

Does Entrepreneurship Education ensure Entrepreneurial Competencies? -An Omani Higher Education Perspective of Faculty Professional Development Program

Balaji. S. K. Swaminathan

Assistant Professor, AFS Department, Oman College of Management and Technology, Sultanate of Oman.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.803014S>

Received: 18 March 2024; Revised: 31 March 2024; Accepted: 04 April 2024; Published: 06 May 2024

ABSTRACT

In the scenario of Omani Higher Education, populating the eco-system with ‘Certified Entrepreneurship Educators as trainers’, along with allied organizations that enable entrepreneurship in Oman is a necessity that needs to be addressed. A ‘Certified Entrepreneurship Educators’ program is a professional development workshop that had precisely been conceptualized for this reason in Oman and has served the purpose to this end. Specifically, the program had been proposed to raise awareness about innovation, including new scientific theories and newer pedagogies for benchmarking as well as expanding the knowledge to learn, “Teaching Entrepreneurship’ as a subject-area to teachers at varied skills levels. Furthermore, the content and concepts of the program had focused on enhancing the innovation value chain to improve the perspectives of the learners from not just being “small businesses” but aspire themselves to be “creative enterprises.” The Information that was captured in the process of delivery of this modular faculty development program was the first step to the development of a set of competencies. These competencies when tested can imbibe trainable skill set for a result-oriented and enhanced learning outcome-based faculty development program. The professional development program was a customization of an international experts’ modular approach to cater to needs. of the local environment. Capacity-Building on Competencies was the value expected to be captured and this paper reviews some competence development frameworks and their implications for stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Keywords: Professional Development Program, Modular Approach, Local needs Competencies, Capacity-Building

INTRODUCTION

The Sultanate of Oman had initiated with a certain rigor, the mentoring of the SME’s (Small and Medium Enterprises) after the Royal Directives at the Royal Symposium at the Seih Al Shamekhat in 2013. The Fortune Global company of Oman, Bank Muscat had taken the lead, that time to the set-up interactions with entrepreneurs. (Ramachandran, 2013). This exclusivity the SMEs had due to the national focus has come a long way in enhancing the skills levels as well as availability of Entrepreneurship Educators in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem of the Sultanate of Oman.

For any developing country at the early stages of entrepreneurship development, the availability of trained Entrepreneurship Educators is a key pillar in the ecosystem. One of the quick deliverables that is possible is by populating the pool of trainers through Faculty Development Programs or Professional Development Programs. The immediate benefit of having such trained faculty for the job would be clearly on the improvement in the innovation value-chain. The start-ups or the small businesses could become more creative enterprises rather than just a “me-too” or a non-innovative business. A parallel to the phenomenon

in the UK in the 1980's that a considerable number of resources were dedicated to the Small and Medium Enterprises, and many of them during that time were a "one-owner enterprise" that never ended up in the path of growth that was expected of them. (Burns, 1993)

As an organic extension, a growth path to an entrepreneurship venture, as a creative enterprise from an SME (Small Medium Enterprise) is a logical requirement of the ecosystem. However, this growth is the result of interactions of some more dimensions in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The resource people who act as mentor-trainers form an integral part of the catalytic process of growth.

The primary aim of this program review discussion is to

1. Highlight the learning outcomes of a popular entrepreneurship education program(s) as faculty professional development program in the Sultanate of Oman.
2. Map the dimensions of the program(s) to the entrepreneurial competencies.
3. Suggest ways to bridge the gap between the demand and supply of the professional competencies of Entrepreneur Educators.

Scope and Limitations of the review:

This study aimed to review one popular Certified Entrepreneurship Educator (CEE) program, a pioneering initiative in Nov 2015 in the context of a Faculty Professional Development Program in a nascent entrepreneurship ecosystem.

THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) has played a pivotal role in any eco-system for the growth agenda of small businesses. The Educator's themselves have traditionally been oriented from the Business Education background.

Naqvi, et al (2023).in their study had identified the gap in the literature about insufficient number of studies in the context of Oman about the perceptions of staff and students about courses on entrepreneurship.

• The Entrepreneurship Education:

Entrepreneurship education has been evolving since the 1980s, majorly in the business schools. The 1980 UNESCO symposium on the concept the international education put forward Colin's concept of need for the Entrepreneurship Educator (EE) being a life skill coach as against just a business skill educator. (Colin, 2014)

• The Entrepreneurship Education in Oman:

The MoHE (Ministry of Higher Education) had started the quest for bettering entrepreneurship education to be adopted in the national curriculum way back in 2012 with

"Moving Mountains: Entrepreneurship Education" workshops (Ministry of Higher Education). This and other developments further culminated in many allied organizations taking the initiatives forward. The work of the SMEF by the Certified Entrepreneurship Educator program brought in very high quality and top-notch trainers. Their early work was captured by the launch of the "The Faculty Forum" in August 2016. The discussions that have started from then on have highlighted the need for more structured and impactful program in the academic campuses in Oman. (SMEF Launches Faculty Forum, 2016).

