

Entrepreneurship Education and Training: an Urgent Need at Tertiary Level in Vietnam

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The paper focuses itself on discussing the trend and practice of *entrepreneurship education and training* (EET) at tertiary level in the world. The author also supports the idea that entrepreneurship can be learnt through EET programs under certain circumstances. After examining the Vietnamese context for private entrepreneurs, including the government's policy and the practice on startup since its independence in 1945, his analysis shows that Vietnam is a prospective market not only for domestic business people but also for foreign investors. Then, with the massive influx of fresh graduates who are well prepared for job seeking, he recommends introducing EET programs formally to nurture entrepreneurial spirit among university students. It is supposed that the inclusion of EET programs at the tertiary level not only helps minimize the unemployment rate among new graduates on the present-day labor market but also contributes to generating jobs for others.

Key words: entrepreneurship, intrapreneurs, micropreneurs, entrepreneurship education and training, enterprise, start-up

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has its root back as early as the start of goods trade and has been considered as the most powerful force in wealth generation, (Certo and Certo, 2009). In addition, Greenfield and Strickson (1981, cited in Hoang & Dung, 2009) attached the role to the economic growth, creating business and fostering innovation. Literature and practice prove that entrepreneurship has long played a very important part in the economic development of a nation, (Napier, N.K, Vu,D.L.N, & Vuong, Q.H. (2012), 2012); it has just got researchers' interest for the last fifty to thirty years. Aware of its importance, universities and colleges in various parts of the world have introduced EET to provide their students with certain knowledge and skills and nurture their aspiration to become entrepreneurs, taking an active part of a business generating jobs, (Wilson, 2008).

In Vietnam, there exist more than four hundred state-owned, privately owned or foreign invested higher education institutions (HEIs), including universities, academies, institutes and colleges. They conventionally help their undergraduates master a certain amount of skills and knowledge in their major and for some HEIs, they offer job-seeking skills as extra-curricular courses. Since the labor market has become more selective and even choosy, when more than 191,000 graduates and post graduates were jobless in the last quarter of 2016 (cited in Dantri), seeking an appropriate job turns out to be much more competitive than ever; on the contrary, a creative and proactive graduate might be wise to choose to enter into entrepreneurship. At this time, EET is very helpful. As a result, this paper aims to discuss what EET is and how it works for students at HEIs. Next, it presents the EET trends at tertiary level through various scientific works published. Then, the author depicts the promising condition in Vietnam for new graduates to become entrepreneurs. Finally, he proposes some recommendations for HEIs to adopt EET to train their students in their corporate incubators, clubs or forums in the hope that they can take advantage of their expertise and aspiration to start up.

2. Entrepreneurship in Vietnam

After the Independence Declaration on September, 2nd, 1945, the People's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, currently known as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam), was officially founded. The centrally planned economic model started to prevail. Though faced with difficulties due to some minor wars that followed, Vietnam still attached the importance to some big economic reforms such as Land Reforms (1956-1958), Collectivization of Farms (1959-1970), or Rehabilitation of Private Industries and Trade (1964-1975) to reinforce the dominance of the state economic sector and simultaneously eliminated illegally-recognized private ownership. During the time, entrepreneurship was kept from growing and developing, (Hoang & Dung, 2009).

The year 1986 was considered by many as a turning point for Vietnam when the command economy was officially replaced after the 6th Communist Party Congress introduced the Reform or Đổi Mới. Hoang & Dung (2009) believed that this “revived the private sector economy and hence encouraged private capital investments in legally recognized private entrepreneurial operations. Then, on the way towards international integration, after normalizing the diplomatic relation with the USA in 1995, especially with the embargo on foreign trade lifted, and joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2006, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1998, Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1997, and ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, Vietnam not only has recognized and helped the private sector grow and develop but also has attracted more foreign development investments (FDI). The market-oriented economy has started flourishing, liberalizing the workforce and making most out of its creativity. In fact, Vietnam is proceeding closer to developed countries, taking advantage of their advances in almost all the domains and becoming a cosmopolitan labor market for FDI, which speeds the generation of jobs and wealth for its residents.

