

Developing Training Materials for Entrepreneurial Skills: Identifying Processes, Principles and Core Skills Through Case Studies

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DOI: 10.34190/EEL.21.097

Abstract: The study reported in this paper aims to address the challenge of entrepreneurial skills shortage by sharing the experience and findings of developing entrepreneurial skills for women and young graduates in the agri-food and creative sectors through effective online training material development and implementation. To achieve this aim, this paper analyses four projects, and identifies common themes in terms of projects, processes, principles, and core skills for developing online training materials. All four projects provide online training materials combined with multiple complementary support schemes. Using the projects as case studies, this paper examines in particular the projects' aim and training objectives, processes and the core skills covered in the training modules. The findings of this paper are used to propose a framework for projects, processes and design principles, with the aim of enabling the development of entrepreneurial skills through effective online training design and implementation.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, online training, case study

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a critical factor for business success, innovation and creating jobs. Helping create entrepreneurs can therefore provide significant benefits to the economy and society. However, entrepreneurship often faces challenges due to the lack of necessary skills, particularly in the agri-food and creative sectors. Although these sectors are growing rapidly, women and young graduates in particular often have difficulties in transforming their innovative ideas into viable business enterprises.

The study reported in this paper aims to address this challenge by exploring how to develop entrepreneurial skills of women and graduates in the agri-food and creative sectors through effective online training material development and implementation. To achieve this aim, the paper analyses four recent projects, and identifies the common themes in terms of processes, principles, and core skills for the development of online training materials. One of the projects aims to create the awareness of the entrepreneurship concepts, challenges, and opportunities in the creative economy among Ukrainian and UK graduates. It is funded by British Council's Creative Spark Higher Education Enterprise Programme. Three other projects are funded by EU Erasmus+ strategic partnership programme and aim to develop entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in the agri-business sector, especially for women in agri-food sector and young people who are interested in entering the farming business through land mobility initiatives. All four projects use online training materials combined with multiple complementary support schemes. Using the four projects as case studies, this paper analyses the common themes in terms of project aims, training objectives, project processes and core skills covered in the training modules, and shares the experience and lessons learned based on case studies. The findings are then used to propose a framework illustrating the projects, processes and principles enabling the development of entrepreneurial skills through effective online training materials development and implementation.

The paper first provides a short review of relevant literature. The research method section describes the four projects used as case studies for this research. Common themes are highlighted as findings. A framework is presented to illustrate the processes, principals, and core skills for developing entrepreneurial skills for young graduates, women, SMEs employees, or others who seek to start their own businesses in the agri-food and creative sectors.

2. Literature review

This section reviews key themes for the paper which covers the significance of entrepreneurship training, need for entrepreneurial skills development, and the design of entrepreneurship training programmes for young graduates, new entrepreneurship and women as a minority group.

2.1 Significance of entrepreneurship education

An 'entrepreneur' is defined as a person who takes the risk and opportunity to open a new business, typically has an independent mentality, and dares to start the business without being overly discouraged by fears or worries even in uncertain economic conditions (Kasmir, 2007; Krisnaesanti, 2020).

Many researchers (e.g., Davidsson et al, 2006) have highlighted the relevance of entrepreneurship to the development of economies. For example, entrepreneurship is regarded by the EU as being an important part of the solution to unemployment, and as a way of contributing to general welfare and economic growth (European Commission, 2013; Valerio et al., 2014).

It is recognised that education and training can play an important role in helping cultivate future entrepreneurs, and to enhance the abilities of existing entrepreneurs to grow their businesses to greater levels of success (Henry et al., 2003). It is also recognised that entrepreneurship education can produce graduates who are not only able to work within an institution, but also open new business opportunities by themselves becoming entrepreneurs (Krisnaesanti, et al. 2020).

