pursuit that attracts a large mass of different walks of life. However, some individuals succeed in turning a thriving business while many others fail. In fact, many entrepreneurs' ideas do culminate in a successful business while others do not. Surprisingly enough, despite the organizations' support to prospective entrepreneurs, many of them launch a business that is destined to fail. More or less, it is the entrepreneur who decides the destiny of his/her business career. The hidden cause behind this fact lies in the entrepreneur's personal profile. Due to entrepreneurship's visible impact in wealth creation and job generation, government leaders and economic development stakeholders advocate entrepreneurial activities via encouraging people to be self-employed. Entrepreneurial activities have been globally hailed as a vital strategy to remedy social malaises and deficiencies and attain sustainable growth.

Owing to the benefits that entrepreneurship provides to society, it is globally hailed as a primary gateway towards social change and sustainability (Pihie & Bagheri, 2011). Therefore, society should build itself entrepreneurially. Entrepreneurial skills should be spurred at an early age of each entrepreneur individual. Schools and culture should foster entrepreneurial mindsets. Towards a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of entrepreneurship, this study aims to answer the following two main questions:

- 1- Does entrepreneurship education nurture entrepreneurial skills and activities among students?
- 2- Does the course of entrepreneurship help university-educated entrepreneurs to face the challenges encountered in the process of building a start-up?

Starting from the analysis of a questionnaire administered to current and graduated students of Business

School Administration in Alakhawayn University and the one-on-one interview conducted with some of the alumni students, the present paper is an attempt to see how beneficial entrepreneurial education is for novice educated entrepreneurs to force their way through business achievements. Hence, the existing abyss that lies between the theoretical knowledge gained out of the entrepreneurship course and the requirements of real competitive business climate is highly recommended to be bridged.

2. Literature Review

Due to its crucial importance and the fact of being an engine for economic growth, entrepreneurship merits a great deal of investigations and research in order to stretch the borders and widen the scope of knowledge in this new branch of business. Entrepreneurship is actually a new field of business that has drawn the attention and triggered the interest of numerous researchers and scholars across the globe. In fact, the term has been given as many definitions as the number of researchers who has endeavored to define it. Their perceptions of entrepreneurship have bounced from their own perspectives. That is to say, each has selected and probed certain phenomena and interpreted the results from their own perspectives. As far as Lichtenstein (2011) is concerned, entrepreneurship “involves such a range of activities and levels of analysis that no single definition is definitive (p. 472).

Entrepreneurship research has been asking what entrepreneurship is or who is an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs are not only creators but also change agents within the society. They innovate, bring and introduce new business ideas and notions that render the current existing ones outmoded. Schumpeter (1994) calls this process “creative destruction”. Great and successful international organizations adopt this strategy by constantly surprising clients and customers with innovative betterment of their existing products to gain a competitive edge in the market. Entrepreneurs, in the form of organizations or individuals, are initiators and instigators of a healthy, vibrant and growing system of economy.

In order to clear off some mysteries hovering around the term ‘entrepreneurship’, it is wise to draw a crystal-clear portrayal of the entrepreneur and dig into the traits and behavior that characterize his/her profile. Simply put, it is imperative to delve into the ‘entrepreneurial personality’ to be able to get a clear picture of what entrepreneurship means. Hence, the first straight question that comes to one’s mind and that requires an adequate answer is: Who/What is an ‘Entrepreneur’?

An entrepreneur, as Zimmerer and his colleagues (2002) put it, “is one who creates a new business in the face of risk and uncertainty for the purpose of achieving profit and growth by identifying significant opportunities and assembling the necessary resources to capitalize on them” (p. 1). According to this definition, people can come up with an unlimited bulk of enterprising ideas but not all of them are crowned with ultimate success. In this sense, not all people can be regarded as entrepreneurs-though anyone can become so- and this fact explains the appearance and sudden disappearance or rise and fall of ‘so-called’ entrepreneurs. Success and failure in objectives’ attainments is a key barometer for labeling or not labeling an individual with the term: ‘entrepreneur’. Real entrepreneurs, with all the meanings this word conveys, are tireless individuals, who come up with new realistic business ideas, turn these ideas into reality via founding their own businesses, seek and identify opportunities related to the existing markets, force their way through the unknown without the slightest guarantee of success and are able to meet their own goals and make the balance tip on their favor. Finally yet importantly, true entrepreneurs are those who do not stop to ruminate and cherish their achievements, but they are the ones who constantly foresee new opportunities, calculate them well, overcome the encountered challenges and generate value for themselves and for their own society as well. All these stated points can be observed as interwoven processes, each part of which should not be overlooked or discarded (Baron & Shane, 2008).