The Reform has proven to be the right way for Vietnam to get out of poverty, obsolescence, and red-tape and has changed the structure of its society. It has brought about the phenomenal transition to a market-driven model. Thanks to the international cooperation and effective reforms, Vietnam had 488,148 businesses (updated on January 31, 2015), over 95% of which are legally recognized as small- and medium- sized enterprises (cited in Saigon Economy Online). Numerous as they might be, Vũ Tiến Lộc, Chairman of Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry stressed that for privately-owned businesses to grow and develop in the international integration, Vietnam needs an entrepreneurial revolution with the objective of starting up five million enterprises, tenfold compared to the existing number of the operational ones, (cited in VN Express Online).

The government of Vietnam also issued a lot of documents on facilitating enterprises, especially start-ups and at the time Vietnam was arousing national entrepreneurial spirits for businesses and individuals. Deputy Prime Minister Vũ Đức Đam additionally reveals that the government always generates favorable conditions for start-ups in order that entrepreneurship can spread nationwide. The noticeable milestone marking the state support of the startup movement was recorded when Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc chose 2016 as the national entrepreneurship year. The practice involves a lot of policies and practices creating a nice environment for entrepreneurs and giving financial, legal, technical and educational help to them. The Vietnamese administration believed that startup is the only way to help its people to get rich, to compete with regional and international rivals and to have an industrial life style. This vital decision was then treated as one of ten most noted socio economic acts domestically in

Vietnam in 2016. Furthermore, as early as the beginning of 2017, the government announced that 2016 had witnessed more than 110,100 new enterprises founded, generating a 16.2% rise compared to the previous year figure. Phung Xuan Nha, Minister of Education of Training of Vietnam, reported that unemployment figure reported at the end of the first quarter of 2016 was over 225,500; this number fell considerably to approximately 119,000 by the end of the last quarter of the same year. Consequently, 2016 has been regarded as a very successful year for entrepreneurs, (cited in Sai Gon Economy Online).

The year 2017 has just come for nearly two months, and its forecast for a steady increase of startups is very positive. The government of Vietnam promised to continue removing perplex administrative procedures, and coping with legal and financial difficulties to be in unison with enterprises. As a result, entrepreneurship is quite prospective in Vietnam currently not only for domestic business people but also for foreign investors, especially when it has a population of over ninety million, many of whom wish to be rich in a fast growing economy, (Napier *et al*, 2012).

3. Entrepreneurship education and training

3.1. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship can play as a catalyst to achieve economic and social objectives, including innovation, employment, growth and equity, (Valerio, A., Parton, B. and Robb, A., 2014, p11). Knowing this, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand have passed acts giving priority to prospective entrepreneurs who want to get their visas or permanent residence. The United States Immigration Act passed in 1990 created a category of “investor visas” because many people believe that the more entrepreneurs come, the more jobs will be created and the more the economy will grow, (Nickels, W., McHugh, J., & McHugh, S., 2012). Scholarly, there has been a great amount of literature on entrepreneurship discussed by various authors in economics, sociology anthropology, business management and political science since the mid-20th century, especially Joseph Schumpeter who attached entrepreneurship to the progress of human society and economic growth, (Hoang & Dung, 2009). Below are different areas of literature on entrepreneurship suggested by different scholars.

Entrepreneurship is accepting the risk of starting and running a business, (Nickels *et al*, 2012; Snell, 1999). This risk taking is an attribute of entrepreneurs and they take moderate, calculated risks, not gambling, (Nickels *et al*, 2012). Besides the risks, entrepreneurs are also defined as those individuals who start a new business on identifying, evaluating and exploiting opportunities. Nickels *et al* (2012) and Certo and Certo (2009) have contended that forming a new business would enjoy a greater chance of survival and success for entrepreneurial teams. Statistically, approximately 70% of new organizations are started by entrepreneurial teams, (Certo and Certo, 2009). The entrepreneurial firm is a particular type of organization that results from the entrepreneurship process, which could be either a totally new firm or the transformation of the existing organization, (Stroke and Wilson, 2010). In general, entrepreneurs normally take risks to seize opportunities to form a legally recognized enterprise.

