

CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

The development of entrepreneurial thinking has become a priority in the entire world, being an engine of community progress. Therefore, the need to develop innovative ideas by supporting the entrepreneurship education is a necessity of the 21st century. The European Commission has repeatedly emphasized the need to integrate entrepreneurship education as a transdisciplinary component in all areas of the knowledge society. In the context of the digital revolution, knowledge management becomes focused on managing the value of information extracted from data and how to analyze them, in terms of critical thinking, enhances the transformation of ideas into value-generating actions for the knowledge society by mobilizing resources. The entrepreneurial competence is a competence that supports the personal and professional development of young people, encouraging them to find innovative solutions to the social problems and to create products that add socio-economic value. It is based on creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and collaborative work to improve the management of cultural, social or economic projects. The study aims to radiograph the good practices in the Romanian higher education in the field of developing entrepreneurial skills in young people. The paper examines the possibility of introducing the critical thinking component as an original and innovative element in terms of opportunities to develop the entrepreneurial ecosystem in higher education institutions by establishing collaborative networks of student SMEs where these skills can be fully valued.

Keywords: *entrepreneurship education; knowledge management, development; higher education; critical thinking entrepreneurial competences.*

JEL classification: *O35, L26, I25*

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education must be seen as one of the most profitable investments that the European states can make, having a positive impact on the dynamic nature of economies, as well as on the development of young people by increasing the capacity for employment.

Specialized literature highlights the fact that the definitions of entrepreneurship are multiple and cover different aspects of it.

Some researchers define entrepreneurship both as a process in itself and in terms of its outcome, that is the establishment of a business. Other researchers study entrepreneurship from the perspective of personality traits related to individuals who act entrepreneurially. Another perspective is the role of entrepreneurship in the knowledge-based economy [20].

Through "The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan", the European Commission emphasized the need to integrate entrepreneurial learning into all sectors of education, including informal learning.

The European Commission recognizes entrepreneurship education as a tool that can help young people become more entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial education refers to the way of developing a general set of competences, applicable in all aspects of life, not only to learn how to run a business. It encompasses all forms of learning, education and training that contribute to the

creation of entrepreneurial spirit, competences and behavior, with or without a commercial objective.

According to a survey made in June 2010, only 49% of the EU citizens have a positive perception of entrepreneurship, while in China, where about 71% of the Chinese people prefer entrepreneurship, or in the US, where about 73% of the American people have a positive image of entrepreneurship, there is a tendency to work independently and not as an employee.

In Europe, entrepreneurship education was adopted much later than in the USA, with its first such attempt being reported in 1970. For example, in the UK, the first meeting of the UK Small Business Management Education Association took place in 1975 and brought together a group of academics interested in stimulating small businesses. The first course on starting a business appeared in France in 1978 (within the "Hautes Etudes Commerciales" schools).

The European Commission (2012) considers that "Member States should encourage entrepreneurial competences through new and creative ways of teaching and learning from primary school, and in secondary and higher education the emphasis should be on setting up a business as a future career. Real-life experience, through problem-solving and business-to-business learning, should be integrated into all subjects and adapted to all levels of education. All young people should have the benefit of at least practical entrepreneurial experience before completing compulsory education. "

The promotion of entrepreneurship in education as a key competence encourages EU citizens to be entrepreneurial, find innovative solutions to societal problems and create products that add socio-economic value.

The development of entrepreneurial ecosystems is supported at EU level through several actions carried out under the Erasmus + program consisting of study or training programs or participating in cross-border projects. At the higher education level, the HEInnovate program is the central tool to help EU citizens develop an entrepreneurial mindset.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN DOCUMENTS

In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council defined the framework of the eight key competences, which also includes the "sense of initiative and entrepreneurship". Approaching entrepreneurship as a key competence opens two perspectives of interpretation: firstly, the development of entrepreneurial attitudes, competences and knowledge should allow the individual to turn ideas into action. Secondly, entrepreneurship does not refer only to economic activities and business creation, but more broadly, to all areas of life and society.

Conceptual polysemantism has made it possible that in practice there are significant differences in the understanding and interpretation of entrepreneurship education.

