BUSINESS TRAINERS' COMPETENCES AS A BARRIER TO USING THE CASE STUDY METHOD IN TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract: *The case study method can be a valuable teaching tool in entrepreneurial education due to it being student-oriented, problem-oriented and teamwork-oriented. The effective use of this method can be hindered by certain barriers pertaining to both students and trainers. The aim of this paper is to show to what extent trainers' competences in respect of case study writing and teaching can be a barrier to using the case study method effectively. In order to achieve this aim a questionnaire study comprising a self-assessment of their level of competences was conducted among business trainers from Poland and Lithuania. These two countries were selected for the study because the majority of the available and ready-to-use case studies describe the situation of companies which operate in economically developed countries such as the USA or the UK. On the one hand, there is a shortage of case studies presenting the situation of companies from Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the use case of studies which involve companies located in the immediate environment is extremely beneficial for entrepreneurial education.*

Keywords: *business education, case study method*

JEL Classification: *L26, M21*

1. ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

Knowledge is the basis for the functioning and development of contemporary knowledge-based economies. Companies which are able to create knowledge faster than their competitors achieve benefits (Maskell, Malmberg, 1999). Knowledge is a key factor in creating the competitiveness of companies and economies (Huggins, 2008) which not only leads to market changes, but also changes a firm's internal structures and external relationships (Maskell, Malmberg, 1999). New economic knowledge can originate from different sources: industrial research and development activity, university activity and skilled labour (Audretsch, Feldman, 1996). The knowledge which is used in business practice can be divided into the formal knowledge obtained in the process of formal education; and the practical knowledge obtained in the course of business activity, referred to as learning-by-doing.

University education and occupational training are some of the elements of formal education which equip students not only with new knowledge but also with skills, competences and attitudes. For example, it is believed that university education develops pro-innovative attitudes and that university education is one of the factors which significantly influence the entrepreneurial innovativeness of individuals (Koellinger, 2008).

From the point of view of analysing the significance of entrepreneurial education, it is necessary to discuss the essence of human capital, understood as the knowledge and abilities of individual people. Human capital consists of three types of capital: human capital specific to a certain company, which can be utilised only within a given firm; human capital specific to an industry, which comprises knowledge resulting from the experiences of a given industry; human capital specific to an individual which comprises knowledge which can be utilised in a wide range of companies and industries (Gawel, 2007, pp. 27-28). In entrepreneurial education the human capital specific to an individual is important. This capital consists of such elements as, for example, general managerial experience, entrepreneurial experience, economic education, occupational training, the age of an individual and the level of household income (Dakhli, de Clercq, 2004).

Entrepreneurship is considered to be a key factor in terms of improving productivity, increasing competitiveness and innovativeness, creating employment and prosperity, as well as contributing to revitalising communities (Smith, Beasley, 2011). It is thought that education at university level, particularly entrepreneurial education, can play a pivotal role in promoting entrepreneurial activity (Nabi, Linan, 2011). This highlights the importance of entrepreneurial education in modern economies. It is an open question how such education should be organised.

Assuming that "learning" is understood in 5 different ways; as an increase in knowledge, memorizing, the acquisition of facts, the abstraction of meaning and an interpretive process aimed at an understanding of reality (Richardson, 2005); entrepreneurial education only makes sense when learning is perceived as an understanding of reality. Only an understanding of reality, rather than memorising or increasing one's knowledge, is useful for starting and running a company, for company growth as well as for achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage. A teaching process oriented towards understanding reality can turn out to be very effective for entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial education should be multidimensional because the entrepreneurial process is a complex one. It should provide not only theoretical knowledge and understanding but also develop the abilities and skills which are necessary to start, run and expand a business. These

features are reflected in the three main aims of entrepreneurial education: to understand the nature of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial process (education about), to prepare students for starting their own business activity (education for), and to deliver hands-on training for entrepreneurs in companies (education in enterprise) (Balan, Metcalfe, 2012). Entrepreneurial education concerns three elements in particular: understanding the essence of entrepreneurship, becoming entrepreneurial and becoming an entrepreneur (Heinonen, Poikkijoki, 2006).

