

Entrepreneurship Education Programs

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Entrepreneurship education (EE) is par excellence a field for advancing and developing societies, a trigger for economic growth, social cohesion, organizational success, and personal fulfillment.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship education (EE) is par excellence a field for advancing and developing societies, a trigger for economic growth, social cohesion, organizational success, and personal fulfillment ^{[1][2][3][4][5]}. For this reason, over the past two decades, entrepreneurship education programs (EEP) have increased exponentially on all continents ^{[6][7][8][9][10][11][12][13][14][15]}. This educational phenomenon originated at Harvard Business School, where the first entrepreneurship course, called Management of New Enterprises, was offered by Myles Mace in 1947; a year later, a research center in this field was created, the Research Centre in Entrepreneurial History ^{[16][17]}. However, courses began to appear at various universities in the USA, and in 1967, the first MBAs on entrepreneurship were held at Stanford University and New York University ^[18]. In the following year, 1968, Babson College offered the first degree in entrepreneurship ^[16].

This phenomenon has been spreading worldwide, given its relevance in the solutions to emerging problems. However, if the focus was initially on the creation and management of companies, in recent decades, the focus has also opened up to entrepreneurial skills, attitudes, and behaviors ^{[19][20][21]}. Education towards entrepreneurship began to take an approach that makes it possible to cover students from all higher education courses and all levels of education who need to develop these skills. Therefore, entrepreneurial programs have been developed and implemented on all continents as a way of preparing and enabling them to face professional challenges, to create their jobs, to create original and valuable solutions to various emerging social and economic problems, such as the environment, poverty, social exclusion, and sustainability. Moreover, entrepreneurship education assumed the objective of promoting an entrepreneurial culture, having the competencies mentioned above as a frame of reference ^{[22][23][24]}.

With this objective, interest in educational actions in the form of intervention programs has grown, consisting in intentional and systematic actions, resulting from the identification of the needs of a population, directed to specific objectives, based on theoretical models, and suggesting activities and pedagogical resources for their execution and evaluation, as defined by Jardim ^[25]. Consequently, studies on these interventions have been carried out on all continents, with the most diverse recipients, such as students in higher education ^{[26][27]}, primary school ^{[28][29][30][31][32]}, and secondary education ^{[33][34][35]}, as well as the most diverse contexts outside the school, such as municipal ^{[36][37]}, agricultural ^[38], and retirement ^[39]. These references show that the actions of education towards entrepreneurship have multiplied around the world in recent years, which demonstrates the need for entrepreneurial skills. A paradigmatic example is that of EEP in Hong Kong secondary schools, presented by Cheung ^[9], who concluded that 70% of schools apply EEP for more than three years; that in most programs (48%), the activities are carried out over one or more school years; and that several teaching approaches are adopted, predominantly workshops (46%), competitions, case studies, and mentoring. However, 75% of schools also use traditional teaching methods.

Thus, the good results achieved through the EEP come from the programs' conceptions, namely the leveled objectives, the competencies, the connection with the socio-economic context, the profile of the program facilitator, and the activities carried out, as has been demonstrated in the literature ^{[10][15][29][40][41][42][43]}. According to Jardim ^[25], there are three dimensions to be taken into account when designing an intervention program: the identity of the program (name of the program, characterization of the recipients and their socio-educational context, objectives, content, skills, and theoretical foundation), pedagogical options (activities, resources, number of sessions, total duration, and facilitators), and evaluation (research design, sample definition, assessment tools, results, and implications for subsequent interventions).

One of the constituent elements of the EEP is entrepreneurial skills (ES), which enable students to face the challenges of the current labor market, such as the sense of initiative, problem-solving, innovation, creativity, and teamwork. For this reason, several approaches and models of ES have emerged [44][45][46][47][48][49][50][51][52]. These skills have been progressively included in school curricula, and interventions have been carried out to promote them at all ages. Thus, it is possible to disseminate an entrepreneurial culture for all such that the economy and the market include not only those who were born in a family and socio-economic context favorable to entrepreneurship, but also those who, through learning and training, acquire the skills, competences, values, emotions, and tools of this culture [4].

The development of the elements of entrepreneurial culture requires creating an educational environment favorable to the creation of value propositions, unique socio-professional projects, useful products, and innovative services [53]. This teaching–learning process implies the use of a set of specific pedagogical strategies. They can be educational games, biographies of entrepreneurs, group dynamics, or business models and can be in digital or printed format, virtual or in-person, individual or in a group. As an example, researchers can observe some of these teaching–learning processes in Europe [53][54] and around the world [14][55]. Moreover, there is a wide variety of procedures and resources representing evidence of the diversity of proposals according to economic, cultural, and social contexts [4].

2. Effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Education Programs

Regarding the effectiveness of the EEP, this systematic review provided an overview of the current literature, analyzing 29 programs, from 24 countries. Overall, programs dedicated to primary school students [56][57][58][59][60] showed a positive effect above all on entrepreneurial skills, highlighting the enhancement of individual skills, such as creativity, self-confidence, power of argument, and construction of social skills in relationships and interpersonal and groups settings. In addition, there were gains in the motivation to work on public causes such as sustainability and social innovation; improvements were found in respect for the environment, cooperation, and communication of ideas. Moreover, teachers at this level of education [61] also revealed self-confidence, initiative, innovation, creativity, mindfulness, empathy, self-motivation, and participation in society after the intervention program. These results are consistent with those presented by other studies that indicate gains when these skills are developed in childhood and adolescence [19][24][27][31].

On the other hand, studies related to secondary education [62][63][64] revealed that at these ages, in addition to fundamental entrepreneurial skills, it is already possible to deepen some more specific skills, such as business skills, reflection on the probability of founding a startup, perception of the benefits of starting a business, and the awareness of the consequences of choosing to pursue an original professional career. This is in line with studies that refer to the contents to be deepened with secondary school students and the strategies used in its promotion [4][9][17][47].

In turn, in higher education [56][65][66][67][68][69][70][71][72][73][74][75][76][77][78][79][80] and programs aimed at adult professionals [81][82][61][83][84], the programs focused on more advanced entrepreneurship concepts, namely networking, target market definition, market research, concept prototyping, financial markets, and intellectual property. Also significant are the effects on awareness of the difficulties and obstacles to following an entrepreneurial career. Thus, at this level, the programs emphasize those skills related to management, economics, finance, and marketing, highlighting the reference to those that enable them to take advantage of business opportunities, develop business models, prepare marketing plans, to use social networks properly, to deal with the risk inherent to the business activity, and to solve problems and conflicts. This growth in the specification of skills developed over the progressive levels of education is in line with several experts in the area, who point out as essential a progressive and complementary teaching–learning process, which alludes to the fact that it is a time-consuming process [1][3][14].

More specifically, the results obtained from this review suggested that approaches focused on ES had a significant effect on the promotion of a certain type of culture, as is clearly shown in the UKids initial teacher training program, which aims to establish entrepreneurship, especially social entrepreneurship, as an element of teaching in primary schools [61]. This option has also been followed in other contexts, such as in Brazil, Portugal, and Sweden [85][86][87].

As suggested by Lyons and Zhang [63], the programs prove to be more effective for those who have limited access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Thus, they are more beneficial to participants who would have more difficulty accessing the resources and skills of the programs. For this reason, the dissemination of this culture among all students becomes very significant in the logic of an inclusive education that promotes social ascension [88][89][90][91][92]. In this review, there was a tendency for the EEPs to have a digital format, as is clearly shown in Newpath [78], for the development of projects in the scope of social entrepreneurship [38][62][61].

Among the strategies that stand out are those that promote communication skills for an adequate exposition of products and services [56][70][79][93]. According to McCollough et al. [94], it is essentially a streamlining of the model for the rapid presentation of ideas. Moreover, being an entrepreneur presupposes skills regarding effective communication, namely the management of social networks and the use of digital platforms and communication channels best suited to a particular customer segment [47][95]. It has also been shown that networking is crucial in EE, with specific attention to partnerships established with institutions outside the school itself. This is in line with Cheung's research in the context of secondary education in Hong Kong [9].

In summary, and based on the review carried out, many problems emerged in the current socio-educational context, such as the high rate of unemployment, ecological and environmental issues, and academic failure. Considering this contextual complexity, most of the reviewed programs were developed based on the definition of a unique identity, pedagogy, and evaluation but always aiming to educate for the development of a culture where the capacity to create value is predominant. Among the identified entrepreneurial skills are the spirit of initiative, innovation, problem-solving, global leadership, teamwork and networking, digital and communication skills, the use and creation of business models, and marketing and e-commerce.

Researchers concluded that the effectiveness of the EEP is mainly due to the quality of the design of the programs themselves, proven, for example, by their pedagogical approach, such as teaching methods, excellence of the facilitator, and activities carried out; by the predispositions of the participants—that is, if they started working on entrepreneurial skills since childhood, it becomes much more natural to be an entrepreneur; and by their integration or not in entrepreneurial ecosystems, verifying that whoever was born and lived in an entrepreneurial family or regional ecosystem more easily takes chances to innovate. Thus, the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture is the consequence of combining these elements, mobilizing individuals and societies for a continuous creation in this global world. For all these reasons, it is necessary to take advantage of the opportunities and face the current challenges, namely those related to the integration of EE in all levels of education, but giving priority to those aimed at younger generations, as well as seeking to improve the quality of scientific production in this field.

Despite the results obtained, this entry not exempt from limitations. First, the characteristics of the studies included vary widely, for example, in study design, the focus of the intervention, number of sessions, sample size, and main outcomes. For this reason, meta-analyses and statistical comparisons were not possible. Second, by restricting the literature search to include only articles published in scientific journals in the past two decades, publications such as conference papers and dissertations may have been lost. Finally, although the methodological rigor of the studies has been assessed, it is important to note that this only indicates the overall quality of each study, including details of the program, but not specifically how information and strategies were addressed in the intervention.

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