

Fostering Entrepreneurial Skills through Education

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Abstract

Over the years, entrepreneurial mindsets have shown to be in the foundation of every vibrant society; a society which has seen inclusive growth without sacrificing any geographical region and improved the standard of living of all its members.

While education lies in the foundation of all human development, entrepreneurship is not given the same kind of attention in education as other core subjects. Perhaps entrepreneurship is viewed through a narrow slit of scepticism which equates it with money matters alone, and societies the world over have stressed upon the need to keep 'students away from money to avoid its corrupting influence'.

What is ignored in this approach towards entrepreneurship is the fact that successful entrepreneurs are not the kind of people who are obsessed with acquisition of money, by hook or by crook. But they are people with such personal qualities, which if imbibed by others, can help take their careers or businesses to greater levels of success. These qualities include creativity, sense of initiative, spirit of innovation, challenging the status quo to find better alternatives, drive for advancement and growth, perseverance and courage to face challenging situations, managing and being responsible, ethical, etc.

It is therefore the need of the hour to include entrepreneurship education in mainstream education.

INTRODUCTION

The word entrepreneurship is most commonly used in the context of

persons starting out in their new business ventures, fighting against the established players and finding a

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niche for themselves in the market. But the word means much more than what it is commonly believed to mean. It implies the general attitude which includes taking initiative, leadership, risk-taking, a strong sense of ownership and responsibility of successes and failures alike, doughty grit and perseverance, and an indomitable spirit to fight against the odds. They struggle till they emerge winners. The people who have entrepreneurial mindset almost always move up in business or career, family or social life.

EDUCATION FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Often, it is asked whether one can be trained to be an entrepreneur? It is easy to guess why such a sceptical question is asked. It is because in the foundation of entrepreneurship lies the entrepreneurial thought, which, it is generally believed, cannot be taught. It is said that entrepreneurship is an innate talent which cannot be learnt. One has to be born an entrepreneur.

Another doubt expressed about education for entrepreneurship is whether the academics are the right choice to impart knowledge to, about entrepreneurship? Would it not make more sense that entrepreneurship be taught by entrepreneurs themselves? Who would share their vast experiences about what they went through and how they overcame those obstacles?

While these arguments do hold ground, there are certain aspects

which can definitely be taught, and those with innate flair for entrepreneurship would excel with this knowledge. Others would do well in their careers as professionals due to the awareness about the skills and competencies which characterise entrepreneurship.

The approach towards teaching entrepreneurship has evolved with two distinct lines of treatment—one which deals with the skills and personal qualities which make a successful entrepreneur, and the second, which deals with the specifics of establishing a new business, making the students aware about the possibility and potential of taking up business as an occupation instead of becoming an employee.

MAINSTREAM EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The conventional teaching which is imparted to learners stresses almost exclusively on making students conform to the standards, being able to learn what is taught and write the exams accordingly. Or as is quite often said in corporate training, learning to colour within the lines. Entrepreneurship, on the contrary, thrives on challenging the status quo and thinking differently. It is a very well known fact that entrepreneurs think differently. They question conventional wisdom and seek creative solutions to problems. In fact, creativity and divergent thinking are two crucial ingredients for successful entrepreneurship.

A study by George Land, the author of *Breakpoint and Beyond: Mastering the Future Today* involving over one thousand children was conducted. These children were tested for their divergent thinking using a test (similar to the one conducted by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to identify creative engineers and scientists) at the ages of five, ten and fifteen years. The results showed that the ability to think divergently actually dropped with age. While the five-year-olds scored 98 per cent, the ten-year-olds scored 30 per cent and the fifteen-year-olds scored the least at 12 per cent. When the same test was administered to adults, they scored an abysmal 2 per cent. Clearly the conventional schooling which stresses on following instructions based upon a prescribed curriculum throttles the capability to think creatively.

TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Creativity skills are learned by doing and not by learning theory in a classroom, by experiencing and applying creative thought process to innovate and discover newer answers, all the while using imagination and inquisitive questioning. This kind of free flowing thought process is stifled by conventional school education.

Saraswathy S. while studying the cognitive process of entrepreneurs found out that they used different reasoning while making decisions about their businesses. According

to her, 'Entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial as differentiated from managerial or strategic, because they think effectually: they believe in a yet-to-be-made future that can substantially be shaped by human action'. It is the *effectual* thinking of entrepreneurs, as against the *causal* thinking of others. Causal thinking tries to find the optimal resources and means to achieve a predefined goal. In contrast to this approach is the effectual thinking employed by the entrepreneurs which begins with the given set of resources and constraints and follows the goals which emerge from the effort. In fact, the goals keep evolving over time and better ways to achieve them keep emerging too.

