Broadening the resource base for entrepreneurship education through teachers' networking activities

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HIGHLIGHTS

- This study focuses on VET teachers' networking in entrepreneurship education.
- The article stresses effects of background and participation in planning and training.
- Female teachers seem to be more bound to use externalities in their teaching.
- Teachers participated in planning or training cooperate more with external stakeholders.
- Conception of teachers' personal capability is positively related to networking activities.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the activities of vocational education teachers when networking in entrepreneurship education. The study examines how the background characteristics of the teachers and their participation in planning and training activities explain the level of use of external stakeholders. As a method, a linear regression analysis has been used. The data consists of 448 Finnish vocational education and training (VET) teachers.

The results show that the teachers' business background or work experience does not lead to richer practices regarding utilizing different external stakeholders. However, teachers that participated in school or regional-level entrepreneurship education planning or training utilize external stakeholders significantly more than their colleagues.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has developed rapidly during the last two decades. The need for entrepreneurship education stems from the overarching shift in the job market during the 21st century; a shift that has meant that new skills, capabilities for reorientation, multiple careers, and active engagement in one's own success are now required. In other words, the current working environment calls for an entrepreneurial mindset for everyone. To meet these expectations, the development of curricula, pedagogical approaches, and rich content regarding entrepreneurship have been considerably targeted (see European Commission, 2006; 2013). A more recent development has been to introduce new approaches for widening learning environments (Cooper, Bottomley, & Gordon, 2004; Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Henderson & Robertson, 2000; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Seikkula-Leino, Ruskovaara, Hannula & Saarivirta, 2012) and extending resource bases for entrepreneurship education (Hynes & Richardson, 2007; Pittaway & Hannon, 2008), and through this, to open up new possibilities for learners to gain experience and insight.

The question of new resources for entrepreneurship education largely refers to engaging with new experiential learning

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opportunities, and in that sense, better knowledge, skills, and experiences available for entrepreneurship education. In this context, resources can be understood broadly, to include money, time, materials, information, or people. Through teachers' active initiatives, entrepreneurship education would not be hampered by the scarcity of resources allocated by the school, but rather offer a wide range of opportunities for entrepreneurship education by means of utilizing different partners and stakeholders (see, e.g., Katz, 2008).

In this article, the focus is on teachers who teach in vocational education and training (VET) and their use of different external stakeholders in teaching. The main interest in this paper is the teachers' network activities, the teachers' background characteristics, and their participation activities that may determine the level of network activity. Additionally, we focus on the teacher as the main actor involving different external stakeholders into the formal school activities.

This article contributes to the literature on entrepreneurship education in three ways: 1) It develops further the discussion of engaging external school network resources in entrepreneurship education, while also pinpointing the role of the teacher as the key operator in this process. 2) It provides empirical evidence on the importance of the participation activities as regards the teachers' ability to widen their resource base in order to perform entrepreneurship education. 3) Finally, it discusses ways in which teachers' networking activities could be further supported.

2. Prior evidence of teachers' educational networks for entrepreneurship education

In this section, a close examination is made of the relevant literature by discussing the studies dealing with stakeholder involvement in entrepreneurship education, the methods and contents associated with the inclusion of the external stakeholders in teaching, and especially the role of participation in creating commitment to new entrepreneurship education practices. Finally, four propositions are constructed on the association between the use of external networks and the teacher.

2.1. Stakeholder involvement in entrepreneurship education

From the point of view of the teacher and the school, local entrepreneurs and various non-profit organizations are parts of an essential entrepreneurship education network. There may be a considerable number of businesses and other organizations close to the school that are not only easily accessible, but that could also be very helpful in achieving the educational objectives. Cooperation between schools in different transitional phases could easily be connected to entrepreneurship education, as could the interaction with various research centers and universities.

While the majority of entrepreneurship education in schools is dependent on the school and the teacher, the resources available from the related networks also have an impact on entrepreneurship education. Networks may include local companies, associations, and national and international initiatives. It seems that the use of these resources has a direct impact on the level of entrepreneurship education in schools (Deakins, Glancey, Menter, & Wyper, 2005; Jones & Iredale, 2010). However, Hynes and Richardson (2007) claim that engaging with external stakeholders requires commitment by both the school and the educator, and thus the teacher needs to be ready to vary their knowledge and teaching perspective.

When involving external stakeholders in education, the school and the teacher should consider it a worthwhile venture, in the sense that the advantages should outweigh the disadvantages of such cooperation. The advantages could, for instance, include

support for development of entrepreneurship education, an enriched learning environment for students, and new routes for financing learning projects. Matlay (2009) reported that external stakeholder involvement in entrepreneurship education is rich and influential in the ongoing development of the educational system. Matlay (2009) refers to Freeman's definition of stakeholders as "… any group[s] or individuals who can affect or are affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives." Matlay suggests that external stakeholders expect improved entrepreneurial development of learners as a result of their involvement. However, through their involvement, stakeholders' views and expectations are likely to affect the operation of the school and the teachers. The effect could include expectations about, for example, the methods and contents of entrepreneurship education, timing, and organization of entrepreneurship education in schools. It is likely that, for many schools, adapting to these expectations would be difficult or undesirable, and would symbolize a loss of the school's independence.

For educational institutions, the adoption of entrepreneurship education and thus new objectives for education is not easy – it seems that the largest obstacle for the promotion of entrepreneurship is the image that people and institutions associate with entrepreneurship and enterprising. Bridge, Hegarty, and Porter (2010) discuss the difficulties associated with the concept of entrepreneurship when promoting enterprise education within higher education institutions. They identify three different targets of enterprise education: employability, enterprise for life, and enterprise for new venture creation. Bridge et al. (2010) suggest that the 'enterprise for life' concept would be the most appropriate approach to entrepreneurship education, but maintain that 'selling' the concept to the two sets of stakeholders – the funders and consumers – remains an issue. To enable the adoption of entrepreneurship education, different approaches to introducing entrepreneurship have been presented. The discussion on the institutional strategies supporting entrepreneurship (e.g. Fayolle, Gailly, & Lassas-Clerc, 2006; Pittaway & Hannon, 2008) underlines the importance of the cultural and structural conditions for undertaking entrepreneurship education.

Jones and Iredale (2010) claim that entrepreneurship and enterprise initiatives have been heavily dependent on public finance. However, the discussion on resources seems to be limited (see also Pittaway & Hannon, 2008), but the lack of resources is mentioned by many (Drakopoulou Dodd & Hynes, 2012; Hynes, 1996; Hynes & Richardson, 2007;). Resource allocation seems to be a current topic in the field. Entrepreneurship education is characterized as being temporary and short-sighted, which stems from the nature of resourcing. The reason for this might be the large number of different projects funded by local, regional, national, or international development organizations. Despite these project resources, the educators have to produce some of the resources themselves. Therefore, the resource challenge could be partially solved through wise co-operation with external stakeholders. At least in some institutions, the decisions concerning utilizing different external stakeholders are highly dependent on the choices made by the heads of the institution. Deakins et al. (2005) emphasize the rectors' significance, not only in setting the guidelines for attitudes and culture, but also as key players in resource allocation, working relationships, and activation of the local community.

2.2. Stakeholders and the methods and contents of entrepreneurship education

Pittaway and Hannon (2008) point out that building relations with external stakeholders is a strategic issue for a school, and external stakeholders play a vital role in developing entrepreneurship education within educational institutions. Pittaway and