A specific study on entrepreneurship education showed two main approaches: the first involves a broader understanding of entrepreneurship, similar to the one defined in the European key competence; thus highlighting the learning outcomes related to the capacity for professional insertion, active citizenship and entrepreneurial competences for life and work. The second has a narrower goal and focuses on the learning outcomes that are directly related to the entrepreneurial and business activity, for example the way a company is created and managed[28].

In 2016, the EU developed the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp), proposes the definition of entrepreneurship as a competence, as follows: "Entrepreneurship is when you act on opportunities and ideas and turn them into added value for the others. The value created can be financial, cultural or social" [28].

The Eurydice Report (2016), Entrepreneurship Education in Schools in Europe, states that about half of the countries use the European definition, and about a third uses their own national definition in the field of entrepreneurship education. In about 10 countries, there is no mutually agreed definition of entrepreneurship education in the national context. Most national definitions reflect the same broad understanding of entrepreneurship education as the European definition of

the key competence. Its role and purpose not only reflect the context of professional and business life, but also the more general context of personal life.

We present, in summary, the main strategic documents of the European Union and the key elements regarding entrepreneurship education:

YEAR	KEY ELEMENTS REGARDING ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION	EU STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS
2004	"Fueling an entrepreneurial mindset"	Action Plan: The European Agenda for Entrepreneurship
2006	"The national authorities should establish interdepartmental cooperation resulting in the development of a strategy with clear objectives"	Communication from the European Commission - Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning
2006	"The need for a more entrepreneurial culture in higher education"	The renewed Lisbon Strategy
2006	"The goal is to accelerate the promotion of an entrepreneurial mindset in society, in a systematic and efficient way".	Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurial Education in Europe
2008	„This specific project is a transnational model of teacher training, with clearly defined learning outcomes for both students and teachers"	South East European Center for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECCEL), the host country being the Republic of Croatia
2012	"They aimed to bring together the factors involved in educating and training teachers in the field of entrepreneurship, by allowing them to present examples of good practices, exchange ideas and learn from each other"	DG Enterprise and Industry and DG Education and Culture have launched two transnational events aimed at preparing teachers for entrepreneurship education. The events took place in May 2012 (Dublin, Ireland) and in September 2012 (Brdo, Slovenia)
2014	"Gathering Evidence on the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education Strategies and Measures"	Entrepreneurship Education: The Road to Success
2018	"Key Competence No. 7 of the European Reference Framework for Key Competences refers to the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship"	The EU Council has adopted Key competences for lifelong learning

Table 1 The European Union strategic documents

The European Commission recognizes entrepreneurship education as a tool that can help young people become more entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship education refers to the way of developing a general set of skills, applicable in all aspects of life, not just to learn how to run a business. It encompasses all forms of learning, education and training that contribute to the creation of entrepreneurial spirit, skills and behavior, with or without an objective.

3. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In Romania there is no country definition for entrepreneurship education, being used the description of the key entrepreneurial competence, defined in the European Reference Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

Currently, in Romania, there is no national strategy in the field of entrepreneurship education (EA). The most relevant national strategy is „The strategy for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and the improvement of the business environment in Romania ” [29]. It covers the period 2014-2020 and includes all educational levels, ISCED 1-8. This strategy is also correlated with other programs, strategies and projects developed by the Romanian Government institutions.

In 2015, the Romanian government requested a report on the entrepreneurship education in Romania, within the Policy Support Facility (PSF), a funding scheme for policy advice launched by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020.

The report provides advice and policy recommendations on how to address the following challenges:

- Assess the innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem, start-up (newly established enterprises with innovative potential) and scale-up (expanding enterprises) ecosystems, in Romania;
- Identify and recommend measures, including legislative ones and specific instruments to further develop and strengthen the innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem, in order to improve its efficiency and foster the growth of startups in Romania.
- We further summarize the recommendations for higher education in Romania in the European Commission Report (2018) Specific Support Start-ups, scale-ups and entrepreneurship in Romania, Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility, developed by a group of independent experts:
 - Revise the Law on Incubators in order to benefit from the international experience
 - in order to make it compatible with the international standards.
 - Grant Romanian companies accepted in international programs to accelerate a grant of EUR 15,000 to subsidize their travel and living expenses.
 - Develop a specific support program for the involvement of academics in entrepreneurial activities.
 - Create an Intellectual Property Law for Romanian universities in order to regulate the transfer of intellectual property, defining the criteria for evaluating the entrepreneurial activities of universities, establishing a common structure of technology transfer centers (TTO) for all universities and providing training and education for TTO staff.