The number of courses and educational programmes in the area of entrepreneurship is constantly increasing, but there seems to be little scientific evidence indicating the potential usefulness of entrepreneurial and managerial education for future business activity (Heinonen, 2007). There are conflicting opinions: according to some views entrepreneurship can be developed through formal education; according to others entrepreneurship is a natural and innate characteristic that cannot be developed by means of education. There are also, however, other opinions and according to these, even if entrepreneurial education does not lead directly to the starting of new companies, in the long term it may lead to the development of unique entrepreneurial skills (Jones, 2010).

The possibility of effective entrepreneurial education is connected with identifying the most appropriate teaching method. It is often recommended that a problem-based learning approach could be an effective pedagogical approach for entrepreneurial education (Tan, Ng, 2006), more adjusted to the specific needs of the target audience rather than simply providing generic courses, and that it ought to encompass all possible educational aspects: being curriculum based along with extra-curricular activities for students, as well as university-based business start-up support for students and graduates (Smith, Beasley, 2011). Entrepreneurial education should focus on the human being as a whole. Entrepreneurs need not only knowledge but also new ways of thinking, new abilities and new modes of behaviour (Heinonen, Poikkijoki, 2006). The most effective programmes for entrepreneurial education incorporate elements of "learning-by-doing" (Tan, Ng, 2006). Additionally, entrepreneurial education requires particular engagement on the part of the students (Balan, Metcalfe, 2012).

2. THE CASE STUDY METHOD IN ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION

The appropriate teaching methods may play a fundamental role in the success of entrepreneurial education. An example of a teaching method which can be useful in entrepreneurial education is the case study method. This method can be used both for academic and teaching purposes. As a teaching method it involves describing a specific business situation and encouraging students to analyse and comprehensively evaluate it (Little, Brookes, Plamer, 2008). This analysis focuses on the factors which influence the relationship between a studied entity and its surroundings, as well as thoroughly examining one particular case which exemplifies certain more general phenomena (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The case study method was popularised by the Harvard Business School in the early 20th century (Barsaukas P., Pundziene A., Maaja V., 2010) and is now used by the majority of business schools worldwide.

A case study presents a specific problem or event based on a real-life situation. It usually includes an event, the people involved in this event, and the circumstances which have an impact on it (Roselle, 1996). Employing the case study method involves analysing qualitative and quantitative data, taking decisions regarding the most appropriate actions and recommendations, as well as sharing and discussing those decisions with other learners (Cranston, 2008). The students assume the roles of the people involved in a given situation, analyse the situation from different angles, and then are asked to suggest possible decisions which would prove the most beneficial at a given point in time.

Analysing case studies develops creativity and the ability to look at issues in a broader context, as well as the skills of cause and effect analysis, and creating alternative development scenarios (Wereda 2005).

A case study is considered to have the following features (Jaques, 2008):

- providing an opportunity to analyse the real-life functioning of an organisation,
- stimulating thinking about possible alternative solutions,
- providing examples of appropriate and inappropriate, productive and unproductive as well as useful and useless behaviour,
- encouraging discussion on alternative activity options for companies,
- providing an opportunity for applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations,
- functioning as a starting point for future actions.

From a pedagogical point of view, a teaching approach which makes use of the case study method can be described as:

1. student-oriented, as it involves encouraging students to reflect on what they are being taught (Gregory, Jones, 2009). This features fulfils the requirement of entrepreneurial education to be focused on the individual as a whole (Heinonen, Poikkijoki, 2006) and it guarantees a high degree of student engagement.
2. problem-oriented, as certain problems are introduced at the beginning of the teaching cycle and these are later used to create a context and to motivate learners (Prince, 2004). This feature helps students to adopt a deep approach to learning as students who follow problem-based curricula are more likely to adopt a deep approach to learning than students who follow subject-based curricula (Richardson, 2005).
3. teamwork-oriented, as students cooperate in small groups in order to solve a problem (Prince, 2004) and as such it promotes interaction within a group of students and it is focused on a particular situation or behaviour. That is why it encourages students to look for better ideas, conclusions and strategies, and to enjoy the benefits of interacting with others (Peterson, Quarstein, 2001).