Entrepreneurship is creating new products, either goods or services and is described as the process of discovery, (Schumpeter 1934, cited in Valerio *et al*, 2014). To introduce new things, people need to be creative and innovative because “creativity is the ultimate resource for economic development”, (Peters, 2009, cited in Napier *et al*, 2012). During the entrepreneurial management, entrepreneurs must engage in specific management behaviors to drive the market or to produce innovation, (Stroke and Wilson, 2010). Placing the emphasis on entrepreneurial

creativity, Certo and Certo (2009) also describe entrepreneurs as those with their own ability to identify and exploit information pinpointing business opportunities that others fail to capitalize on.

Entrepreneurship is self-employment. Nickels *et al* (2012) point out that many people enjoy a greater extent of independence and freedom when working for themselves than working for others. Valerio *et al* cite that self-employment demands the differentiation between the incorporated self-employed (formed into an official company or organization with legal status) and the unincorporated self-employed (not formed into an official company or organization with legal status), (Rubinstein, 2013, cited in Valerio *et al*, 2014). European Commission asserts that “entrepreneurial ventures are the major source of new jobs in the economy for the owner and new employees”.

Entrepreneurship is creating jobs. Enterprises can “serve as an important source of income and employment for vulnerable populations, and entrepreneurship is regarded as the largest source of new job growth in both developed and developing countries,” (Birch 1979, cited in Valerio *et al*, 2014). Fane (2012) also assumes that entrepreneurship give students more employability and Snell (1999, p236) sees entrepreneurship as the act of forming a new organization of value.

Entrepreneurship is generating wealth. Certo and Certo (2009) refer it to the identification, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities. The framework of entrepreneurial opportunities involves “the occasions to bring into existence new products and services that allow outputs to be sold at a price greater than their cost of production”, (Certo and Certo, 2009, p139). Nickels *et al* (2012) also assert that profit is an important reason for people to become entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship is changing the social structure. Greenfield and Strickon (1981, cited in Napier *et al*, 2012) and Klein (1982) view it as the mechanism by means of which society at one stage was transformed to another. To continue praising its role, Baumol (1990, cited in Napier *et al* 2012) recommends that society should think, act and operate entrepreneurially. Klapper and Richmond (2009) underline the importance of entrepreneurship in contributing to the employment, spillovers, and structural economic change, (Valerio *et al*, 2014). Habaradas (2009) also suggests that small and medium sized enterprises are seen as the means of reducing poverty, and broadening and deepening the industrial structure. Hills (1994) defines entrepreneurship as a the process that causes change in the economic system through innovation to create values for both individuals and society, (Paswan and Trang, 2011).

Entrepreneurship not only leads to the formation of start-ups where individuals or teams see opportunities but also may trigger a contagion in well-established enterprises, (Ahuja and Lampert, 2001; McDougall and Oviatt, 2000, cited in Napier *et al*, 2012, Stroke and Wilson, 2010). These entrepreneurs are often called intrapreneurs¹ and their idea is to utilize a company’s existing resources to launch a new product or generate profits, (Nickels *et al*, 2012). Another form of entrepreneurship may involve micropreneurs who are willing to accept the risk of starting and managing a business that remains small. Most micropreneurs are home-based businesses, offering their owners a balanced lifestyle why doing what they want to do.

In the context of Vietnam’s private entrepreneurship, it represents an important fabric of society and it has been contributing a lot to the country’s transitional economy. Prior to the Reform (1986), the dominance of the state economic sector, including state-owned enterprises

¹ Creative people who work as entrepreneurs within corporations

and collectives, led the national economy and the privately-owned sector existed illegally in forms of self-employed households and small businesses. In other words, private entrepreneurship was not permitted by law, (Bich, T. T., Grafton, R.Q. & Kompas, T., 2007). After the Reform, the law has recognized the private sector where the multi-sector economy was chosen as the roadmap for the country's economic growth and development though there were discriminations in terms of access to land, capital, technology, training, and so on, (Bich *et al*, 2007). However, Hoang & Dung (2009) points out that entrepreneurship as the most important driver of the omnipresent growth of the economy and in fact, it has become a universal attempt and spirits among thousands of people wishing to be rich, (Hoang and Dung, 2009).

