ORIGINAL SCIENTITIC PAPER

E-Learning as a Tool for Empowering Entrepreneurship

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A B S T R A C T

Distance learning is a specific form of education which can be applied in many different areas in order to enable the improvement of the skills and competencies of the people who have decided to learn this way. The advantages of distance learning based on IT are numerous and more than obvious. The question we are trying to address in this paper is whether e-learning can be used for

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empowering entrepreneurship. For that purpose, we have designed and conducted a research and the results of that research are presented in this paper. The overall conclusion is that e-learning programs specially designed for entrepreneurs can be used as a tool for empowering young people competencies in this area and especially in countries with inadequate system of formal education, like Serbia.

KEY WORDS*: e-learning, entrepreneurship, competencies, students*

Introduction

Distance learning is not news anymore. It has been around for years now and many universities, schools and private companies are using all of the advantages that distance learning (e-learning) is offering in order to widespread their markets, offer more competitive programs to their students and learners and simply use all the advantages of the information technology in the learning process. There are many authors who are investigating the potential of distance learning in different areas of study. Spatariu et al. addressed evaluating effective online instruction. Graham et al., McCombs assessed the value of online courses in specific fields of study. Draves, in its studies, emphasizes the benefits of providing online learning. The greatest advantage of using modern information and communication devices in education is reflected in learning from home, at its own pace where the material is presented by different methods, with the possibility of perceiving its own progress. Recent research shows that the introduction of virtual environments into higher education has the potential to bring a positive change in the learning experience.

Our research is focusing on investigating the possibilities of distance learning application in the area of entrepreneurship. The studies carried out so far on the impact of education on entrepreneurship show a high level of connectivity. Increasing the competencies of individuals encourages entrepreneurship and establishes an entrepreneurial culture on a wider scale. Dynamic business environment requires a permanent increase in the educational level of entrepreneurs, and consequently to improve the educational process by adding alternative subjects that a participant can choose.

Research Methodology and Questionnaire

In order to investigate the student's attitudes towards e-learning and its association with entrepreneurship we have designed a study which was conducted during 2012 in Turkey and Serbia, simultaneously. In Turkey the respondents were the students of Anadolu University, Faculty of economics and in Serbia the students of Belgrade Business School were introduced with the questionnaire. In total 405 participants from both countries were participating in a research, 205 from Turkey and 200 from Serbia respectively.

The research included seven questions as follows:

1. Do you intend to run your private business as soon as you graduate?
   A) Yes
   B) No
   2 Why do you want to be an entrepreneur?
   A) This is the only way to get a job
   B) I can earn more than working for someone
   C) I have a good business idea I want to realize
3. Do you have any role model among successful entrepreneurs?
   A) Yes
   B) No
4. Is formal education necessary for entrepreneurship?
   A) Yes
   B) No
5. Do you believe that distance learning would be a good solution for future young entrepreneurs?
   A) Yes
   B) No
6. Would you like to attend one of these distance learning programs?
   A) Yes
   B) No
7. What would be the most important in selecting such a program, and ways of learning?
   A) Acquisition of knowledge
   B) The faster and easier way to graduate
   C) Flexibility in studying

Key Findings

As it can be seen in Table 1. 29% of respondents in Turkey are ready to start their own business as soon as they graduate. On the other side, the portion of the students in Serbia willing to start their own private business after graduation is 90%.

Table1: Readiness of the respondents in Turkey and Serbia to start their own business after graduation

Country	Readiness to start own business
Turkey	29%
Serbia	90%

Source: Authors

Key question arising from the data presented in Table 1 is why is there such a huge disproportion between undergraduates in Turkey and Serbia regarding this question. One of the reasonable explanations may be the fact that the students in Serbia are far less introduced with all the challenges that start up projects bring along.

The results of the second question regarding the student's perception of the reasons to become an entrepreneur are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons that the respondents in Turkey and Serbia perceive as the most important in terms of becoming an entrepreneur

Country	Reasons to become entrepreneur
Turkey	Good business Idea - 50%
Serbia	Possibility to earn more - 45%

Source: Authors

As it can be seen from Table 2. the students in Turkey perceive good business idea as the main reason to become an entrepreneur. One of the possible explanations of such result is developed entrepreneurial culture in this country supported by the educational system which promotes entrepreneurship. On the other side, the students from Serbia observe the possibility to earn more as the key driver of becoming an entrepreneur.

