

## Teaching Entrepreneurship through E-learning: The Implementation in Schools of Social Sciences and Humanities in Greece

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**Abstract:** In a constantly changing environment young people in Greece face the dilemma to search for career opportunities abroad, or to work in Greek private or public sector. Since unemployment is growing and the labor market gets more pretentious, people obtain more diplomas to become more competitive and appropriate for market's needs. Additionally, job providers claim that they cannot find workforce with real knowledge on organization needs ("skills gap" phenomenon). This knowledge is a privilege of business or economic schools. On the other hand Social and Humanities Schools do not provide such courses so it becomes more difficult for their graduates to be absorbed by the labor market. In order to maintain university's curriculum and provide students with further practical skills, e-learning as a supplementary tool could be an aid for those who want to start their own business or for those who aim to be the future, competitive workforce.

**Keywords:** E-learning, entrepreneurship, Humanities-Social Sciences

### I. INTRODUCTION

Crisis is a common term that describes adverse economic conditions. OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) survey showed that the 20% of people in Greece aged 15-29, who were not working, didn't have the opportunity to study or participate in any educational program (the group of NEET-a young person who is "Not in Education, Employment, or Training"). This reveals another hidden aspect of the current crisis: the skills crisis, particularly in countries like Greece, where the 1/3 of the positions requested by the labor market is not covered by the existing resources. Similarly, 2,194 young people hold a master's degree but is unemployed, 58,277 graduates find that their degree has no relevance to the labor market, 22,334 TEI (Technological Educational Institute) graduates remain unemployed, while 153,368 high school graduates are also unable to find a job. These figures prove that the main problem is not the lack of qualifications. They instead highlight the need for closer and deeper connection between education and labor market. This study, having as a starting point the global phenomenon of skills gap, aims to determine the usefulness of distance education (as a complementary and innovative teaching method)

especially in social and human sciences. The results showed that students of Panteion University of Social & Political Sciences wish to enhance their skills and to devote additional time of personal study in order to establish a program of distance learning which will operate complementary to their studies, with the parallel contribution of business people, in order to get closer to the demands of a complex market, either as entrepreneurs or as employees.

### II. THE DIPLOMA DISEASE

The major issue of linking the education acquired during the academic studies with the qualifications needed for succeeding high levels of work performance was the main concern of the British sociologist and scholar Ronald Dore in his book "The Diploma Disease", published in 1976. His analysis aimed to raise several questions related to the usefulness of the current educational system. Dore tries to investigate the motives that led and lead millions of people worldwide to obtain degrees, their reliance to the level of a country's economic development and the effects of this trend in the structure of educational systems. He states that when labor market is interested for an increased number of

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degrees, there is a faster inflation of diplomas, so the educational system becomes more exams-oriented, ignoring the real education.

He also found that society has become addicted to the standpoint that diplomas or degrees are not only related to an increased job performance, but also with their holder's personality: they are different, smarter humans, with better manners and clearly more civilized. This point of view constitutes a distorted reality. Attendance to universities, in the vast majority of cases, is not a selection coming from a genuine scientific interest, or from a need to train the participant on a business object, but someone's alternative to complement the formal prerequisites in order to find a job. Thus, this social problem, under the pressure of unemployment and job insecurity, has been converted into a paradox of human consciousness, thus an unemployed person "is guilty for being unemployed, as he didn't acquired a degree", while at the same time even if he has obtained one "he lacks the required skills sought by the labor market". Therefore learning has been downgraded to preparation for exams and universities have been transformed into a place where thousands of people have no real interest in their field of studying. Degrees are multiplied, so they are increasingly losing any professional value. As the value is reduced, people's pressure to obtain more degrees and more years of study is increased. And here is the paradox that the increased number of diplomas makes their owners feel more and more "cheated". And the vicious circle of "the diploma disease" continues, with young people to seek more and more degrees, as they cannot find job or they find one that corresponds less and less to their field of study. This situation could be linked to Zerigko's paint "Le Radeau de la Méduse (the Raft of the Medusa)" where over 150 soldiers on board are waiting for their rescue.