At the desirable level, teaching entrepreneurship to young learners would include:

- encouraging the development of personal qualities which are fundamental to being a successful entrepreneur, including creative thinking, taking initiative, risk taking abilities and ownership (or being responsible) of the actions— successes or failures.
- equipping the students with managerial tools and techniques which specifically help them in setting up their own ventures; things such as market research, business planning, sales, negotiation techniques, customer focus, quality consciousness, financial and accounting practices, etc.

FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship can be merged with the conventional, mainstream curriculum at all the levels of learning. Focus must be on enhancing creativity, initiative, responsibility, ownership, etc. At the levels of higher secondary education, specialised subjects pertaining to entrepreneurship can be offered as electives, supplementing the core subjects. In this way, a good foundation can be laid during the early years of education. Subsequently, a more specialised business-related knowledge can be imparted.

This approach towards fostering entrepreneurship through mainstream education entails alteration in pedagogy. This by no means is a small course correction. In fact, it is nothing short of a paradigm shift. From treating entrepreneurship and business studies as extra-curricular appendages to a part of the mainstream curriculum requires a total change in the mindset of both teachers and learners alike. The features of such a programme must include the following.

- A qualitatively superior exposure to the students, to the 'entrepreneurial way' so that they develop a strong sense of the usefulness of the programme
- Make them aware about the skills needed to become a successful entrepreneur.
- Offer them the opportunity to acquire experiential learning

so as to make the learning long lasting as well as fostering a sense of accomplishment, leading to enhanced self-confidence.

- Challenge the students to come out with innovative ideas, action plans and solutions to reach their goals and improvise them as the need arises.
- Make them responsible, take ownership, drive the outcomes, align them with predefined business objectives and stand up in the face of stiff competition.
- Introduce them to the concepts of business planning, sales, customer service, quality management, accounting, communication, leading teams and driving business results.

Why to Integrate Mainstream Education with the Development of Entrepreneurship?

Education is one of the most crucial components in a nation's development. In fact, it enables the creation of competent human resource, so crucial for creating the growth infrastructure. It develops the dignity of individuals and labour. In the absence of education, there would be no technological advancements or proper utilisation of natural and human resources, no economic growth, no food security and no advancement in healthcare.

Education opens up the whole world for people to learn from, to exchange knowledge and learn from

each others' experiences of success and failures. It motivates people to change and evolve into better societies. It ignites their imagination and drives them to aspire for higher achievements. This aspiration leads to chain reactions of development of several allied fields, whereby millions of people earn better and have higher standard of living. As many new opportunities open up, entrepreneurship blossoms too.

Education, therefore, is the life force of every society, and it is logical to connect every aspect of the development of human resource, including entrepreneurship with it.

Where is Entrepreneurship Education today?

Entrepreneurship education is not treated at par with the core subjects of the prescribed curriculum. It is typically treated as an add-on activity and is therefore confined to the fringes of mainstream education.

The Government of India has started giving a lot of emphasis to make entrepreneurship a huge factor in providing answer to large scale unemployment in India. But despite this, it is still a distant object as far as getting it into mainstream curriculum of secondary and higher secondary schooling concerned.

All training and entrepreneurship development programmes are designed as stand-alone interventions, which at best can be treated as slightly detailed awareness sessions.

They cannot be substitutes for a sustained education, spread over several years, addressing each aspect of not just specifics of business but also the personal capability aspects of individuals as well.

In the absence of a systematic entrepreneurship education programme, the schools or colleges where some attempts are made to teach this, have to depend upon private players of one of the Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the inputs on latest trends and practices in the market/industry.

There are however, advanced courses available in almost all the business schools where entrepreneurship is taught to students of management, but of course these are postgraduate programmes.

How can the System be Improved to Impart Quality Entrepreneurship Education?

- It has to start at the national policy planning level. A consensus needs to be established between the Union Government and the State Governments to make this transition from purely academic-oriented education to the one which includes real life subjects too. The ministries of human resources, commerce, industries and labour to name a few, must pool in their ideas and evolve a comprehensive education policy which addresses the issues being faced in entrepreneurship education.

- The next critical item in the list is the availability of trained teachers. Teachers need to be trained in the new concepts which are related to entrepreneurship education.
- Adequate knowledge resources in the form of textbooks, workbooks, interactive content along with holistic assessment system which ensures the delivery of right learning outcomes.
- Since entrepreneurship is all about business and industry, there must be a systematic approach to facilitate a robust and meaningful interaction between the schools and business.
- Every geographical location has its own local trade and commerce which specialises in some specific products, commodities or services. Therefore, it is in order that the schools be included in the overall policy of local or regional development authorities.