The aim of entrepreneurship education and training should thus be to 'develop entrepreneurial capacities and mindsets' that benefit economies by fostering creativity, innovation and self-employment (European Commission (2008). The concept of an entrepreneurial Europe, which promotes the creation and development of innovative businesses, has led many of the EU member states to strengthen their policies on SME formation and support since academics, politicians, and policy-makers increasingly acknowledge the substantial contribution that entrepreneurship can make to the economy (Bruyat & Julien (2001).

2.2 Need for entrepreneurial skills and designing of training programmes

However, entrepreneurship education and training programmes have sometimes been criticised for various reasons, including in not sufficiently instilling essential entrepreneurial skills. For example, Henry, et al. (2003) say that entrepreneurship education programmes are often too focused on the functional aspects of business management, rather than helping develop the broader capabilities of entrepreneurs to be innovative, manage the changing business environment, and to be creative in developing and taking forward their businesses. While business students might learn theoretical concepts of entrepreneurship at education institutions, they may not have sufficiently mastered the broader range of entrepreneurial skills.

According to the UK's Department of Business Innovation and Skills (now Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy), entrepreneurship skills are linked with one's competence in identifying opportunities and the ability to capitalise on such opportunities to develop and implement business plans to ensure that the opportunities are realised; and pointed out the link between entrepreneurship skills and business success (BIS, 2015). Moreover, BIS (2015) noted that a significant number of SME managers in UK had relatively underdeveloped entrepreneurial skills.

Academic studies have shown evidence of the impact of entrepreneurship programmes on students' entrepreneurship skills (Ismail, et al., 2019). For example, the survey by Jain and Chaudhary (2017) indicated that entrepreneurship programmes have a positive impact on students entrepreneurship skills; and the study by Lyons and Zhang (2017) also showed a positive impact on minorities, especially females. But while some entrepreneurship skills can undoubtedly be taught by standard education approaches, evidence also shows that students tend to learn some of these less effectively from such traditional teaching approaches. As a result, a variety methods of entrepreneurship education and training are provided in many countries in order to produce new and more competent entrepreneurs. UK initiatives such as Goldman Sachs '10,000 project' and the UK's Growth Accelerator programme have supported target small businesses in developing their entrepreneurship skills by demonstrating best practices. However, it is not clear as to how truly effective and innovative overall entrepreneurship education has been in producing new entrepreneurs (Krisnaesanti, et al., 2020), and where

BIS suggested that it is more effective to learn entrepreneurship skills by using experiential learning that is task-oriented, with focus on real business problems (BIS, 2015). Given that the world is currently facing significant economic challenges, especially with the decreasing opportunities for graduate employment during the current health pandemic, developing new entrepreneurs and encouraging greater entrepreneurial activities have become a prominent goal for all countries.

3. Research method

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to explore how to develop entrepreneurial skills of young graduates, women and SME managers in agri-food and the creative sectors through effective e-learning design and implementation. To achieve this aim, the study adopts a qualitative case study method that “explores a research topic, or phenomenon within its context, or within a number of real life contexts” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). In our context, it involves a close examination of phenomena of multiple cases (four cases). According to Saunders et al. (2012), the rationale for using multiple cases focuses on whether findings can be replicated across cases. Based on the authors’ experience working on the relevant funded projects on developing entrepreneurial skills among different target groups, four cases are selected in terms of their relevance and similarities. Table 1 provides a profile of the cases used in this study.

