



Research paper

Developing entrepreneurship in primary schools. The Mexican experience of “My first enterprise: Entrepreneurship by playing”



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HIGHLIGHTS

- This study contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial education by showing that entrepreneurial abilities can be developed at the elementary school level.
- The Mexican sub-program “My First Company: Entrepreneurship by Playing” was the educational experience (EE) analysed to show the relevance of an early introduction to entrepreneurship.
- The quantitative and qualitative analysis of information concluded mentoring is critical to the successful implementation of the entrepreneurship learning experience.
- The implementation of EE has the potential of improving the socioeconomic situation of participant communities and increasing self-employment particularly in developing countries.
- Further research is required to determine if the positive aspects of the EE, if properly reinforced at higher school levels, contribute to the entrepreneurial activity at the regional level.

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ABSTRACT

“My first enterprise: Entrepreneurship by playing” is a Mexican educational sub-programme designed to promote entrepreneurship at the elementary level. The sub-programme led to the creation of 1327 minicompanies from 2009 to 2014, but a critical research question complementing these results is: how effective is the entrepreneur training sub-programme? A qualitative and quantitative assessment of the sub-programme demonstrated the critical role of tutors (teachers) and advisors, and revealed a significant improvement in the administrative knowledge and entrepreneurial skills of participants, along with a reinforcement of business values.

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1. Introduction

The recent global economic crisis jeopardised the

competitiveness, employment level and social welfare of the world economy (Askun & Yildirim, 2011, p. 663). In the case of Mexico, contemporary globalisation was promoted by implementing the neoliberal model, which generated adverse effects, among them an annual average unemployment rate of 4% for the period 1982–2014 (Ruiz & Ordaz, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to redirect economic policy to create and increase sources of employment and income, thereby decreasing persistent unemployment. According to Coraggio (2004), it is possible to construct an economy that benefits

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society by promoting a bottom-up transformation in which local actors such as universities, for-profit organisations, state and local governments, and civil society share the responsibility of sustainable growth. Realising such an economy implies recognising entrepreneurship as critical to economic growth because of its contribution to creating mini-companies and jobs (Ben-Nasr & Boujelbene, 2014; Bruyat & Julien, 2000). In this regard, it is important to emphasise that several authors have recognised the contribution of social entrepreneurship to the creation of mini-firms that prioritise social benefits over economic benefits and use their surplus financial resources to provide employment and higher incomes for disadvantaged groups (Drucker, 1990 cited in El Brashi, 2013, p. 189; Haugh & Tracey, 2004; Mair & Noboa, 2006; Nicholl, 2006).

In early 2000, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommended that all of its member countries should include subjects related to entrepreneurship at all educational levels. In Mexico, such subjects were only included in high school and at universities offering technological and economic-administrative curricula. In 2007, however, the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES, for Spanish initials) conducted an entailment study that resulted in the 2009 creation of a non-profit civil association responsible for unifying the efforts and resources of universities, the private sector represented by the Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic (COPARMEX, in Spanish) and the Industrial Chambers Confederation (CONCAMIN, in Spanish), the government (represented by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP, in Spanish) and the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT, in Spanish) to create economic benefits through entrepreneurship. This civil association, called the Enterprise-Higher Education Foundation (<http://www.fese.org.mx/index.html>), introduced the Programme for the Promotion of an Enterprising Attitude at the national level, which spawned the educational sub-programme

“My First Company: Entrepreneurship by Playing”. This sub-programme is focused on developing an entrepreneurial spirit among fifth- and sixth-grade (11–12 year olds) primary school students in 27 Mexican states (Fig. 1).

The aim of this study was to determine whether the entrepreneurship education (EE) model implemented by tutors and adviser contributed to economic-administrative knowledge, the reinforcement of values, the development of entrepreneurial skills and the recognition of entrepreneurship as a long-term strategy for self-employment and wealth creation among primary-school students. A previous study in Mexico performed by Simon (2013) from 2009 to 2014 concluded that children can be effectively educated to become entrepreneurs and to make business decisions based on personal and social values. However, that study also highlighted the need for complementary research to better define educational practices related to entrepreneurship. This study responds to that need.

2. Literature review

2.1. Entrepreneurship

Askun and Yildirim (2011), Simon (2013), and Thurik and Wennekers (2004), among others, argued that entrepreneurship is a type of conduct centred on opportunities and economic resources; moreover, it represents a combination of risk, creativity, personal success, and innovation. In addition, entrepreneurship must adopt financial, moral, and social responsibility to establish a new and profitable business idea that can contribute to solving social problems. As Jean Baptiste Say wrote at the turn of the 19th century, “The entrepreneur shifts economic resources out of an area of lower productivity and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield” to create value (Dees, 2001, p. 1). Peter Drucker extended Say’s definition and noted that although entrepreneurs



Fig. 1. Map: States of Mexico participating in the sub-programme “My first enterprise: Entrepreneurship by playing”.

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