The European Enterprise Hub (EE-Hub) project is a focal point for entrepreneurship education in Europe, bringing together organizations and individuals from both the public and private sectors, with solid evidence of the achievement of entrepreneurship education at regional, national and European level. EE-HUB is designed as a space where these actors can work together to increase the visibility and impact of entrepreneurship education and practice across Europe.

The HEInnovate exercise involves assessing the entrepreneurial and innovative potential of universities in the participating countries, based on their self-assessment in relation to the guide developed by the OECD and the European Commission.

For the year 2020-2021, the Ministry of Education and Research promotes programs to ensure access to higher education:

- the implementation of contracted projects within the call for competitive projects financed by the Operational Program „Human Capital”, integrated measures to increase the participation of students from vulnerable categories in entrepreneurial programs, projects aimed at increasing access and equity by offering financial support to students from vulnerable categories;
- the implementation of contracted projects within the call for competitive projects financed by the Operational Program „Human Capital”, measures to optimize the study offers in higher education in support of employability, which aim at developing and piloting the provision of complementary courses with an application component;
- the implementation of projects submitted under the call Support for PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. The projects fund learning programs with an application component and programs of training transversal and entrepreneurial skills in support of research and innovation, especially in potentially competitive economic sectors.

Promoting entrepreneurship education by financing, through the Institutional Development Fund 2020, projects submitted by state universities in the field of entrepreneurship education; the establishment of student entrepreneurial societies (SAS, 54 state universities and 34 private universities have established SAS.); the functioning and expansion of the Career Guidance and Counseling Services within universities (to date, 40 higher education institutions have submitted projects to promote entrepreneurship education among students).

In higher education, entrepreneurship education is a less systematic approach than in other EU Member States, although in recent years there have been more and more initiatives in this field, belonging to universities across the country.

In line with the EU policies to encourage entrepreneurship education in technical higher education, Romanian technical universities have been involved in entrepreneurship education programs, expanding their cooperation with companies in order to stimulate entrepreneurship among students, including international partnerships with prestigious universities or companies.

In the context of the above stated facts, we can mention that the dynamization of entrepreneurship in Romanian universities is beneficial both for the students and for the economic and social environment in that particular region.

An important actor in such a process is the Romanian Ministry of National Education; in this case we can mention a solution for the development of entrepreneurial universities in Romania such as “Order no. 3262/2017 of February 16, 2017 on the organization and functioning of student entrepreneurial societies in the Romanian higher education system”.

Here are some examples of good practices in the Romanian university education. The Entrepreneurial University project, launched in 2016, proposes a new approach to entrepreneurship and innovation in the university environment and the transformation of higher education institutions into engines that bring progress in the community.

„Entrepreneurial higher education institutions are designed to give employees and students the opportunity to demonstrate entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity in research, teaching and development and the use of knowledge across borders. They effectively contribute to the improvement of learning in a social environment characterized by a high level of uncertainty and complexity and they are dedicated to creating public value through an open engagement process, mutual learning, discovery and exchange with all stakeholders. from society - local, national and international” [9].

The Entrepreneurial University aims to support universities in developing entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial approaches, at management level, in relation to the business community, as well as entrepreneurial education and dynamic training of the students for the labor market.

The project was implemented between April 2016 and July 2018, in partnership with higher education institutions, and was funded by private funds, with the contribution of The Romanian-American Foundation, Junior Achievement and European partners.

The aim of the Entrepreneurial University project is in line with the provisions of the New Skills Agenda for Europe, developed by the European Commission in June 2016, and the expected benefits are all the more important as recent studies show that 40% of the European employers say they cannot find people who have the right skills to enable their companies to grow and be innovative.

According to the same studies, too few people have the entrepreneurial mentality and skills needed to start their own business and adapt to the dynamic demands of the labor market.

The universities participating in the project receive free, throughout its development, consultancy and support, consisting of: training, access to the HEI platform, materials, case studies, content for the courses and practical modules for the development of the sense of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship, for stimulating students to participate in start-ups, but also the entrepreneurial approach at the level of faculties.