Taking this into account it is necessary to offer a curriculum that enhances learners' interest and adapts to new developments and requirements, promoting substantial knowledge on key issues, and not a "diplomas market".

### III. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE CURRICULA OF GREEK UNIVERSITIES

As stated above, entrepreneurship as learning subject is found mainly in the curricula of economic or business schools, not as a compulsory but mainly as an optional course. The recent experience of European countries shows that non-business universities do not offer an adequate educational environment that promotes business and entrepreneurial skills as a viable career option. Another important issue in teaching entrepreneurship is the required skills and knowledge of educators and their willingness to switch from conventional to innovative teaching methods. Apart from classical teaching, the entrepreneurship teaching

could include the following:

- Workshops and round tables for transmitting the expertise, in-depth discussions with experienced business people.
- Case studies.
- Simulated exercises for direct understanding and addressing individual problems.
- Virtual enterprises for understanding the overall business operations, through simulation.
- Visits to enterprises (and if possible internships) for experiential understanding of business environment.
- Processing of business ideas (possibly innovative) to exercise in capturing opportunities for new products and services.
- Elaboration of business plans by learners with approximately real conditions.
- Groups of mentors (mentoring) for transferring their real work experiences.
- Advisory guidance to better understand the design of business or entrepreneurial activities.
- Participation in business competitions and innovation competitions to gain experience.

These tools could be integrated in a simplified educational structure as shown in the following Table (Table 1).

TABLE I  
EDUCATIONAL MATRIX OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

	<i>Theory</i>	<i>Reality</i>	<i>Virtual reality</i>	<i>Phantasy</i>
<b>Senses</b>				Business idea
<b>Memory</b>	Worksh ops	Case studies		
<b>Simulation , experience, performances</b>		Visits	Virtual enterprises	Competitions
<b>Learning</b>	Courses, Library	Mentoring , seminars	Virtual exercises	Business plan, mentoring, coaching

Table 1 translated into an educational program, takes the following structure (Fig.1):

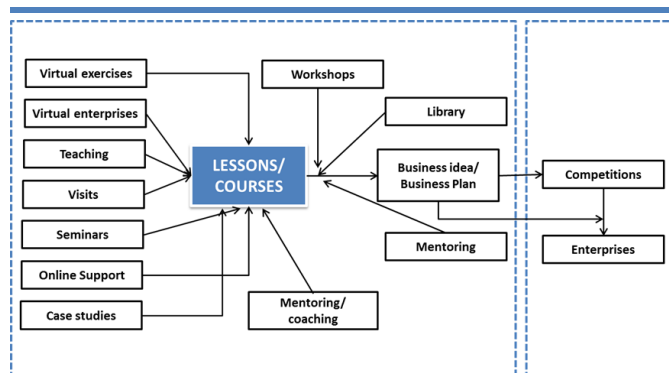


Fig. 1 Educational matrix of entrepreneurship

IV. ELECTRONIC EDUCATION AS A SUPPLEMENTARY TEACHING METHOD

The kingdom of education has greatly expanded with the advent of the Internet and New Technologies. Coursera, founded in 2009, is the most widespread startup in education which redefined the distance learning as it allows people to choose courses from 83 leading universities and professional institutions around the world.

Given the continuous growth of youth entrepreneurship and global skills gap, it becomes necessary the parallel acquisition of practical skills that will provide competitive advantage to those who wish to engage in the business world either as employees or as owners. At this point, is highlighted the necessity of cooperation of the academic with the business world, with particular emphasis on teaching objects associated with entrepreneurship.