Entrepreneurship in Primary and Secondary Schools

In order to teach entrepreneurship in schools, the course content which is appropriate to the age of pupils must be designed. This should cover all aspects such as knowledge, attitudes and skills, etc. The personal qualities including the ability to take initiative, independent action, being responsible, creativity, innovation, etc., should be developed which will help in developing entrepreneurial attitude. This will not only enable those students who set up their own

ventures later on, but also those who opt for employment in organisations. Active and autonomous forms of learning, coupled with knowledge gained through interaction with businesses will enable them to better appreciate the role of entrepreneurs in society, which will in turn prepare them to become one if they so choose.

Early Vocational Training at the Secondary Level of Education

Vocational training imparted at this level is very effective because of the age and intellectual development of students. They can appreciate entrepreneurship in a much better way and are also eager to learn more. Their curiosity about career options and anxiety about their future provide the most conducive learning environment. Such vocational training can also be aligned to provide them the skills to perform in the local or regional markets.

This will be in contrast with the current practices in vocational trainings where only the technical aspects of the trade are dealt with, making them skilled workers but completely ignoring the entrepreneurial side, which would enable them to become self-employed.

Learning by doing and mini enterprises

Hands-on experiential learning must be a significant part of the course content along with theoretical studies. It becomes very easy to learn

and retain the learning if practice exercises emulate entrepreneurial environment.

Many institutions encourage students to participate in earn-while-you-learn schemes. This exposure is the closest to being an entrepreneur.

Training of Teachers on the Subject of Entrepreneurship

Since teachers play a vital role as an agent of change in the society, we should focus on the training of teachers in this regard. Teachers maybe taught about entrepreneurial teaching as part of the regular curriculum of their teacher training course for the new joiners. For the existing batches of teachers, workshops and seminars can be organised to enable them to come up to the required level. The purpose of their training is—

- To create an awareness of the need and importance of entrepreneurship
- To impart knowledge and develop skills in diverse training methods in imparting training to students
- To plan curriculum that can imbibe the skills and competencies to achieve goals directed by values, have a positive attitude and have the ability to cope with the changing times
- To develop teachers with the entrepreneurial and professional mindset

- To make them aware about the promotional, financial and regulating scheme of MSME
- To guide them for the techniques of preparation of feasible and viable project
- To provide exposure to small enterprise market survey techniques and tools of market survey

Entrepreneurship has very little to do with money. It is instead an attitude, a way of thinking. It focuses beyond simply starting a company. In other words, not all people who start their own organisation can necessarily be categorised as entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs challenge assumptions, recognise opportunities in a period of change, reveal patterns where others see chaos and mobilise limited resource to achieve an objective.

However, what must be emphasised is that the teachers appreciate the need and usefulness of entrepreneurial teaching; it is essential for their being motivated to teach the subject well. Trainers and instructors from the business and industry along with the successful entrepreneurs, can be brought to train the teachers in this field.

SUMMARY

Entrepreneurship education affords the students to carve out for themselves more successful careers, irrespective of whether they set up their own businesses or opt to become an entrepreneurial worker

in someone else's organisation. The qualities defining the entrepreneurial mindset make them more productive of all workers. So it is a win-win for everyone.

For instance, efficient networking and communication skills are two very important attributes of persons who excel in their career. These qualities can be learned during the schooling as students go through entrepreneurship education. Students can gain these type of simple but crucial techniques, which are the desirable traits of an effective future employee or business person, through entrepreneurship education.

It is also well known that students perform better academically when the learning environment comes close to their personal locus of control, because they can engage more effectively in their studies. Moreover, entrepreneurship education affords the students the opportunity to develop skills which are in demand in the marketplaces of today.

While every year thousands of start-ups are set up, only 10 per cent survive their first year of existence. Of these survivors, hardly 2 per cent make it to their fifth birthday. The problems these enterprises face are very common. They include low revenues, stagnant growth, limited access to capital and human resources. But one common thread which runs through all the still born businesses is the limited availability of specialised training and the absence of a long family history of business ownership. Since they did not learn how to run a business in their families, they fail to run the one they set up.

Since the new entrepreneurs did not have the opportunity to learn the nitty-gritty of running a business at the dining table, they should be given the opportunity to learn about it in schools or colleges. This is the philosophy behind fostering entrepreneurship through education.

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