Regarding entrepreneurial activities, practical trainings are highly recommended to first-time entrepreneurs in order to hone their skills and get more adequate apprenticeship in the field of entrepreneurship. It is proved that individuals who undergo such trainings beforehand manage to face and overcome the challenges that lurk on their horizons. The entrepreneur should be armed with the required tools to be able to break the barriers all along the tough journey of launching a business and getting it go despite the hardships and hurdles.

2.1. Academic Entrepreneurship:

Education is of paramount importance in that it is a vehicle through which science and technology are disseminated, nurtured and strengthened. Investment in science, technology and education is one of the primary goals and missions of developed countries. It is not only an efficient strategy towards development and sustainability but a panacea for social maladies and adversities. Governments’ policies in developing countries need to lay emphasis on education, based knowledge economy, and are required to seek collaboration with universities. Knowledge is a powerful tool and a sure-fire way toward economic growth. Several scholars highlight the crucial importance of knowledge in economic growth in addition to physical capital and labor (Mueller 2006, Audretsch & Lehmann 2005, Plummer & Acs 2004, Varga & Schalk 2004).

Universities, therefore, are undoubtedly a hub in the development process. Nowadays, universities get open to the world by making partnerships with other foreign universities for the benefit of students, faculty and society as well. Most importantly, universities' participation in sustainability is unique in that they pave the way for a knowledge society; prepare individuals to assume various roles, functions and professions within society. They are also responsible for educating future decision-makers, economic development stakeholders of a society who in turn will devise paths for growth and development.

With the rapid pace of technological advances and the 'global village', too much focus is being placed on universities. There is an urgent need to reconsider the place of the university in such changing and globalizing world. Today's leading universities tend to adapt their core activities to the needs and expectations of the digital age. The world has really turned global and is veering towards knowledge-based economy. Knowledge is the main driver of economic growth, whereas education is a basis for individual prosperity and social mobility. In leading economies, universities yield scientific knowledge, discover breakthrough ideas, foster innovations, create jobs and spur economic growth and high-tech entrepreneurship. Such an overarching role should permeate universities in low income countries in order to achieve prosperity and growth.

By way of student education, collaborations with industry, e-learning and community outreach activities, leading universities disseminate knowledge and accelerate growth. They are key actors in the advancement of scientific knowledge, which enhances our lives. They are indispensable players in a global system driven by knowledge, information and enterprising ideas. They are primary drivers of the global economy. Universities, in developing countries, are the unsung heroes behind the phenomenal success of high-achieving entrepreneurs such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gate, Michael Dell and the like. Simply put, universities lie at the heart of successful leading economies.

In today's fast-paced world, universities are not only expected to direct their activities to research and teaching, but also bridge the abyss between them and the surrounding community and ultimately pave the way for innovation and economic growth. Given that the world is becoming 'businified' and that the university is part of the community, the term 'academic entrepreneurship' comes to the surface. It simply refers to "an extension of business entrepreneurship to academia" (Cantaragiu 2012 p. 684). In other words, it is "a practice performed with the intention to transfer knowledge between the university and the external environment in order to produce economic and social value both for external actors and for members of the academia" (Cantaragiu 2012 p. 687).

Hence, an academic entrepreneur is the one who transforms the knowledge created in the academic institution into innovation, builds a start-up and generates value by creating new products or services. To put it simply, the academic entrepreneur is

a university scientist, most often a professor, sometimes a PhD student or a post-doc researcher, who sets up a business company in order to commercialize the results of her research. (...) enriched of the qualifying adjective 'academic', to stress that the innovations introduced by the entrepreneur originate from the research she conducted as part of her 'other job' as a university scientist. (Franzoni & Lissoni, 2006 p. 2).