This study was conducted at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Greece as a proposal for the design and implementation of a distance learning program with main thematic the "Youth Entrepreneurship". At this point we mention that Panteion University is one of the oldest and most historic universities. At Panteion operates an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit, where participate students from different departments. This is an important initial effort, but it requires physical presence both from learners and educators. So, it becomes clear that students who work or live in different cities are unable to attend this program. And here is why the participants of the current survey pointed the need of such a distance learning program, as it includes the following advantages:

- No physical presence of educators and learners needed to complete the course.
- It saves time.
- The content is still relevant and the participants can reuse it.
- Learners are involved in the learning process through innovative methods which make more

pleasant the teaching of complex objects.

Learners evaluate themselves, they furthermore evaluate their group or/ and the other groups, they evaluate the course as a whole and its components separately. They participate in all assessment procedures.

This kind of education encourages critical thinking. Any errors not disclosed across the hall but to each student individually.

Each participant can continue to further courses or programs depending on how much he has understood the curriculum (Personalized learning).

The participation in distance learning programs is rapidly increased in recent years which in Greek universities as an attempt to face the financial crisis by helping young, unemployed graduates and professionals to acquire more skills and meet the enormous competition of the modern labor market scene. The programs offered are addressing a wide range of Greek society such as high school graduates, universities graduates, professionals etc. and include Greek and foreign educators. The subjects cover almost everyone since are provided more than 500 programs, with emphasis on innovation and a clear orientation to labor market requirements.

However, e-learning is not welcomed by everyone. Many people argue that the physical presence of the professors and students cannot be replaced by computers. Proponents of this view supplement that during the learning process are transferred feelings, images, the dialogue is promoted and the communication is strengthened between the two parts of the educational ecosystem, (educators-learners). The truth is somewhere in the middle. Clearly, interpersonal communication and contact is more meaningful when are done correctly. E-learning could (and should) operate and considered not as a competitor but as a "partner / supporter" of the traditional education. Although many academic institutions support a wide range of e-learning services, in most of them the rapid development of new technologies has not changed the teaching through interpersonal contact which remains the focus of educational process. But it is equally important to realize that the educational environment is changing and while educators may still be effective using the traditional way of teaching, the new technologies cannot be used effectively if they are not willing to adapt new ways of learning.

On the other side of the educational ecosystem, that of learners, e-learning - combined with face to face teaching- can provide great value to their future. In particular, having the ability to attend additional courses of their choice through a platform offered by their university, they will be able to have a more clear view of their postgraduate studies but also of their career goals,

enhancing their skills in parallel, and therefore the chances, for their integration into the labor market. Market's requirements are not -as erroneously considered- the acquisition of a large number of degrees or diplomas. What is missing is the essential knowledge on key issues of each scientific field.

Furthermore, such a move further enhances the extroversion of universities as it allows their direct connection to the labor market and the important issues of modern society. This cooperation generates innovation and forms a circle where from innovative and leading educational institutions are graduating people with strong and essential skills which represent the future capable manpower. The circle ends with the extroversion and the "posthumous fame" of the University where all started.

Finally, e-learning is not a new teaching, but a new tool, and like all tools, if used rationally can lead to miraculous results. As noted by the report on the Lisbon Strategy published in 2007, Greece is the only country where unemployment indicators worsen as the level of education improves. This finding reveals two situations: firstly, Greece has demonstrated high rates of higher education graduates who have continued their studies at Master or PhD level. Secondly, degrees are not enough to secure a job as the market requires specific knowledge and skills that the majority did not acquire.

#### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

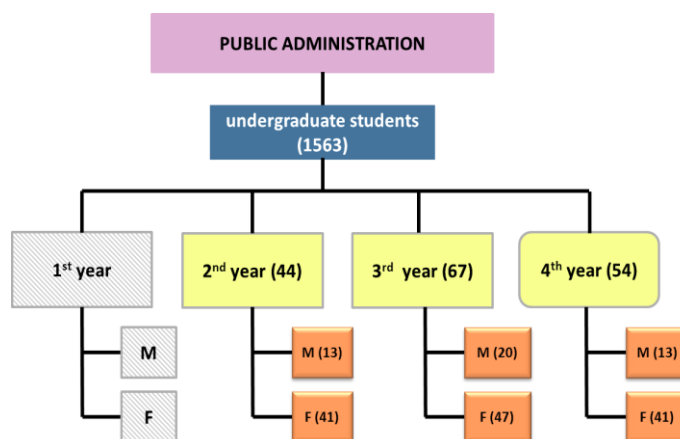
The current survey was conducted mainly in the Department of "Public Administration" at Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, as it holds the majority of university graduates, and will be further continued to the following departments (in undergraduate level):