Probably the most important contribution of the case study method to the teaching process, as compared to other methods, is the fact that this approach helps to

produce autonomous and effective learners who are willing to learn throughout their lives; whereas the more passive methods, which concentrate on the content of the course, tend to produce people who simply acquire knowledge (O Cinneide, 2006).

Employing the case study method as a didactic approach can help educational institutions to address issues like introducing students to in-company learning and aid the development of their ideas. The case study method is based on authentic business situations, which makes the learning pragmatic. This method makes it possible to introduce "real life" experiences into the classroom (O Cinneide, 2006).

It is generally thought that creativity training can be useful for enhancing the entrepreneurial intentions of students. Also, heterogeneity in creative styles among students is recommended (Hamidi, Wennberg, Berglund, 2008). Using the case study method, where the students attempt to solve problems faced by companies and engage in creative discussions concerning possible strategies, can increase the creativity of students. At the same time, because of the diverse approaches of students to the situations in question, this method promotes heterogeneous creativity as it allows each student to look for their own individual solutions.

Entrepreneurial education ought to promote new ways of thinking, new abilities and new modes of behaviour (Heinonen, Poikkijoki, 2006), and the case study method fulfils these requirements. Through conducting critical analyses and in-depth discussions the students gain a better understanding regarding the situation of companies, which promotes new ways of thinking critically about previous knowledge and set patterns of behaviour.

Finally, the case study method can also be used in entrepreneurial education because it corresponds to problem-based and "learning-by-doing" learning approaches (Tan, Ng, 2006).

3. BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD IN ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION

Although the case study method has numerous advantages which seem to make it ideal for entrepreneurial and managerial education, there are also certain barriers to its implementation. These barriers are of two kinds: those connected with the instructors of entrepreneurial education; and those connected with the recipients of entrepreneurial education.

The barriers to the implementation of the case study method presented in this paper are based on the experiences gathered during work on the project entitled "Transfer of experiential and innovative teaching methods for business education", realised within the Leonardo da Vinci, Transfer of Innovation programme for the years 2010-2012[1]. The project is coordinated by Poznan University of Economics in Poland, and the partners include Navigator Consulting Advisors LLP (United Kingdom), ISM University of Management and Economics (Lithuania), Wielkopolska Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Poland), and Elmfield House Associates Limited (United Kingdom).

[1] Project number: 2010-1-PL1-LEO05-11462.

The idea of the project is based on the observation that the managers of many companies are not satisfied with their employees' abilities. An analysis of teaching materials and good practice leads to the conclusion that the case study method, employed by the best higher education institutions worldwide, is a highly effective tool which can bridge the gap between theory and practice. A specific objective of the project is to incorporate the case study method in business education within the consortium and to encourage its extensive use among trainers and educators. The principal aim of the project, i.e. the transfer of innovative and experiential teaching methods which will enhance the quality of business education, will be achieved through the realisation of intermediate objectives; which include, among others, training 30 instructors in respect of preparing case studies and teaching notes as well as preparing a minimum of 6 case studies related to running a business and testing them on a pilot group of students.

One of the specific objectives of the project was to determine the level of competences of business trainers from Lithuania and Poland with regard to using the case study method, and in particular to evaluate how participation in training can affect the level of competences. The study was carried out in 2012 and was based on a questionnaire administered via the Internet. As a result of the study 395 questionnaires from Lithuania and 231 questionnaires from Poland were collected, which contained complete statistical material relating to the use of the case study method and to the trainers' self-assessment of competences in this respect.

From among the Lithuanian respondents, 253 people represented universities (64% of the total number), and 142 people represented vocational higher education institutions, the so-called colleges (36%). In the case of Polish respondents as many as 23.4% did not indicate the type of institution for which they worked. Out of the remaining group of respondents (76.6%) 98.9% represented universities, of whom the majority taught at institutions which specialised in economics.