2.2. International Entrepreneurship:

The phenomenon of globalization has impelled organizations to undergo a radical change typified by the concept of global village. Because of this phenomenon, firms are invited to operate within an increasingly global economy. International entrepreneurship is an activity that crosses national boundaries and operates within international environments. Growth is one of the key goals of any business enterprise. To expand and internationalize business activities is a common characteristic among all types of business organizations. The ultimate objective of all types of firms is to gain a competitive edge in the global market. To be able to do so, they have to be innovative and creative to obtain a competitive advantage in an international market characterized by fierce competition and dog-eat-dog strategy.

According to Zahra & George (2002), international entrepreneurship is "the process of creatively discovering and exploiting opportunities that lie outside a firm's domestic markets in the pursuit of competitive advantage" (p.11). Companies that artfully exploit market opportunities in a creative and innovative way would undoubtedly pave the way for gaining a competitive advantage over their peers. Competitive advantage is a sure-fire way to value creation and international expansion - still, much can be gained through international entrepreneurship.

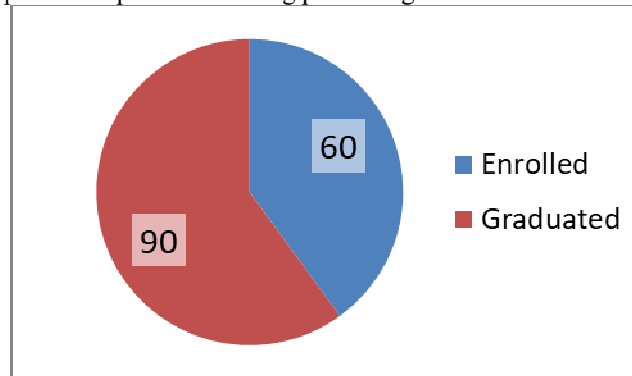
3. Methodology

The present study aimed to explore the significance of taking entrepreneurship courses and its significance in starting a business. It is carried out with students of the School of Business Administration in Alakhawayn University, Ifrane (AUI), Morocco, with the aim of exploring their attitudes and mindsets towards entrepreneurship. To achieve its objective, the study adopted a mixed method for data collection. Accordingly, a questionnaire was administered to 150 students including current and graduated students. Semi-structured

interviewing was also adopted as a data collection tool to get an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the respondents' attitudes and lived experiences vis-à-vis entrepreneurship education.

3.1 Respondents

This research was carried out in Alakhawayn University in Ifrane. The subjects of the study were current and graduated students of the School of Business Administration. They were 150 students and were selected because they took courses on entrepreneurship. The following pie chart gives detailed information about the participants.



Graphic 1: Enrolled and graduated respondents

This diagram shows the percentage of both categories, namely the enrolled and the graduated students. Most of the alumni's attitudes and perceptions are worthy of assessment for they are built on hands-on experience gained out of their contact with the job market. Being connected to the job market, the majority of alumni seem to have reshaped attitudes vis-à-vis enterprise creation.

Table 1. Questionnaire Survey and Students' Feedback

Question	Yes		No	
	Count	%	Count	%
A) Students' entrepreneurial mindset and background.				
Do you enjoy working within a team?	95	63	55	37
Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?	143	95	7	5
Do you have a coach, a mentor or a consultant?	30	20	120	80
Do you know how to write a business plan?	137	92	13	33
Do you have any successful entrepreneur in your close-knit circle of family or friends?	71	47	79	53
B) Students' perceptions of entrepreneurship course:				
Does the course provide you with adequate knowledge to start your own business?	139	93	11	7
I believe that entrepreneurship education is essential for a business creation.	140	97	10	3
The entrepreneurship course changed my perception of how to start my own business.	139	93	11	7
I believe that entrepreneurship course helps me become a successful entrepreneur.	139	93	11	7