- Psychology Department
- International, European and Regional Studies Department
- Communication, Media and Culture Department
- Sociology Department

The tool used for the research was the questionnaire, entitled "Teaching entrepreneurship in Departments of Social Sciences: the contribution of e-learning". The questionnaire was divided into five sections: a) general questions on entrepreneurship, b) questions on e-learning, c) questions concerning the teaching of entrepreneurship, d) demographics, and e) comments section, where participants can illustrate their comments or/ and proposals. The sample consists of undergraduate students of the Department of Public Administration of Panteion University as shown in the figure below (Fig.2). Subsequently we present and analyze some vital responses of undergraduate students. We chose to conduct the research to students from the last three years

of undergraduate studies in order to collect more reliable results, as students from the first year have not yet obtained an integrated view of their studies. From the total 1563 undergraduate students we selected a sample of 165, using the Simple Random Sampling statistical method.

Fig.2 The construction of Public Administration undergraduate students



#### VI. RESULTS

Entrepreneurship as a term is known to the majority of participants with the 94% saying that knows its meaning (Fig.3). They submitted very interesting keywords and phrases in order to describe entrepreneurship. Those that received the majority of responses are presented below:

- Innovation (36 responses)
- Creativity (21 responses)
- Risk Taking (13 responses)
- Profitability (11 responses)
- Initiative (10 responses)
- Knowledge (9 responses)
- Collaboration (8 responses)

There is a positive predisposition and optimism that pervades young people on entrepreneurship as an employment choice. Despite the vicissitudes of Greek economy and the factors that inhibit the entrepreneurial initiative bloom (Fig.4), the 49% of participants stated a preference to work in the private sector, while the 24% wants to develop future business activity, especially in the trade sector (Fig.6). As it may be expected from students of a Public Administration department to prefer the public sector, however, this alternative comes third in their preferences as shown in Fig.5.

Equally interesting were the responses regarding the view and the statement of students on the issue of electronic or distance learning. The majority, and more particularly the 94%, knows the term "e-learning" and describes it by a plurality of keywords and phrases, with the most usual the terms of:

- Online Education (29 responses)
- Affordable education for all (26 responses)
- Facilitate (12 responses)
- Time / money saving (9 responses)
- Innovation / progress (8 responses)

These responses indicate that students are not face adversely the knowledge offered by their university and they do not want to replace it but to enrich it, to modernize the use of e-learning tool as a supplementary teaching method. Regarding the subjects that make distance learning program successful, participants proposed the following (in descending order) as shown in Fig.7:

- Marketing (78 responses)
- Human Resources Management (77 responses)
- Psychology (70 responses)
- Public Relations (61 responses)
- Negotiations (49 responses)
- New Technologies (46 responses)
- Accounting / Finance (36 responses)
- Sales (32 responses)
- Legal / Institutional (31 responses)

Emphasis was given on the motivation to engage students in a program of distance education with a focus on enhancing the entrepreneurial skills. Among the alternatives, most of the answers correspond to the following two motives: a) obtain a certificate (the 64% stated that certification is the key factor) and b) the acquisition of additional knowledge / skills (the 49% said that skills are the most important factor). These two figures, if we see “the glass from the half full perspective”, highlight an upbeat picture of the real and internal necessity to enhance the knowledge in order to successfully respond to labor market requirements, but they also remind us the aforementioned diploma disease, clearly imprinted in the subconscious of Greek society: a certificate will give further competitive advantage and will increase their chances of joining the labor market.