The need to include all the aspects of the “Entrepreneurial Ecosystem” in the Sultanate was a requirement that had to be addressed by the higher education.

Manimala, the lead of the initial workshops in the area in the region says that there are a variety of ways in which HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) have tried to improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, (Manimala, 2012) which include:

- External association and assistance schemes
- Interdisciplinary programs
- Specialized offerings in entrepreneurship
- Entrepreneurship skill development
- Real-life entrepreneurial opportunities as part of the curriculum
- Distance education through electronic media.

After this pursuit to populate the ecosystem with more entrepreneurship educators, the CEE program was designed and launched in line with international benchmarks of similar programs in other countries.

• Certified Entrepreneurship Educator Program- A Framework for the Professional Development:

The Certified Entrepreneurship Educator’s Program (CEE

– Jointly certified by the Ministry of Higher Education and The SMEF Fund), was a Professional Development program that was a Training of Trainer’s (ToT) for the teaching faculty of the Business Administration Specialization, teaching both at the Undergraduate and Post-Graduate level in Colleges and Universities in the Sultanate. The program was delivered by experts from premium institutions and tailor-made to address local needs.

Certified Entrepreneurship Education Program (Phase I)		
	Collaborating Institution	Key Contents
1st Module	Harvard Business School	theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship education
2nd Module	London Business School.	Entrepreneurial marketing strategies and business modelling focusing on experiential learning.
3rd Module	Babson Global	Entrepreneurial finance and innovation.
4th Module	Swinburne University	Coaching & Mentoring

The 1st module of CEE program was a 4days program in November 2015. The 2nd module in April 2016 covered the teaching of entrepreneurial marketing strategies and business modelling focusing on experiential learning. The 3rd module was conducted in September 2016 and dealt with the teaching of entrepreneurial finance and innovation. The 4th module was the concluding module of CEE in December 2016 that dealt with Coaching & Mentoring of students and entrepreneurs.

This structure for a standard faculty professional development program was clearly a step in the direction of improving the pool of Entrepreneurship Educators in the universities according to the suggestion by Manimala, (Manimala 2012.) (Ref: Fig2 Theoretical model of Manimala)

• **Competencies development and its environment: A framework for action captured:**

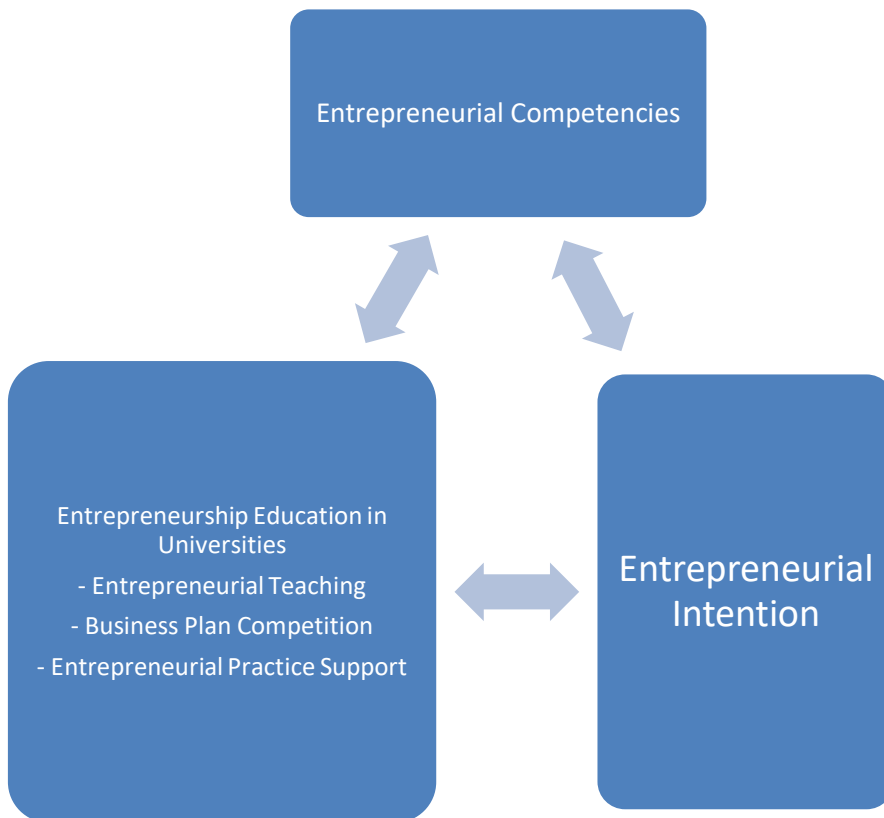


Figure 2. Theoretical model of Manimala -adapted by the author.