Table 1: Profile of the four chosen cases

| Case Title | Funding Body | Project Length | Other project partner(s) | Status |
|--|-----------------|----------------|--|-----------|
| Case 1: Create creative entrepreneurs (CCE) | British Council | 60 months | Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics (S. Kuznets KhNUE) (Ukraine); Ukrainian Engineering Pedagogics Academy (UEPA) | On-going |
| Case 2: Creating Entrepreneurs in Food (CEF) | EU Erasmus + | 26 months | Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) (Ireland) The European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) (Belgium) The Polish Beef Association (Poland) | Completed |
| Case 3: Land Mobility: Innovative and digital training materials to foster land mobility initiatives | EU Erasmus + | 24 months | Macra na Feirme (Ireland); GMIT (Ireland) Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre (PFATC) PROPEL Europe (Belgium); European Landowners Organization (Belgium) | On-going |
| Case 4: Advancing Women in Agri-Food Rural Environments (AWARE) | EU Erasmus + | 30 months | GMIT (Ireland) Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori Toscana (Italy) PROPEL Europe (Belgium) PFATC (Poland); Macra na Feirme (Ireland). | On-going |

3.2 Case study analysis process

The case study analysis mainly involves two important phases: The first phase is with case analysis and the second phase is cross case analysis. The within-case-analysis collects and analyses information concerning the project background, the rationale, aims and objectives, partners, target beneficiaries, key project activities and outcomes, stakeholder surveys, evaluation feedback, and initial results and impacts. These are all secondary data available to the authors. The findings of the within-case-analysis is provided in Section 3.3. The cross-case-analysis involves identifying the common themes in developing and implementing online training programmes for developing entrepreneurial skills among graduates, women, and SME managers. The authors’ personal experience and observation are also used for case analysis and themes identification. The common themes are served as the main findings and presented in Section 4. Cross Case Analysis and Key Findings.

3.3 Within case analysis

Case 1 – Create Creative Entrepreneurs (CCE)

Creative industry is becoming an important sector to boost competitiveness, productivity, employment, and sustainable economic growth. However, people working in the sector face various challenges to develop

innovative ideas and transform them into viable business enterprises. In Ukraine, the impact of creative industries is growing rapidly. However, support for entrepreneurial activities in these areas is rather poorly developed and requires comprehensive support from the state, business, and education.

This project aims to develop a new partnership between the Business School of the University of Bedfordshire’s Business School (UBBS), Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics (KhNUE) and Ukrainian Engineering Pedagogics Academy (UEPA) to establish a Centres of Creative Entrepreneurship Development (CCEDs) in KhNUE and UEPA. CCEDs will include three main types of activities: (1) Training programmes; (2) Business support and consulting services, (3) Annual roadshow of the best entrepreneur ideas and annual competition award for young creative entrepreneurs

The outputs of this project include:

- 1. Creation of a new innovative educational model for developing creative enterprises and entrepreneurial oriented curriculum
- 2. Design and creation of new training course for developing participants’ essential entrepreneurial skills
- 3. A pilot support portal to provide relevant educational materials and resources, and to link students, graduates, and young entrepreneurs (SME managers) and other like-minded people to share their ideas and promote their businesses.

Through knowledge transfer, capacity building, pilot training and launching of CCEDs, the project should help raise the awareness of entrepreneurial skills among the target groups in both UK and Ukraine, develop their new skills and abilities, and enhance further collaboration and knowledge sharing.

It is observed that the project has started to create a positive impact on the creation of creative entrepreneurship and self-employment in the creative industry for the eastern region of Ukraine. In the long run, the work of CCEDs should help increase the number of start-ups of creative enterprises, generate new jobs, improve competitiveness of creative industry, and enable a sustainable ecosystem of youth entrepreneurship.

Case 2 – Creating Entrepreneurs in Food (CEF)

The CEF project, which was completed in 2020, aimed at building food innovation and entrepreneurship-focused rural communities and economies across Europe. This project addressed the flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy namely ‘Innovation Union’ and ‘An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’. The project’s aim was to boost innovation and entrepreneurship in vocational education, and ultimately in business and in the broader socio-economic environment with the following objectives:

- 1. To jointly develop and implementing entrepreneurship training aimed at those in short food supply chains in participating programme countries
- 2. To create short food supply chain entrepreneurship mind-set that will empower food producers to gain control of their business models and move up the value chain
- 3. To cultivate transversal skill sets developed in cooperation with food entrepreneurs thus strengthening employability, creativity, and new professional paths
- 4. To provide a web platform that stimulates the flow and exchange of knowledge between education and enterprises, embedding entrepreneurship and innovation as core themes