Most of the respondents have not previously participated in an e-learning program mainly because they were not sufficiently informed about the available programs (59%), others did not have enough time (14%) but also because they were not interested in the available programs (10%). A percentage of 11% stated that doesn't believe in this specific way of teaching.

The third part of the questionnaire focused on what students believe that they receive from their studies at University. *It was observed that respondents, who are closer to the completion of their studies, declared that they do not receive the desired level of knowledge on applied aspects of the labor market* (Fig.7). Students of the second year of studies indicate that they are receiving the knowledge on practical labor market issues (52%) while the 48% says the opposite. Similarly,

students of the fourth year of study feel that they have not been sufficiently trained on practical labor market issues (52%) while the 42% stated satisfied (a rate of 6% did not answer this question). The differences are not large, but the majority of participants agree that entrepreneurship teaching could be useful if integrated into their program of studies as it helps the identification of work orientation and postgraduate studies. Of crucial importance is the contribution of people from the business world as educators/ lecturers in such a program in order to bring participants a step closer to the conditions and situations of a real company.

Finally, in the fifth section of comments/ feedback, participants declared inter alia that "distance learning is a useful aspect of study that can act positively, when not prevents the advent of the students at the University and the face to face teaching".

They also reported that "there is a need of courses' modernization –specifically those associated with the entrepreneurship, and generally with management science- in order to respond to the economy/market conditions and the constantly evolving theory of Management". They want an immediate installation of e-class software in order to help people who live far from the University or those who are working. More specifically, they declare that "e-learning can provide further knowledge and to deepen more on specific subjects. It also enables working students who want to participate in such a program because they really want to strengthen their knowledge but their work program doesn't allow them". The e-learning according to research is "an important step towards better education for all, as long as it remains low in cost and appeals equally to all".

## VII. CONCLUSIONS-SUGGESTIONS

The above responses are a reflection of young people's intentions from the Humanities-Social sciences. They demonstrate their will for direct connection of scientific identity with the labor market. They do not hesitate to incorporate the description of the term "entrepreneurship", with words like "innovation", "risk-taking", "knowledge" and "cooperation". The fact that this research conducted at the Department of Public Administration of a Social Sciences University, gives a greater value to the approach of these keywords and phrases. The 94% knows the average English term "e-learning" as a *supplementary tool* to achieve their goals, through which is offered an affordable education and time saving, as young people are continuously try to enrich their academic and professional skills. This method is as a guarantee for better and more efficient time management.

Concerning the subjects they would like to integrate, these are: marketing, human resources management,

psychology and public relations, which highlights a more human-oriented point of view on modern economic units in the light of social and economic crisis.

The breadth of knowledge is considered sine qua non. Skills improvement and the avoidance of the "diploma disease", increase the chances of joining the labor market. An important percentage also stated that it is not expressed by this way of learning.

In conclusion, the respondents are generally satisfied with their level of studies, and they only hope for a greater "integration" of market-related subjects. Research also proves the obvious. *Young people seek to link academic knowledge with the labor reality.* They could not be an exception the undergraduate students of a Department which ministering the administrative science and the public administration. It is suggested the immediate installation of a relevant platform through which will be given this needed deepening in the aforementioned subjects. This need is equally intense in-Social or Humanities Departments like Philosophical, Pedagogical and others, in order to involve experienced educators both from the public and private sector, who will introduce participants to the new trends of business world, and will show them a piece of the real «big picture».

