

DOI: 10.47743/ejpar.2023-2-1

ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION AMONG HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

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Abstract

Starting from the premise that the development of entrepreneurial spirit is an educational ideal and entrepreneurial skills are key European competencies, this paper aims to assess the entrepreneurial spirit and intention among high school students, as well as the role of pre-university education institutions in shaping their attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions.

To achieve the research objectives, a quantitative research method was employed, and the research instrument used was a questionnaire administered to a sample of 147 high school students. The results reveal that, to foster their entrepreneurial spirit and intention, high school students need appropriate support and guidance from schools, universities, and the community in general. By providing a conducive environment and support in developing entrepreneurial skills, optimal conditions can be created for young people to explore their potential and put their ideas into practice.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship, education, attitude, intention, young people, high school.*

JEL Classification: L26, L31, I20.

1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of each individual is influenced by a multitude of factors of cultural, social, economic nature, etc. This formation is achieved through a mix of various types of education. All forms of education, whether formal education (having a systematic, organized, intentional character), non-formal education (being less rigid), or informal education (which is spontaneous and accidental), produce transformations in the values, attitudes, and behavior of people.

Education, as a process and as a specific human activity, aims to shape a model of human personality based on the needs and requirements of the economic, social, and cultural context. Thus, the idea of an educational ideal

emerges, which in Romania is identified, including in the National Education Law, formulated as follows: “the educational ideal of the Romanian school consists of the free, integral, and harmonious development of human individuality, in the formation of an autonomous personality and in the assumption of a value system that is necessary for personal fulfillment and development, for the development of entrepreneurial spirit, for active civic participation in society, for social inclusion, and for engagement in the labor market.”

As it can be observed, “the development of entrepreneurial spirit among young people” is one of the directions towards which the educational ideal of the Romanian school is aimed, demonstrating the importance and interest that the state and government attribute to this field.

From this perspective, following a theoretical and applied research approach, we will analyze the entrepreneurial spirit and intention among high school students as well as the role of educational institutions in the pre-university system in shaping the attitude and entrepreneurial intent of students.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

Formal and non-formal education in the development of entrepreneurial spirit and intention among high school students acquires different meanings in European countries. Thus, entrepreneurial education (Soare, 2008) can be seen as: a study discipline (already present in the school curriculum); a module of specific courses and activities (sometimes present within formal or non-formal programs); an innovative way to design, organize and develop the entire school curriculum (a restructuring of the school and extracurricular curriculum from the perspective of entrepreneurial education requirements, desirable to implement).

In our country, the main means by which formal education in the field of entrepreneurship is carried out is represented by the mandatory discipline „Entrepreneurial Education” which, starting from 2003, was introduced into the framework education plan for high school in the 10th grade, all streams, profiles and specializations, being granted one hour per week, so approximately 35-36 hours in a school year. The school curriculum related to the Entrepreneurial Education discipline, approved by Order of the Minister of Education and Research No. 4598 / 31. 08. 2004, (ME, 2004) lists the general and specific skills that should ideally be formed after completing the mandatory hours of Entrepreneurial Education. General and specific competencies are based on and promote the following values and attitudes: independence in thinking and in action; positive relationship with others; responsibility in entrepreneurial activity; free initiative; economic efficiency.

Despite the knowledge and skills acquired in schools, Romania does not have a high level of entrepreneurship. One of the factors that contributed to this state of affairs, in addition to the mentality strongly influenced by communist

doctrine and the low level of economic development in the post-communist period, is also the prevalence of the cognitive component over the attitudinal one, in the vast majority of study disciplines, including entrepreneurship education. Thus, students have knowledge, develop skills but do not necessarily have the attitude necessary to materialize them.

As proof, there is also the latest Country Report published by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor in 2023, (GEM, 2023) which shows that in 2022, only 6% of Romanian adults intended to start a business in the next three years, decreasing compared to 15% a year earlier. At the same time, almost half of Romanian adults knew people who had recently started a business, so there is no lack of role models, while two thirds considered that they have the skills and experience to start a business themselves, so there is no shortage trustworthy. The decrease in entrepreneurial intention from 2022 is noticeable not only in the case of Romania, being a general trend in the area, probably influenced by the war in Ukraine.

In some cases, the entrepreneurial intention is influenced by the social perception of entrepreneurs, by the status that entrepreneurs have in society and by the way the mass media present entrepreneurs. Thus, society must be educated in order to develop a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2020), potential entrepreneurs must be encouraged and supported by those around them, by society in general.

In this context, it is necessary to introduce optional classes, which will also take place in educational institutions, but will be different due to the applied non-formal education methods.

The notion of non-formal education appeared in the 1960s - 1970s, being associated with lifelong learning, outlining the importance of education that takes place beyond the formal framework of the education system, even if it takes place in other spaces than those of school, whether it is carried out at school but through activities that are not the subject of the school curriculum (Costea, Cerkez and Sarivan, 2009).