Regardless of the reasons it is very important that the students from both countries recognize the importance of entrepreneurship.

The students attitudes regarding the existence of a role model among successful entrepreneurs are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: The existence of a role model among successful entrepreneurs

Country	Yes	No
Turkey	66%	34%
Serbia	42%	58%

Source: Authors

The fact that the students in Turkey are more likely to have a role model among successful entrepreneurs can be attributed to the fact that the entrepreneurship has longer tradition in this country than in Serbia. Often, successful businesses in Serbia are associated with some form of unethical government protection and corruption resulting in a fact that successful entrepreneurs are not perceived as successful, hardworking and intelligent people.

The student's attitudes towards the importance of formal education for entrepreneurship are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: The importance of formal education for entrepreneurship

Country	Yes	No
Turkey	57%	43%
Serbia	50%	50%

Source: Authors

In both cases, students recognize the formal education as important driver for the development of entrepreneurship. The system of formal education should provide students with necessary knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Serbia at the moment and serious changes need to be undertaken in this area.

One of the possible solutions for the aforementioned issue in Serbia could be the distance learning programs in the area of entrepreneurship. Student's opinions regarding this option are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Distance learning programs in the area of entrepreneurship

Country	Yes	No
Turkey	44%	56%
Serbia	40%	60%

Source: Authors

The fact that some students recognize the potential of distance learning programs in the area of entrepreneurship is very important, especially in terms of lifelong learning. It can be concluded that the existence of world known distance learning platforms contributed to the fact that young people recognize the potential of distance learning programs.

Data representing the students willingness to participate in distance learning programs are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Willingness to participate in distance learning programs

Country	Yes	No
Turkey	31%	69%
Serbia	80%	20%

Source: Authors

As it may be seen in Table 6, the students in Serbia are more willing to participate in distance learning programs than their peers in Turkey. One of the possible explanations may be the fact that due to obvious lack of competences provided to students in Serbia by the system of formal education, they are willing to try something new in terms of acquiring necessary skills and that distance learning programs are seen as good options to do so.

In terms of motivation to enter distance learning program, the results presented in Table 7 show that students in Turkey perceive acquisition of knowledge as most important factor. On the other side, students in Serbia think that flexibility in studying is the most important motive. Once again, it is obvious that the students in Serbia do not consider the acquisition of knowledge as the most important factor because of the fact the system of formal education is not perceived as being able to provide the acquisition of necessary skills and competences.

Table 7: Motivation factors to enter distance learning program

Motivation factor	Turkey	Serbia
Acquisition of knowledge	44%	25%
The faster and easier way to graduate	29%	27%
Flexibility in studying	27%	48%

Source: Authors

Conclusions

The results presented in this paper point to the fact that the students from Turkey and Serbia recognize the importance of entrepreneurship and what is most important the significance of distance education programs in terms of acquiring skills and expertise necessary for entrepreneurs. The fact that students point of view in these two countries significantly differ regarding some dimensions of entrepreneurship points to the fact that the system of formal education in these two countries is different in terms of knowledge and skills provided to the students after graduation. Students from Serbia recognize the importance of entrepreneurship but on the other side are well aware of the fact that the system of formal education in Serbia is not good enough and that some alternatives should arise, either in the form of informal education programs or in the form of distance learning programs.

The results obtained from both countries suggest that distance learning programs have great potential in the area of entrepreneurship. The fact that over 40% of students in both countries recognize the potential of distance learning programs in terms of entrepreneurship is very important. In order to enable those programs to be successful they need to be carefully planned and designed, with clearly stated goals and outcomes.

Using modern technologies, the process of learning becomes more informative where learners access different types of information, using the methods that best suit them. This kind of education can be combined with the classical form of teaching, face to face. This combination provides them a lot of opportunities to learn more new things in a quite different environment. Unfortunately, according to our key findings these opportunities are not exploited enough in Serbia.

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