4. CRITICAL THINKING AS THE CENTRAL ELEMENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE

According to the European definition, “Entrepreneurial skills and initiative mean capitalizing on ideas and opportunities and turning them into value for others. They are based on creativity,

critical thinking and problem solving, taking initiative and perseverance and the ability to work in a team in order to plan and manage projects that have a cultural, social or financial value" [29].

In the context of the evolution of the knowledge society and the information explosion generated by BIG DATA, information and knowledge management tools become indispensable for any type of transversal competence and implicitly also for entrepreneurial competences. The central support on which they are based becomes critical thinking that enhances creativity and leads to problem solving by highlighting the tools of analysis and information management indispensable to the new paradigm of entrepreneurial competence that becomes oriented towards extracting value and knowledge from data, achieving compliance between organizations. data driven ”and the human resources competencies that will be part of the new“ data driven ”entrepreneurial systems.

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is a superior, organized way of approaching a subject, fact, or problem, through which the stages and algorithms involved in the thinking process are realized and specific performance standards are applied. In other words, it is a cognitive (thinking) and meta-cognitive (thinking about how we think) activity. It is a process of reflection on the meaning of information, examining the evidence and reasoning provided and judging the facts.

THINKING

Loosely
Vague
Irrelevant
Surface
Narrow
without logic
Peddling

CRITICAL THINKING

Clear
Precise
Relevant
Deep
Large
Logical
Relevant/important

Critical thinking is the process by which we think clearly, finely and precisely; with attention, logic and depth, with a free mind, examining points of view and confirming assumptions and tendencies regarding a given point of view. It requires training, patience and experience.

There are two main activities we always do when we think. The first activity is gathering information. As human beings, our minds constantly examine and gather information about the world around us. We use our five senses to gather information about the world we live in. We examine the height, size, weight, color, nature, and smell of the objects around us, and we examine these qualities in relation to each other. The second activity we carry out when we think is to form a conclusion based on the information we have gathered. We can conclude that an obstacle is too high to jump over or an atom is too small to be seen with the naked eye or a luggage is too heavy to lift with your hands.

Therefore, critical thinking requires the ability to understand and reflect on what we know, but not before becoming aware of one's own acquisitions and abilities. Often, we fail to update our previous knowledge, which is why we find it difficult to reflect on new information and assign meaning to it, leaving ourselves with confusing or even contradictory ideas. To think critically, it is essential to be aware of what we know, what we do not know, and what we should know.

Those who think critically operate systematically and reflexively with the knowledge they possess and, as they grow and learn, redefine themselves and the way they perceive the world. What differentiates a critical thinker from a non-critical thinker is how he evaluates both the data he has collected and the conclusions he has drawn. In order to evaluate both the information and the conclusions, the critical thinker must ask questions - the most important means in the instrument of critical thinking. "Is the information we have important?", "Is it relevant?", "Is it applicable?". We

must also ask questions about the conclusion drawn: "Is the conclusion correct?" "Is it logical?" "Is it reasonable?" and "Is it consistent with all the information gathered?"

An inventory of questions as a means of critical thinking includes: facts for obtaining facts, questions for evaluating facts, questions for drawing a conclusion, and questions for evaluating the conclusion:

Questions for obtaining the facts

They include questions such as: "Who?", "What?", "Where?", "When?", And "How?". To give an example, it could be the questions of an insurance company representative who came to the scene to find out about an accident. By addressing them, we evaluate the exact, clear and precise character of the described facts.

Fact assessment questions

They include questions that explore the importance and significance of the facts: are the facts relevant to the conclusion or not? Knowledge of the facts must be doubled by their evaluation. The process is problematic because it concerns not only the facts, but also the opinions and preferences. For example, in an attempt by the insurance company's representative to assess the facts, an individual involved in the accident may claim that the accident was someone else's fault, just because it was a full moon. It may have been a full moon, but is this relevant to the accident?