According to the National Education Law no. 1/2011 learning in non-formal contexts is learning integrated within planned activities, with learning objectives, which do not explicitly follow a curriculum and may differ in duration. This type of learning depends on the intention of the learner and does not automatically lead to the certification of the acquired knowledge and skills and the institutions or organizations in which it is carried out are those in which formal education is carried out, to which are added „*care and protection centers of the child, student clubs, cultural institutions such as museums, theaters, cultural centers, libraries, documentation centers, cinemas, houses of culture, as well as professional, cultural associations, unions, non-governmental organizations*” (Law no. 1/2011).

Non-formal entrepreneurship education will aim to develop a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship, taking into account the fact that attitudes best predict subsequent behaviour. Attitudes influence intentions (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2013) and intentions represent individual motivations to exert effort in order to act on a plan or a decision.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Starting from the premise that the development of entrepreneurial spirit is an educational ideal and entrepreneurial skills are key European competencies, this paper aims to assess the entrepreneurial spirit and intention among high school students, as well as the role of educational institutions in the pre-university system in shaping attitudes and intentions towards entrepreneurship among high school students, with the following objectives:

O1: Analysis of entrepreneurial spirit among high school students;

O2: Research on the perception of entrepreneurship among young individuals;

O3: Self-assessment of the level of entrepreneurial knowledge among high school students;

O4: Analysis of entrepreneurial intentions among high school students;

O5: Identification of ways in which schools could contribute to the enhancement of entrepreneurial education and intentions.

In order to achieve the research objectives, a quantitative research method was used, and the research instrument was a questionnaire administered to a sample of 147 high school students from the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades at the „Ioan C. Ștefănescu” Technical College in Iași, specializing in „Gastronomy Technician” and „Hairstylist”. These students attended Entrepreneurship Education courses, as well as other courses such as Accounting, Marketing, Business Administration, Negotiation and Contracting, courses included in the curriculum for the Services Profile. The students voluntarily completed the questionnaires, receiving the link through their class communication groups and their responses remained anonymous. The questionnaires were filled out between May 2nd and May 19th, 2023, near the end of the school year, when the subjects relevant to each year of study were almost entirely covered.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Following an investigative process involving induction, deduction, statistical analysis, and critical interpretation of the results, the following findings were obtained:

For *Objective O1: Analyzing Entrepreneurial Spirit Among High School Youth*, six items were proposed to examine to what extent young individuals possess qualities that could indicate entrepreneurial intentions in the future. These qualities include risk-taking, independence, openness to innovation, the

desire for achievement, determination, and perseverance. Based on the responses provided by students, it can be concluded that the interviewed youth possess qualities indicative of entrepreneurial spirit, being willing to take risks, independent, determined, persevering, and having a desire for accomplishment. Regarding openness to innovation, it seems that they need to be encouraged and motivated to seek the new, as they are still under the influence of traditionalism, which characterizes our people.

For *Objective O2: Researching the Perception of Youth Regarding Entrepreneurship*, several questions were posed focusing on the qualities that young individuals believe an entrepreneur should possess and how they view an entrepreneurial career. Concerning the qualities that young people think an entrepreneur should have, most responses indicated: knowledge of the field, responsibility, decision-making ability, intelligence and creativity, passion for business, vision, etc. The youth who completed the questionnaire are familiar with entrepreneurs (friends, relatives, bosses or supervisors, neighbors, acquaintances, teachers, etc.), some of them coming from families that have or had a business. Knowledge of the field and responsibility are the most important qualities an entrepreneur should possess, according to the interviewed students. The emphasis is placed on the support provided by school and authorities for establishing a business.

For *Objective O3: Self-assessment of the Level of Entrepreneurial Knowledge Among High School Youth*, students were asked if they have entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, if they believe they know how to initiate and develop a business, if they have ever developed a business plan, and if Entrepreneurial Education and other economic disciplines studied have helped them develop entrepreneurial competencies. The responses showed that the level of knowledge in entrepreneurship is average for 53.4% of students, followed by those who consider themselves to have minimal knowledge (29.5%), and only 17.1% of students believe they have a good level of knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship.

On a more concrete level, when asked if they would like to initiate and develop a business, 45.5% of them claim to know the requirements and steps to initiate a business, 33.8% are undecided and 20.7% do not know or have little knowledge. Regarding the development of business plans, the majority (58.9%) claim they have not developed any, while 41.1% of students state that they have developed a business plan during Entrepreneurial Education classes. Additionally, young individuals believe that Entrepreneurial Education and other economic disciplines studied have helped them develop entrepreneurial competencies.

For *Objective O4: Analyzing Entrepreneurial Intentions Among High School Youth*, the intentions of young individuals to become entrepreneurs were assessed. This involved evaluating if they have seriously considered initiating a business, if they currently have a business idea, if they would like to open a business in the next 3-5 years, the field in which they would like to open a business, and what they consider to be the biggest obstacle in starting a business.