More promisingly, the results of Swiecczek, William, F. & Thanh, H.T.'s research (2003) find out that the Vietnamese have a higher level of risk-taking than the Thai people and Thang's research (2009) also indicates that the Vietnamese have higher score in their intention to start up a business than the USA and Taiwanese and are more confident in creating a new venture than the Taiwanese. Consequently, entrepreneurship not only realizes many Vietnamese people's dreams to get rich but also is the only way out to deal with the high unemployment rate resulting from the influx of new graduates every year and helps compete with foreign enterprises.

3.2. Entrepreneurship education and training

EET "represents academic education or formal training interventions that share the broad objective of providing individuals with the entrepreneurial mindsets and skills to support participation or performance in a range of entrepreneurial activities", (Valerio *et al*, 2014, p21).

Over the last twenty years, EET programs to promote entrepreneurial skills and attitudes have been growing great interest worldwide although people doubt whether mindsets and skills are cultivated, taught or transmitted for the purpose of entrepreneurship promotion. Akola and Heinonen (2006) distinguish the art and the science of entrepreneurship, in which the latter is not teachable, except through the practical experiences while the latter can be learnt, (Valerio *et al*, 2014, Wilson, 2008). Furthermore, Europe Commission claims that "Entrepreneurs are not born... they "become" through the experiences in their life." Regarding this point, the author supports Valerio who suggests that "when the education and training system incorporates creative and entrepreneurial skills into teaching methodologies, mindsets and skills more closely tied to the art of entrepreneurship are transmittable". Valerio *et al*, 2014 also effort to differentiate entrepreneurship education from entrepreneurship training by the program objectives and outcomes as below.

Entrepreneurship education (EE) programs tend to focus on building knowledge and skills for the purpose of entrepreneurship. Due to the academic nature of EE, these programs mostly target students from secondary education to higher education (Valerio *et al*, 2014) as illustrated in *Figure 1*. Education plays an important part in shaping attitudes, skills, and culture, from the primary level up and EE offers a mix of experiential learning, skill building and mindset change, (Wilson, 2008). More importantly, European Commission stresses that EE serves as inspiring entrepreneurial potential where people need the mind-set, skills and knowledge to generate creative ideas, and the entrepreneurial initiative to turn those ideas into action.

Entrepreneurship training (ET) programs tend to centre on building the knowledge and skills, explicitly in preparation for starting or operating a new venture. ET programs mainly target a wide number of potential and practicing entrepreneurs, (Valerio *et al*, 2014) as illustrated in *Figure 1*. Also, European Commission adds that after adults have got job experience or have furthered their education, many of them are in need of special assistance to assemble business ideas through education programs on start-ups.