The aim of the curriculum and web portal developed as part of this project is to develop entrepreneurial skill sets in the early stage of food entrepreneurs and to facilitate innovative thinking that will develop the potential for participants to recognise and critically analyse opportunities within the sector and in turn create employment in their local regions throughout Europe. The main target of the resultant vocational education and training package is local/regional food producers, the wider agricultural community, rural farmers, and food entrepreneurs across Europe.

The participating organisations of the three countries involved in the project should have benefited from various activities. They include:

- In Ireland: Teagasc, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Department of social Protection, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), VET colleges, Local Enterprise Offices, Industry leaders

- In the UK: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA); FARMA (A not-for-profit association of the best real farm shops and genuine farmers markets from across the UK), Community Food Enterprise Limited, The farmers' network
- In Poland: Ministry of Agriculture and Development, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education, Wide network of Beef Farmers, Agricultural Market Agency, Educators, and training centres

There are three main outputs from the project:

1. Core teaching materials and guidelines for Level 4 curriculum 'Creating Entrepreneurs in Food'
2. Online learning course - 'Creating Entrepreneurs in Food'
3. A web portal as an all-in-one online support tool for food entrepreneurs. It is serving as a knowledge repository for food entrepreneurs to access information, forums, social media community, knowledge base, and training materials.

Case 3 – Land Mobility: Innovative and Digital Training Materials to Foster Land Mobility Initiatives

This project aims to develop training modules for the establishment of land mobility services for all partner countries, and to promote similar initiatives in EU Member States and internationally beyond the project lifetime. The main objectives are:

1. To promote initiatives and innovative concepts surrounding land mobility by developing training materials and guidelines for landowners, farmers, authorities, and advisors around land mobility services, land management partnerships and farm take-over brokerage
2. To promote agricultural land staying in the sector and a continuation of the EU family-like farming model
3. To ensure that land in Europe is kept as much as possible in sustainable ownership and is not subject to land abandonment so that land becomes a tool for empowerment and entrepreneurship for Europeans rather than an obstacle to it

The project will set out guidelines for how to establish land mobility services and develop an animated educational video to help raise the awareness of different concepts of land mobility and the enormity of the problem of access to land that faces European young farmers. This will be accompanied by open access training materials in the project website such as animated power point slides, training materials for the farmers (both successor and predecessor), and mobile training opportunities for land mobility brokers and advisors.

The project aims to bring a generation of young agricultural entrepreneurs one step closer to starting their own farming business by providing them with a solution to one of the main barriers which currently stand in their way: access to land.

The project will encourage the take-up of land mobility initiatives by training relevant target audiences and informing them about best-practices elsewhere in the EU which should be rolled out in other areas and regions. By matching young farmers with older farmers, the project will multiply the number of young farmers that are able to start their own entrepreneurial farming businesses, including promoting general take-up of digitization and modern technologies in the farming population across Europe.

The project's main outputs are: new training curricula with digital training materials training methodology, and open educational resources.

The project is expected to have far-reaching impacts and results on the European farming population, including:

1. Improved education and training for farmers, landowners, farming organisations, local authorities and other relevant regional actors in farm partnerships and land mobility.
2. Fostered new ideas and concepts in this field
3. Increased awareness of potential solutions to challenges relating to land access for young would-be agricultural entrepreneurs, not only through informing, explaining, and attempting to roll-out best practices but also through the creation of a promotional video about land mobility solutions
4. Raised awareness of land mobility and developed new thinking around the idea in relation to farming
5. Increased knowledge of these issues among farmers across the EU

Case 4 – Advancing Women in Agri-Food Rural Environments (AWARE)