In order to assess the competences of business trainers with respect to using the case study method in their teaching, a self-assessment test was conducted with regard to applying this method during business courses. The trainers assessed their abilities in a number of areas relating to case study teaching on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated a lack of ability and 7 indicated a very high level of ability.

The barriers to the implementation of the case study method on the part of instructors can be divided into two groups: those which are connected with writing case studies and those which are connected with teaching with case studies.

Writing a case study consists of the following stages (Yin, 1994; Neale, Thapa, Boyce 2006; Lynn 1999):

1. Designing a case study, which involves determining the aims and the competences that the case study is to develop; structuring the case study; determining the form and type of the case study, the sources of data, and the approaches to problem solving;
2. Developing and conducting the case study, which involves, among other things, establishing cooperation

with companies; collecting data; conducting surveys and interviews; and the critical verification of the data collected;

3. Analysing the data included in a case study, which involves examining, categorising, and recombining the evidence needed for solving the initial propositions of the study (Miles, Huberman 1984);
4. Specifying the consequences and implications of actions as well as making recommendations, which involves reflecting upon the solutions which can be adopted; but as these solutions were not always adopted in real life situations and the appropriateness of a decision cannot always be verified, the experience and intuition of the instructor are extremely important (Rao, 2012).

In order to evaluate the competences of trainers from Lithuania and Poland in respect of case study writing, the questionnaire listed 14 competences, the level of which the respondents were expected to indicate. These competences were related to the four stages of writing a case study listed above. More specifically, the competences related to preparing a case study were assessed in respect of the following abilities:

- clearly formulating the teaching objectives for the case studies developed,
- designing an outline of a case study (headings and structure),
- effective opening of a case study session,
- creating an opening paragraph which will grab and help maintain the attention of the reader throughout the case study,
- structuring a case study,
- determining a time frame for a case study,
- using a narrative structure which makes it possible to understand the chain of events,
- integrating unexpected events in a case study,
- creating a summary for a case study reiterating the most important issues and problems.

Regarding the stage of developing and conducting a case study the questionnaire focused on trainers' abilities with respect to determining the most essential elements which must be included in a case study and communicating them to the reader. The competences which are necessary for the stage of analysing the data included in a case study relate to the ability to decide how many and how complex the assumptions in a case study should be as well as what analytical methods are necessary for processing the data in a case study. The last stage, concerning specifying the consequences and implications of actions as well as recommendations, requires competences in respect of:

- The ability to make a decision regarding how long the case study should be, whether it is clear, and what charts, tables etc. it should contain,
- The ability to reconcile the target group's learning needs to the complexity of a case study.

The results of a self-assessment test for trainers from Lithuania and Poland are presented in Table 1. The level of competences was assessed on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated a lack of ability and 7 a very high level of ability. Among the trainers from Lithuania and Poland who took part in the study the average level of self-assessment was 3.01 and 3.87 respectively, which can be considered as being close to the median value. Such a level of competence is insufficient for writing case studies which would effectively contribute to the teaching/learning process.

Among the Lithuanian trainers who participated in the study, the lowest marks were indicated with regards to abilities connected with structuring a case study (2.5 points) and the ability of integrating unexpected events in a case study for the case study to have one or more issues which need to be solved (2.8 points). The trainers from Poland indicated the lowest marks for competences in the following areas (3.7 points each):

- The ability to create an opening paragraph,
- The ability to integrate unexpected events in a case study for the case study to have one or more issues which need to be solved,
- The ability to decide how many and how complex the assumptions in a case study should be,
- The ability to reconcile the target group's learning needs with the level of complexity of a case study.