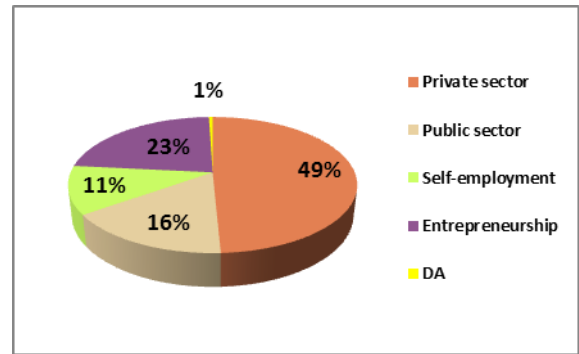


Fig.5 Which kind employment would you prefer?

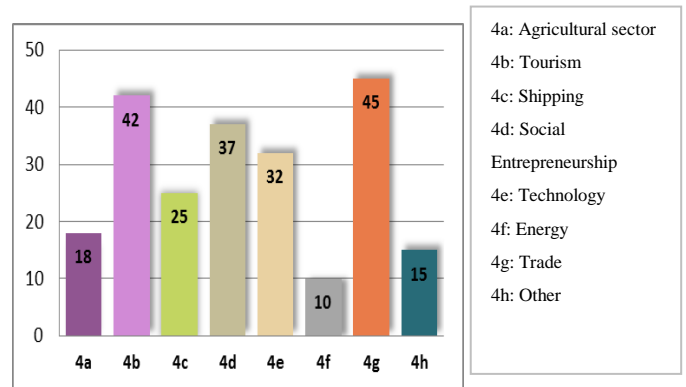


Fig. 6 If you choose to start your own business, which industry would you prefer?

APPENDIXES

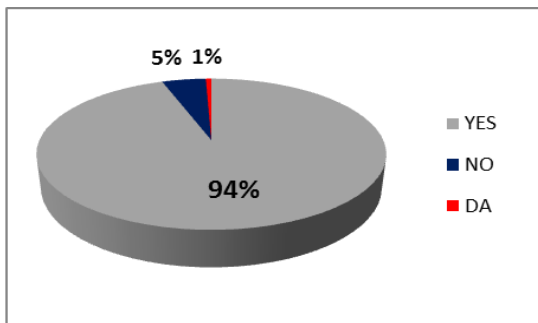


Fig.3 Do you know the term "entrepreneurship"?

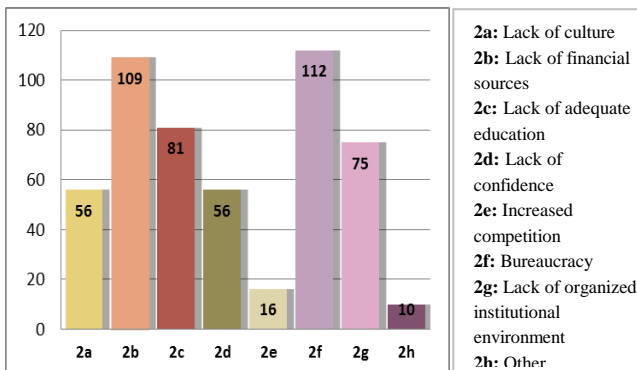


Fig.4 Which factors hinder the development of entrepreneurship in Greece?

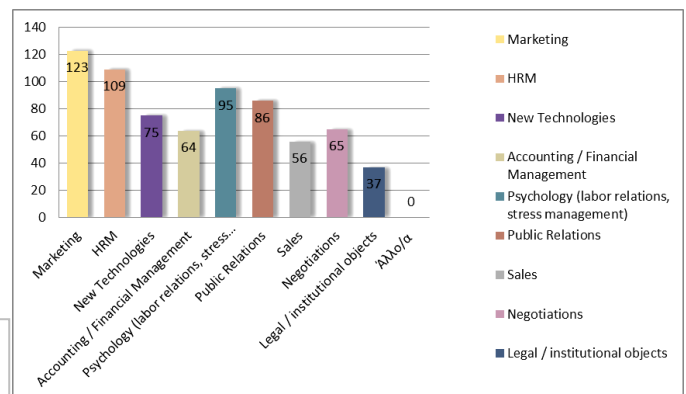


Fig.7 What subjects would you give more emphasis?

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