This project aims to assess the needs of women living in rural areas, who are willing to start up farming and forest activities. The main objective of the project is to support the growth of women entrepreneurs in the Agri-Food sector across Europe. The project should contribute to achieving social inclusion and closing the gender gap in agri-food entrepreneurship. The project's objectives are in line with the recommendations of the Social Inclusion and development of rural economies - European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) for 2011-2020, in particular, fostering innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship, as well as the use of ICT. The key outputs as follows will be available as online resources to women entrepreneurs in the Agri-Food sector, VET educators, business mentors and the wider agricultural community:

1. Curriculum for an online training course "Start your own Food Business" designed specifically for women in the Agri-Food sector
2. Module contents for the training programme
3. Research report on the importance and benefits of engaging with a business mentor
4. Video of testimonials from Mentors/Mentees in Agri-Food businesses across partner countries
5. Infographic booklet of resources for supporting women entrepreneurs in Europe's Agri-Food sector

The main achievements of the project will include needs analysis review for the development of a detailed curriculum and module content, project website and social media platforms for supporting project dissemination activities and allowing for engagement with the target audiences and stakeholders as well as a database of women entrepreneurs, mentors, educators, and enterprises. The output of this project should equip women entrepreneurs in the Agri-Food sector with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to foster their business concepts right through to fruition by providing access to specific training and engagement with business mentors.

4. Across case analysis and key findings

The four project cases described above are cross-analysed and four common themes are identified. They are project, processes, principles, and core entrepreneurship skills. These are discussed in detail below.

4.1 Project

To develop entrepreneurial skills among the target groups including young graduates, women, and SMEs managers, all the projects have secured financial support from public funding programmes (EU and British Council) and established a strategic partnership involving higher education institutes, sector associations, support agencies, and consultancies. The common features of the projects are involving key stakeholders in the project partnership, establishing effective collaboration, and identifying clear aim and training objectives.

Although these projects are funded by different programme funding bodies that have targeted at different project participants from different sectors, they do share common project objectives that are summarised as follows:

1. To develop entrepreneurial skillsets
2. To facilitate innovative thinking
3. To recognize and critically analyse opportunities within the sector and in turn create employment in the local regions
4. To provide young graduate, women or people who are keen to start their own business with the skills and the mind set required to become successful entrepreneurs.

Based on these objectives, all four projects focus on developing online training materials that should help participants with the following:

1. Increased awareness and understanding on the importance of entrepreneurship in the creative and agri-food industries
2. Development of knowledge and skills in business planning, marketing and branding
3. Enhanced personal and inter-personal communication skills

- 4. Creation of awareness of business sustainability
- 5. Development of digital business skills

4.2 Process

To achieve these project objectives, the processes that these projects have followed share the following common themes:

1. Identifying skills shortages, challenges, and training needs – Three of the four projects involve identifying the main areas and specific training needs at the start of the projects. This is achieved by using online survey questionnaire and interviews with the key stakeholders.
2. Designing programme modules to meet the training needs – Partners in all projects discuss and contribute to the development of training programme. The modules not only cover the core skills, but also specify the sector related skill needs and activities. For example, for Land Mobility project, in addition to the development of core modules, it also has specific modules covering topics such as “Farm hand over process” and “Farm management”.
3. Developing effective training materials – The final training materials are created based on the skills identification exercise and agreed training needs.
4. Delivering training sessions via effective blended learning approaches – Project web portals, workshops, and training sessions (face to face and online), webinars, and so on.
5. Testing, evaluating, and improving.