Table 1 Results of a self-assessment test regarding competences in respect of case study writing for Lithuanian and Polish trainers (average points on the scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates a lack of ability and 7 a very high level of ability)

Statements relating to competences in respect of case study writing	Average self-assessment of trainers	
	Lithuania	Poland
I can clearly formulate the teaching objectives for the case studies I develop	3.1	4.2
I can design the outline for a case study (headings and structure)	3.1	4.1
I can open a case study session effectively	3.1	3.9
I can create an opening paragraph which will grab and help maintain the attention of the reader throughout the case study	3.1	3.7
I can structure a case study	2.5	3.9
I can determine a time frame for a case study. It is always clear when the events took place	3	3.8
I can use a narrative structure which makes it possible to understand the chain of events (cause and effect)	3.2	3.9
I can integrate unexpected events in a case study. A case study contains one or more issues which need to be solved	2.8	3.7
I can highlight the key elements for inclusion in a case study and to be communicated to the reader	3.1	4
I can create a meaningful summary of a case study reiterating the most important issues and problems	3.1	4
I can determine how many and how complex the assumptions in a case study should be	3	3.7
I can determine what analytical methods are necessary for processing the data in a case study	3.1	3.8
I can determine how long a case study should be, whether it is clear, and what tables, charts etc. it should contain	3	3.8
I can reconcile the target group's learning needs with the level of complexity of a case study	3.1	3.7
Average level of competence self-assessment	**3.021**	**3.871**

Source: Own compilation based on questionnaire results

The trainers from Lithuania indicated the highest marks for the ability of using a narrative structure which makes it possible to understand the chain of events (3.2 points). Among the trainers from Poland the categories which received the highest marks included competences in respect being able to clearly formulate the teaching objectives for the case studies developed (4.2 points) and to design an outline for a case study, i.e. the structure and headings (4.1 points). It is worth noting that the studied group of trainers from both countries were considerably diverse in respect of the competences they possessed with regard to case study writing. The difference between the ability which received the lowest mark (2.5 points) and the one with the highest mark (4.2 points) was 1.7 points on a scale from 1 to 7. Looking at the two countries individually, the disparity is smaller: among the trainers from Lithuania it amounted to 0.7 points (between 2.5 and 3.2 points), and among Polish trainers 0.5 points (between 3.7 and 4.2 points).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of competences in respect of case study writing is fairly low, as it only slightly exceeds the median level. Even those competences which were given the highest marks are far from excellent as they were assessed at a level of only 4.2 points out of 7.

Two solutions can be recommended to address this issue. The first recommendation could be to use existing case studies which are available from specialised institutions or published in journals and monographs. However, there is one problem connected with such a solution: the majority of the available ready-made case studies describe the situation of companies which operate in economically developed countries. There is a shortage of case studies which present companies from Central and Eastern Europe, because using case studies which involve companies located in the immediate environment increases the effectiveness of entrepreneurial education.

The second recommendation regarding solving the problem of trainers' competences in respect of case study writing is increasing the number of training courses aimed at enhancing theses competences. An example of activities aimed elevating the level of competences in respect of case study writing is training for trainers provided as part of the "Transfer of experiential and innovative teaching methods for business education" project, realised within the Leonardo da Vinci, Transfer of Innovation programme.

The second group of competence barriers connected with the case study method is the ability of incorporating this method in the teaching process. In view of the relatively low level of competences in respect of case study writing, the ability to use this method in the teaching process is particularly important as it determines the possibility of using ready-made case studies. The competences of trainers were assessed in the following areas:

- The ability to introduce the participants to the session,
- The ability to initiate discussions,
- The ability to lead discussions using the trainees' contributions to the debate,
- The ability to ensure an appropriate session layout with correct proportions between student and teacher contributions,
- The ability to conduct in-depth analyses,
- The ability to appropriately conclude discussions,
- The ability to maintain a positive attitude throughout the session,
- The ability to formulate teaching objectives for each session,
- The ability to select appropriate teaching materials and methods,
- The ability to control and maintain the participants' attention throughout the session,
- The ability to construct discussions on the basis of the participants' level of knowledge,
- The ability to effectively organise a session,
- The ability to give participants feedback on their efforts.

The results of a self-assessment of trainers from Lithuania and Poland in respect of using the case study method in the teaching process are presented in Table 2. The average results of competence self-assessment as regards case study teaching marginally exceed the median value, and the level among the trainers from Lithuania (3.98) is similar to the level among the trainers from Poland (3.95). The average competence level of 3.97 on a scale from 1 to 7 is not very impressive, although it is a little higher than the level of competences in respect of case study writing.