• Questions for drawing a conclusion using logical criteria

After collecting and evaluating the facts, we can "draw a conclusion." A conclusion is a statement that sums up all the information gathered in order to express a point of view or a decision. But how can we know if this conclusion is valid and consistent or if it is logically wrong? For example, it is possible that an individual involved in the accident, who dislikes people wearing red shirts, may say that it was not the moon that caused the accident, but the person in the red shirt. Is this true or does that person make a logical mistake?

The means of formulating a conclusion use logic and investigate the validity, consistency of arguments and logical errors, correctness, reasonableness, depth and scope of a conclusion.

Useful questions are: "Is my conclusion correct?", "Did my conclusion take into account all existing information?", "Is my conclusion reasonable?", "Is there any information that needs to be considered?" For example, the insurance company's representative may conclude that none of those involved in the accident had been careful at the time: one was looking at the moon and the other was looking at a button on his shirt; thus, both are guilty.

But does this conclusion take into account all the existing information or is there still information that needs to be taken into account before reaching a correct conclusion?

Criteria for evaluating information

The information is seldom neutral: it offers only a variant of interpretation of the facts or the perspective of an author on the respective subject. Therefore, in terms of information analysis, it is important that the reading is an active one: the objective of the reading cannot be limited to understanding "what is being said". At this level, reading must allow the identification and understanding of perspectives, biases and implications, in the sense that we must see how the world is portrayed by information and not see the world as portrayed by information.

The application of active reading techniques allows us to understand "what the information says", but also "how the information represents" the problem in question. At the same time, starting from the premise that each information is the unique creation of a certain author / source, the practice of active reading helps us to evaluate the way in which a perspective on events or a selection of events can determine a certain way of representing the described reality. / complete, objective / partisan). In other words, the choices that any author makes in the process of drafting and writing a text, in terms of content, language and specific structure, must be evaluated because they have effects on the meaning given to the information in question.

Inferences naturally double communication, whether verbal or written. Often, communicators suggest some things and aim to achieve an effect in terms of receivers far beyond what they

explicitly convey. But as active readers, we must know the temptation and implications of advancing interpretations and conclusions in the absence of data or arguments, and, in return, read with an open mind in the face of as many alternative interpretations as possible.

Moreover, in order to obtain a higher degree of objectivity, we can operate with information evaluation criteria (completeness, credibility and conclusion of information).

Completeness refers to the extent to which information provides answers to the questions: who? / With whom? what the? where? When? how / by what means ?, why ?, with what consequences? who else has data?

Complete information should include references to:

- actors (who?) - organizations, institutional structures, interest groups, people (partners, allies, opponents - real or potential);
- content (what?) - the reference to the essence of the problem taken into account, and not to the phenomenon as a whole;
- space (where?) - location of the entity or action, details related to initiation and destination;
- time (when?) - the date and time of the phenomenon, the significant landmarks in its evolution;
- action (how?) - quantitative-qualitative evaluation of the approaches and the manner of their development;
- causes, motivations (why?) - capturing the real causality of the event;
- perspectives (with what consequences?) - post-factual, appreciation of the resulting effect in the short, medium or long term, as well as of the possible and probable evolution.

Credibility designates the degree of compliance of the informational content with the level of knowledge of the society, indicated by the definition of notions.

Conclusive designates the extent to which the information contains enough components that describe the object, action and context (their way of relating to the environment), offering the possibility to understand the message so that it is given the appropriate meanings and allows hypothetical consequences.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Universities have an important economic impact through education and research. In order to capitalize on entrepreneurship, universities must create a culture favorable to entrepreneurship through curricula, business relations, competitions.

Universities focused on entrepreneurship, technology and research have an extremely important impact on the economies they are part of, through the entrepreneurial ecosystem created in these universities, start-ups created by students and spin-offs derived from university research (Entrepreneurial Culture and Education Barometer, 2014).

Entrepreneurship is one of the pillars on which the European employment strategies are based, along with improving the employment capacity (employability), promoting the adaptability of businesses and their employees (adaptability) and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men (equal chances).

Entrepreneurial education helps to promote an entrepreneurial culture, to change the mentality and acquire the skills necessary to carry out an activity. The traditionalist approach in schools, which focuses only on providing basic skills for employment, is no longer enough. The phenomenon of globalization has accelerated in recent decades, which means adapting the education system to the new challenges of the business environment, which is in a continuous dynamic both in national and international spaces.

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