4.3 Principles

Three principles identified for developing online training programmes are common to all the four projects:

1. Relevant and focused – The topic of entrepreneurship covers a wide range of areas. All projects understand the importance of providing the most relevant and well-focused materials for the target groups. It is critical that the training materials are relevant based on the input from key stakeholders. It must be well focused on the development of core skills. For example, in the creative sector, the training materials aim to develop knowledge and skills to help round entrepreneurs and graduates to turn big ideas to business success.
2. Interesting and interactive training materials – To effectively engage target groups in online and offline learning, all projects have developed the online training materials that are interesting and engaging. The online training materials include a range of activities which include multimedia presentation, online interactive workbooks, online quizzes, links to free online resources, workshops, virtual events, etc.
3. Supporting online learning with offline activities – Using various face to face activities to support online learning, e.g., mentoring scheme, gamified learning workshop using Lego, pitch competitions, multiplier events, guest speakers, etc.

4.4 Entrepreneurship skills

To provide the most relevant and focused e-learning materials, three of the four projects conducted surveys and interviews with target groups to understand and identify their training needs. Table 2 below shows the core training modules identified from the four case studies which should help develop the participants’ entrepreneurship skills. Based on these core skills, all project have enriched and contextualised the training materials with supplementary materials using sector-specific examples, case studies and best practice.

Table 2: Core training modules

| Training Modules | Main Topics |
|---|--|
| Module 1: Essential skills for entrepreneurs | Session 1 - Characteristics and Skills of Entrepreneurs Session 2 - Understand Team Theory and Teamworking Skills Session 3 - Design Thinking: Opportunity Recognition and Solution Generation Session 4 - Communications |
| Module 2: | Session 1 – Business Start Ups: Top Tips |

| Main Topics | Training Modules |
|--|---|
| Session 5 - Business Planning and Business Plan Session 3 - Financing your business Session 1 - Marketing concepts and principles Session 5 - Market testing techniques and evaluation methods Session 3 - Marketing strategy Session 4 - Concept of branding Session 2 - Brand strategy | Skills for building and running successful enterprises Module 3: Marketing and branding |
| Session 1 - Introduction to emerging digital technologies Session 2 - Digital media and marketing Session 3 - Digital Analytics Session 4 - Tools for web analytics – Google Analytics | Module 4: Digital and analytics skills for entrepreneurs |

Figure 1 is a framework which summarises the key points identified for effective online training design and implementation through the collaborative work with our partners on the funded projects.



Figure 1: Framework for developing entrepreneurship skills

2. Conclusions

Entrepreneurial education and training are vital for the development of entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours of business students and individuals who seek to meet the increasing needs for creativity and innovation in a labour market characterised by globalisation, uncertainty, and dynamic change. Although there are many online training materials available for entrepreneurship development, there is still a significant gap in providing relevant and well-focused courses that meet the needs of specifically women and young people in the agriculture, food and creative sectors. This study aims to help address this entrepreneurial skills challenge by sharing the experience of projects on the development of effective online training materials and their implementation focused on these areas. Using the four case studies based on the funded projects, the paper presents the key findings in terms of project, process, principles and core skills. From the common themes identified, we concluded the following key points:

- 1. Government and public support is likely to be a critical element in such provision, as all four studies were funded by public organisations, specifically the EU and British Council, and where the funding provided the financial resources to enable key stakeholders to work together to provide entrepreneurial skills in the agriculture, food, and creative sectors.
- 2. Effective collaboration of the key stakeholders helped set up feasible project aims and training objectives, and also ensured a clear understanding of beneficiaries’ training needs for developing relevant and focused materials.
- 3. A set of common development process were identified, from training needs identification through to training programme design, evaluation and feedback to ensure that the projects were able to meet their aims and to address feedback for continuous improvement.

- 4. The core skills for the targeted groups included: essential skills for entrepreneurs; skills for building and running successful enterprises; marketing and branding; and digital and analytics skills for entrepreneurs. The projects also showed that when delivering training programmes, training materials should be contextualised, and supported with supplementary materials using sector-specific examples, case studies and best practice.
- 5. Finally, to effectively implement online training materials and courses, they should be supplemented by associated supporting schemes, both online and offline, including mentoring, gamified learning workshops, 'project-pitch' competitions, multiplier events, and external speakers.

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