In response to the question „Have you seriously considered becoming an entrepreneur”, 59.6% of respondents answered yes, while 47.9% of the total respondents even have a business idea at the moment. Regarding the desire to open a business in the next 3-5 years, 71.9% of the young people who completed the questionnaire answered yes. The fields in which they would like to open their businesses are as follows: Beauty Services ranked first (with 40 responses), closely followed by Commerce (39 responses), and then equally by Production and Tourism (each with 32 responses), and Catering (27 responses).

The fields in which they would like to open their businesses are largely influenced by the professional qualifications they will acquire upon completing high school studies, namely, Technician in Gastronomy and Hairstyling. Among the obstacles mentioned in starting a business, more than half (52.1%) of respondents mentioned a lack of necessary funds, followed by the challenging implementation of the business idea (18.5% of respondents) due to various reasons (lack of knowledge, skills, lack of tutorial support), and a lack of a business idea (in the case of 17.8% of respondents).

In conclusion, the majority of young individuals have considered becoming entrepreneurs, some even have a business idea, many aspire to open a business in the next 3-5 years, especially in the field they are preparing for. The main obstacle in starting a business seems to be the lack of funds.

For *Objective O5: Identifying ways in which the school could contribute to increasing the level of entrepreneurial education and intention*, the role of the school in developing entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions was investigated. From this perspective, students asserted that:

- entrepreneurial education can develop entrepreneurial intention. Data analysis showed that the majority of students believe that entrepreneurial education can develop entrepreneurial intention to a large extent (54.8%) and a very large extent (14.4%);

- mentorship and coaching activities are very useful in the initial stages of business, followed by entrepreneurship skills training and information on legal, accounting, and tax procedures.

As a result of the research conducted, the majority of students (87.0%) believe that the education system/institutions should do more to develop entrepreneurial intention among students. The methods suggested by the youth include: more hours of entrepreneurial education; more economic disciplines; financial education hours to learn how to manage money; starting entrepreneurial education as early as possible; interesting and interactive lessons; more emphasis on practical training; meetings and discussions with entrepreneurs; visits to companies; the opportunity to receive advice from entrepreneurs, etc.

In conclusion, high school students believe that the education system can and should contribute to the development of entrepreneurial intention, both

through formal means (mandatory hours in the curriculum) and especially through non-formal means (optional hours, projects, activities, meetings, conferences, visits) or even informal means (discussions, mentorship, etc.).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the current period, there is a significant increase in the interest of high school students in entrepreneurship. Many young individuals are drawn to the idea of building their own business and fulfilling their own dreams, rather than following traditional paths and employment methods. This growing interest may result from a better awareness of the entrepreneurial profession. Developing an entrepreneurial spirit at this stage of life can bring both individual and collective benefits, fostering critical and creative skills, providing access to technological opportunities, offering appropriate support, and generating social and economic impact.

The research process revealed the following:

- the interviewed young individuals possess qualities indicative of an entrepreneurial spirit, being willing to take risks, independent, determined, perseverant, and having a desire for affirmation. Regarding openness to innovation, they seem to need encouragement and stimulation to explore the new, still being under the umbrella of the traditionalism that characterizes our people.

- high school students are acquainted with individuals who are entrepreneurs (friends, relatives, bosses or supervisors, neighbors, acquaintances, teachers, etc.), with some of them coming from families that have or had a business. They view knowledge of the field of activity and responsibility as the most important qualities an entrepreneur should possess.

- high school students believe they possess certain entrepreneurial qualities; most of them consider their entrepreneurial knowledge to be moderate and know how to initiate and develop a business. Less than half of them have drafted a business plan; most believe they would need support in creating a business plan, especially in disciplines such as Marketing, Acquisition, and Accounting. The majority believe that the studied disciplines have helped them in developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills;

- a majority of young individuals have considered becoming entrepreneurs, with some already having a business idea. Many aspire to start a business in the next 3-5 years, especially in the field they are preparing for. The main obstacle to starting a business is perceived to be a lack of funds.

- high school students believe that the education system can and should contribute to the development of entrepreneurial intentions, both through formal means (mandatory hours in the curriculum) and especially through non-formal means (optional hours, projects, activities, meetings, conferences, visits, etc.), and even informal means (discussions, mentorship, etc.).

To develop their entrepreneurial spirit and intention, high school students need adequate support and guidance. Schools, universities, parents, and the community, in general, can play an important role in providing educational programs, mentorship, and access to resources. By offering a favourable environment and support in developing entrepreneurial skills, optimal conditions can be created for young people to explore their potential and put their ideas into practice.

By providing a environment and support in the development of entrepreneurial skills, optimal conditions can be created for young people to explore their potential and put their ideas into practice.

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