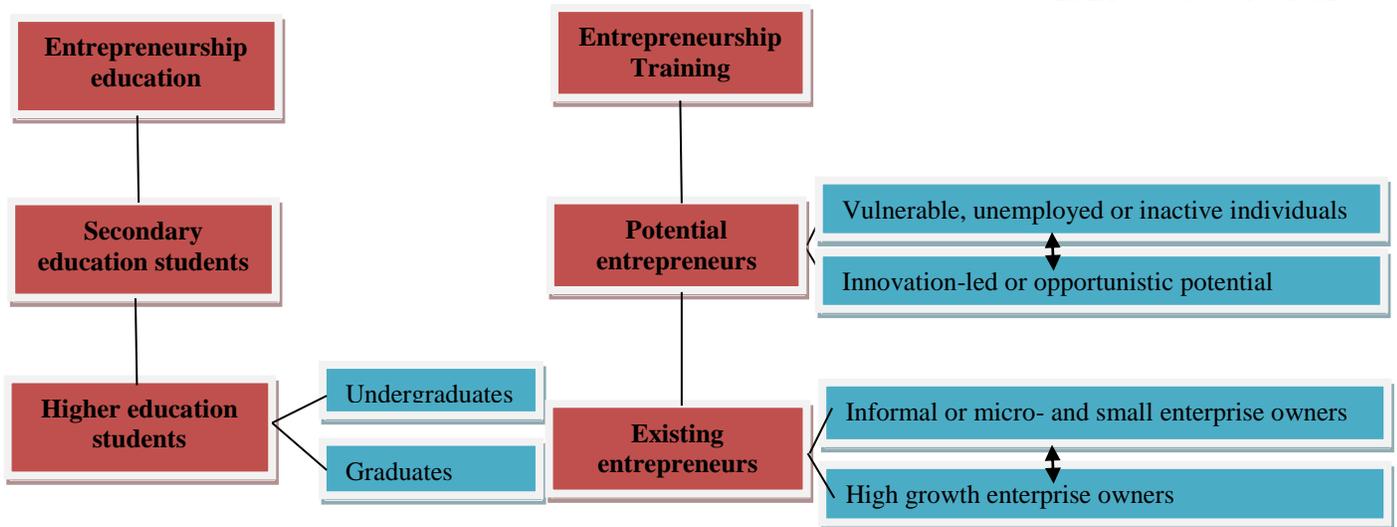


Figure 1. Classifying EE and ET (Valerio, et al, 2014)

Even though the two categories of EE and ET are distinguished upon the group of audiences they tend to target, they are often combined and balanced in various interventions, from formal academic education to stand-alone training programs.

3.3. Conceptual framework of EET

On choosing a EET program, course designers usually take into consideration of its objectives and target audiences. Valerio *et al* (2014) use the conceptual framework to categorize EET program outcomes into a series of four major domains as below.

Entrepreneurial mindsets refer to the socio-emotional skills and overall awareness of entrepreneurship associated with entrepreneurial motivation and future success as an entrepreneur (e.g., self-confidence, leadership, creativity, risk propensity, motivation, resilience, and self-efficacy).

Entrepreneurial capabilities refer to entrepreneurs' competencies, knowledge, and technical skills associated with their entrepreneurship (e.g., management skills, accounting, marketing, and technical knowledge).

Entrepreneurial status refers to the temporal state of a program beneficiary as measured through entrepreneurial activities and beyond (e.g., starting a business, becoming employed, and achieving a higher income).

Entrepreneurial performance refers explicitly to how indicators of a venture's performance have changed as a result of an intervention (e.g., higher profits, increased sales, greater employment of others, higher survival rates).

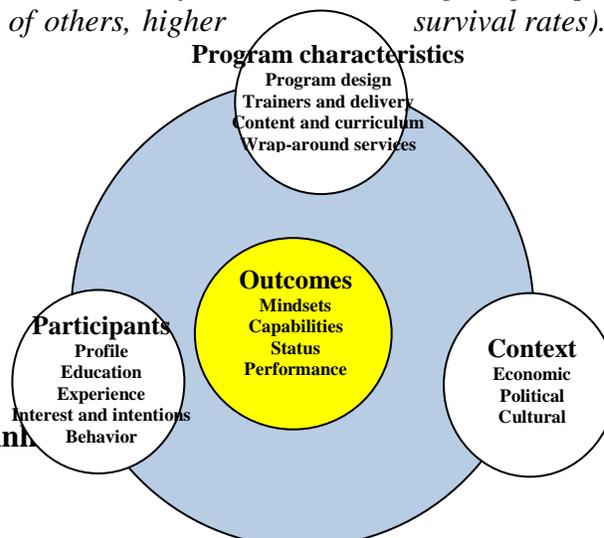


Figure 2. The conceptual framework, (Valerio et al, 2014)

Examining ten EET programs for higher education students, Valerio *et al* (2014) found out that there is a relationship between entrepreneurship outcomes and academic-focused EET interventions. They evaluated the impact of two out of the ten EET programs on the audiences' outcomes, both evaluations provide compelling results for the capacity to foster positive effects in mindsets capabilities but provide mixed results around entrepreneurial status. The evaluation of the other programs also indicates the promising results in mindsets and capabilities.