Table 2 Results of a self-assessment test regarding competences in respect of case study teaching for Lithuanian and Polish trainers (average points on the scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates a lack of ability and 7 a very high level of ability)

Statements relating to competences in respect of case study teaching	Average self-assessment of trainers	
	Lithuania	Poland
I can introduce the participants to the session	3.9	4
I can initiate discussions	4.1	4.1
I can lead discussions using the trainees' contributions to the debate	3.9	4
I can ensure an appropriate session layout with correct proportions between student and teacher contributions	4	3.8
I can, if necessary, conduct in-depth analyses	4	3.9
I can appropriately conclude discussions	4.1	4.1
I can maintain a positive attitude throughout the session	4	4.2
I can formulate teaching objectives for each session	4.1	4.1
I can select appropriate teaching materials and methods	4	3.9
I can control and maintain the participants' attention throughout the session	3.9	3.8
I can construct discussions on the basis of the participants' level of knowledge	3.9	3.9
I can effectively organize a session	3.8	3.8
I can give the participants feedback on their efforts	4	3.8
Average level of competence self-assessment	**3.977**	**3.954**

Source: Own compilation based on questionnaire results

The trainers from Lithuania gave the lowest marks to competences regarding effective session organisation (3.8 points). The competences which were the least well developed among the Polish trainers were assessed at a similar level (3.8 points) and they included the following abilities:

- ensuring an appropriate session layout with correct proportions between student and teacher contributions,
- controlling and maintaining the participants' attention throughout the session,
- effectively organising a session,
- giving the participants feedback on their efforts.

In the opinions of Lithuanian trainers, their competences were highest in respect of opening discussions, concluding discussions and formulating teaching objectives for each session (each received a mark of 4.1 points). Polish trainers most highly evaluated their competences regarding maintaining a positive attitude throughout the session (4.2 points).

It is worth noting that the discrepancy between the lowest and highest assessments of the level of competences was not very large as it was only about 0.3 points on a scale from 1 to 7. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of competences relating to case study teaching is very similar among Lithuanian and Polish trainers.

Although the average level of trainers' competences in respect of case study teaching is higher than in respect of case study writing, it is still insufficient and may be a barrier to making an effective use of the potential of the case study method. In order to enhance the competences of trainers with regard to using the case study method in their teaching a recommendation can be made to increase the volume of training addressed at business trainers, such as, for example, training for trainers provided as part of the "Transfer of experiential and innovative teaching methods for business education" project, realised within the Leonardo da Vinci, Transfer of Innovation programme.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The case study method can be a valuable tool in entrepreneurial education as it is student-oriented, problem-oriented and teamwork-oriented. This method addresses many of the requirements for effective business education because it makes it possible to better adjust the teaching to the needs of the recipients, it ensures a high degree of engagement by participants, and it is based on business practice, thus making education more similar to "learning-by-doing." However, in order for this teaching method to be used successfully business trainers must possess certain competences both in respect of the process of writing case studies and in respect of using this method in the teaching process.

In order to assess the competences of business trainers with regard to working with the case study method a questionnaire study was conducted, in the course of which trainers from Lithuania and Poland assessed their own competences in this area. The results of the self-assessment test of business trainers' competences as regards case study writing and teaching indicate that the level of those competences can be a significant barrier to an effective implementation of this teaching method in entrepreneurial education. Both in Lithuania and in Poland the average level of competences in this respect is moderate, ranging between about 3 to 3.9 points on a scale from 1 to 7. At the same time it is worth noting that the level of competences relating to case study writing is lower than that relating to case study teaching.

Such a level in trainers' competences can be considered inadequate for the effective implementation of the case study method. Such an insufficient level of business trainers' competences can be a significant barrier to the propagation of this method. Because trainers can use ready-made case studies, it seems that it is more important to overcome the competence barrier as regards applying the case study method in the teaching/learning process.

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