A) Students' entrepreneurial mindset and background

The purpose from this part of the survey was to explore students' perceptions of entrepreneurship. It comprised five questions that gave an insight about students' entrepreneurial mindset and background. Students were asked if they enjoy working within a team, and 63% answered yes. A key trait that characterizes a successful entrepreneur is the ability and willingness to work within a team. The individual entrepreneur can't do everything by himself. That is why he or she ought to hire people who would assume various positions and carry out various tasks. The students were asked a direct question: "do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?" 95% answered "Yes". A high percentage of participants displayed confidence in being entrepreneurs and confirmed that they knew how to write a business plan. The students were further asked if they had a successful entrepreneur within their close surrounding; 47% answered favorably while 53% answered negatively. The presence of an entrepreneur mentor is essential for the development and improvement of their enterprise. Business consultants or an entrepreneur family member are a reliable source whom entrepreneurs can consult and seek advice in developing a sound business plan.

B) Students' perceptions of entrepreneurship course

The main goal of this section is to shed light on how students perceive the entrepreneurship course and its significance in their entrepreneurial career. Students were asked if the entrepreneurship course is beneficial and

it provides them with adequate knowledge and skills to start their own businesses; 93% answered “Yes” and 7% answered “No”. This indicates that the course is beneficial. Furthermore, 97% of the students agreed that knowledge of entrepreneurship is essential for future entrepreneurs. And in response to the two research questions, 93% of the participants state that the entrepreneurship course changed their perception of how to start their own businesses. Likewise, 93% of the students believed that the entrepreneurship course helps them become successful entrepreneurs. The findings accentuate the importance of entrepreneurship course and its impact on students’ entrepreneurial knowledge. The subject of entrepreneurship has proven tremendously beneficial in changing students’ mindsets as well as their perception of becoming entrepreneurs.

Students believe that the course of entrepreneurship can be an important facilitator for university-educated entrepreneurs to face the challenges encountered in the process of building a start-up. is an important figure that vindicates the necessity of incorporating entrepreneurship within the curriculum. Its integration within the syllabus has therefore a bearing on molding students’ entrepreneurial ability.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Based on questionnaire results, we have deduced that entrepreneurship education helps students acquire basic business skills. The questionnaire respondents have positive attitude toward entrepreneurship education. Many participants are of the opinion that taking curricular courses on entrepreneurship promotes the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship, fosters entrepreneurial mindsets and forms well-prepared individuals to overcome the obstacles lurking in the entrepreneurial route. Entrepreneurship education helps its recipients to meet the challenges in their entrepreneurial journey. The university, therefore, plays an important role in shaping entrepreneurial mindsets.

5. Findings and Recommendations:

The examination of the whole data above leads to the conclusion that the results elicited from Alakhawayn university-educated entrepreneurs’ responses emphasize the varied positive attitudes they hold toward entrepreneurship. Most importantly, the general finding that this research study has achieved is a profound insight of the entrepreneurial level and mindset of the majority of Moroccan youth embodied in Alakhawayn university educated entrepreneurs. According to the survey data, we can deduce that the benefits of taking courses on entrepreneurship are substantially rewarding and therefore the need to incorporate it as a curricular course is a top priority. We can also deduce that the knowledge that is obtained through education is a key building block for shaping entrepreneurial mindsets while adaptability to the external environment together with the expertise is a prerequisite. The former stands for theory and the latter for practice. Both theoretical and practical knowledge of the market field are instrumental in building a successful enterprise. Hence, the university and society should be spontaneously linked together. The existing abyss that lies between the lack of coaching into the business arena and the competitive business climate is highly recommended to be bridged. Learning basics on entrepreneurship is an absolute precondition and obtaining experience through consulting and coaching is an indispensable tool that goes into a successful start-up.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the significance of entrepreneurship education and its effect in students’ future job creation. The influence of Entrepreneurship knowledge and skills was substantiated by the positive outcome on their mindset. Most of the participants displayed a high level of entrepreneurial ability and affirmed the benefits of entrepreneurship course. Incorporating entrepreneurship within the curriculum has therefore a bearing on molding students’ entrepreneurial ability, especially if it is implemented at an early school stage. Due to the importance of entrepreneurship and its dynamics, the need to develop the knowledge base about it is a top priority. Education and training need to be reinforced and dedicated efforts are to be considered on the part of governments and concerned ministries to boost entrepreneurship.

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