4. Discussions and recommendations on EET at higher education level

4.1. Discussions

Training students for a career is not enough in the present-day time; indeed, it is time for universities to get their students prepared to work in a dynamic, rapidly changing, entrepreneurial environment or become entrepreneurs, (Wilson, 2008). In Asia, Taiwan is one of the most noted counties where incubators are quite successful in helping entrepreneurs. At first, incubators are funded by their establishing universities; however, they gradually grow to become self-financed. University incubators are where students can work as volunteers, interns, or founders to accrue experience, sharpen skills, nurture entrepreneurial spirits and come up with new ideas. They incubate not only young students, researchers and staff but also their customers: people from outside the university who pay fees to attend EET. Prof. Shih-Ming Wang at Chung Yuan Christian University said that 70% of entrepreneurs nurtured by this university incubator center are the customers, (cited in Business People Online).

In Vietnam, the tie with enterprises has been paid much attention for long. The fact is that most higher education institutions have their own corporate relation/cooperation department, serving as the link with businesses where students take part in field trips, fact-finding tours, or internship and/ or they can seek jobs after graduation. Nonetheless, training students this way means that they passively rely on businesses for work, and are less active and creative to generate jobs for other people who are considered more vulnerable.

For a few years now, some higher education institutions, nevertheless, have established their *business incubators* such as Can Tho University, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Nong Lam University, Vietnam National University-Ha Noi, Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City or Da Nang University; some others have chosen to found *entrepreneurs' clubs* or *forums* such as the University of Finance – Marketing, Duy Tan University or the University of Home Affairs. Then, EET is introduced either as a subject or an extracurricular course, which vividly shows a growing trend in startups in Vietnamese education at tertiary level where students can be provided with EET. The incubators and clubs/forums actually serve as the link between higher education institutions and enterprises where entrepreneurial spirits can be nurtured and startups can follow accordingly. Startups are more socialized than ever, and EET can go through a more real environment. This, indeed, benefits students, especially those with good ideas for starting up.

Most university-directed incubators, however, are formed by higher education institutions training their students in the field of technology or engineering; other areas of sciences such as education, arts, or management are mostly neglected from this fast-growing trend. There is absence in the fact that these business incubators have succeeded in EET such as the number of new healthy businesses which graduate from incubators, the revenue earned from their customers, any new products created, wealth and jobs generated for individuals or the societies, and/or mindset change.

4.2. Recommendations

Vietnamese HEIs are on the way to move from training their students to seek jobs at some organization to preparing them through EET programs to take a more active role: creating work for others. However, it is completely true that educating and training all the students to become entrepreneurs is an unlikely mission for any university as not all of them have the dream of starting up. As a result, job-seeking skills should be supplemented with entrepreneurship ones at HEIs to serve a wide range of students with their various dreams of work. And below are some recommendations on how EET should take place at tertiary level.

HEIs should adopt EET programs designed for their students either as extracurricular courses, perhaps certificate-granting ones, or part of the curriculum with the inclusion of all the four domains of outcomes as mentioned earlier. EE and ET programs should be balanced, depending on participants' characteristics. Therefore, to make them participant-driven courses, the more progress the students make, the more ET programs they should be given. The group of trainers should consist of successful businessmen and professors. Additionally, the courses should involve students from different disciplines and clients from outside in order that they can draw upon one another's expertise and experience. When the participants become creative and innovative, they can see entrepreneurial opportunities not only in their major but also in different areas.

HEIs should promote entrepreneurial culture/awareness among students since the culture has a great impact on entrepreneurship, especially when strict Confucian values such as generational orders, hierarchy, paternalism, and loyalty tend to guide the majority of people in Vietnam, (Hoang & Dung, 2009). This not only hinders students' mindset change and learning of new things to be creative and innovative but also keeps them from reception of new skills. Thus, efforts are badly needed to build up their confidence in order that entrepreneurial culture can be formed to promote entrepreneurial attempts and spirits.

EET should be closely linked to business practice. HEIs can deploy case studies to inspire their students through each lesson where students can explore successful ventures and admire real-life business owners. In fact, students can develop their managerial skills in business management or new product ideas and concepts via valuating others' entrepreneurial situation in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges before they might start up their own businesses.

HEIs should form more institutionally-run clubs, enterprise zones² or incubators³ for potential entrepreneurs who are quite action-oriented to practice their skills acquired. Great business ideas do not work; alternatively, they have to realize, actualize and build their dream in reality, (Nickels *et al*, 2012). Accordingly, after students attend EET programs, universities

² Specific geographic areas to which the government tries to attract private businesses by offering low taxes and other government support

³ Centers that offer low businesses low-cost offices with basic services such as accounting, legal advice, and secretarial help

should permit them to start and run small ventures, e.g. shopping stands, food counters or parking lots. Instead of subcontracting out these facilities and services, students should be allowed to trade in petty products such as stationeries, parking, junk food, publications, accessories, decors, or periodicals with other peers and their professors. Thanks to this, their managerial skills are practiced and students become more confident in the entrepreneurship.

HEIs should create much more forums, both online and offline, for their students to realize their creativity, and nurture their desire to do business through activities such as writing business plans, generating new product ideas and concepts, identifying market opportunities, doing market surveys, and so on. These activities can help them apply what they learn in theory, make the most out of their creativeness and practice their managerial skills. To make these activities more effective, foreign students can also join the forum where English-majored students can take advantage of their language and intercultural skills.

HEIs should maintain a good “academic-business link” where entrepreneurs, business practitioners, venture capital firms, and business angels in certain fields can share their experiences in starting up, inspire students, help assess and advise on EET programs and work as trainers in these programs. If possible, alumni who are entrepreneurs, should be invited to mentor or coach the participants. Without this critical link, EET programs may stick to the theory only. Besides, the connection can equip academics with real-life evidence, which might be included in the EET programs later.

HEIs should enhance research work through the internship and onsite/fact-finding visits to businesses where they can see real things which cannot be learnt at university. Doing research also helps them get rid of their concerns over entrepreneurship, explores new areas of ventures and helps them identify their own strength or talent. The successful business may inspire them or help them foster their desire for a start-up.

HEIs should facilitate cross border faculty and research collaborations. This should be a widespread trend when enterprises tend to become multinationals through their expansion. The labor market then becomes more and more global; hence, people should learn to work globally. As a result, a panel of good teachers who can work and do research internationally are highly valued. Thanks to this, they can understand another part of the world better, which inspires their students with their achievements and understanding of the world’s market and helps advise them on entrepreneurship better.

Quality entrepreneurship curricula are very critical in EET programs for students. Most entrepreneurship courses, materials, and research are borrowed from foreign countries, and they are normally modified to fit in the real condition of Vietnam. As a result, universities need a multidisciplinary panel of scholars to provide recommendations and a group of good entrepreneurship teachers, which makes sure that these entrepreneurship courses, materials, and research are of high quality.

Conclusion

EET programs have become a trend in universities in most parts of the world. Even though it is true that not all the participants can become entrepreneurs no matter how good EET programs are, it is worth inspiring students and nurturing their desire to start up a new enterprise when the unemployment rate all over the world has been higher and higher. In Vietnam, EET programs are mostly introduced as extracurricular activities by an in-university department or an independent organization. This should have been the subject of interest for scholars and academics to help generate jobs, create wealth and make most out of the workforce’s creativity

and innovation to meet the competitive employment market. To make EET work, not only universities but also their stakeholders should work together to give favorable contexts for entrepreneurs to-be take more confidence and expertise to start up throughout the country.

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