The objectives of CEE program launched in November 2015 were as follows:

- To have a total pool of 50-70 CEE graduates in Oman.
- To develop 40-50 faculty members as “STAR Trainers” through Faculty Forum and other training platforms. These faculty members will not only be teaching entrepreneurship in their respective colleges, but also in other colleges in Oman. They will even be delivering sessions in other entrepreneurship programs organized in collaboration with large corporates.

A case of evolving competencies on understanding the teaching of innovation through the CEE (Certified Entrepreneurship Educator) as an Entrepreneurship Education was to be explored on a continuous basis for measuring the outcomes of the Professional Development Program.

• **The Gaps in the capturing of the competencies:**

The Challenges of Competencies are that there is less empirical evidence of linkage of Psychometric measurements to better employee performance and the same, in predicting desirable behavior. There are no clear predictions yet on the Entrepreneurial Competencies, so the nature of the teachable Entrepreneurial Competencies for the academics is even more “Grey”. But a usable tool if the framework is defined clearly either iteratively or intuitively based on job description fundamentals could be helpful in clarifying the mistrust that Entrepreneurship Educators have amongst the prospective entrepreneurs. (Gibb, (2020))

METHODOLOGY

This review paper has adopted the methodology of mapping review (Grant & Booth, 2009) of the dimensions of competencies of an entrepreneur that can yield specific directions towards the gaps in the

literature. The rationale for the methodology is the research objective that aims to highlight the gaps in the literature on entrepreneurship education that contribute to the overall societal objectives.

DISCUSSION

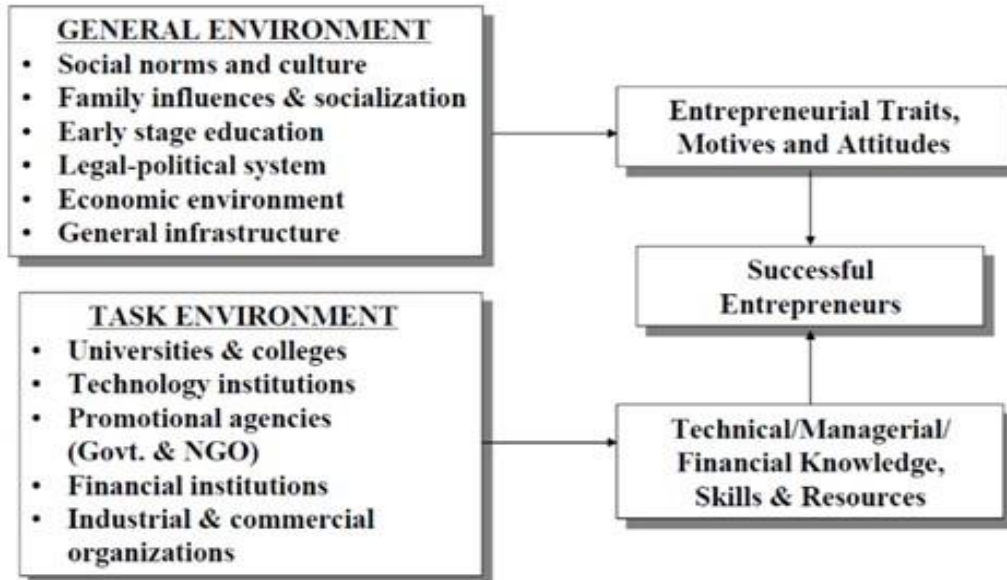


Figure 3 Note 1 A suggested Model for addressing the areas of intervention: (Manimala, 2012)

- **What can serve as entrepreneurial competencies for the local environment? The wish list discussion for a faculty professional development:**

The Figure 2 model above that presents both the General Environment and the Task environment, can serve as a framework for populating the competencies for a successful list of competencies for a Faculty Professional Development Program.

The General Environment

1. Competencies about an entrepreneurial culture and social norms linkage:

Creating an entrepreneurial culture as an influence in to the social and cultural norms is an element for the attitudinal part to the competency profile development as in the above figure3. Does my family support my initiatives about entrepreneurship as a career choice?

In a parallel to the comparison to a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem, the sociology researcher Anna Lee Saxenian’s observation that “The Silicon Valley is an example of a culture rather than a place” should be a guide for taking in the requisite knowledge for building this cultural outlook through possible interventions. (Anna Lee Saxenian. 1994)

2. The support structure infrastructure & ‘What should I expect from them as a start-up?’ - competency:

The current scenario in the Sultanate has many boot camps (Google Start-up Grind, The Co-working Spaces like Al Rud’ha, the Start-up Café’s etc.) that support the entrepreneurial culture. Competencies mapping needs to bring in the technical know-how of how to streamline these efforts into the formal education framework.

3. ‘My Family- My support & social influence’- competency:

The family influences and socialization with the “Hero entrepreneur” experience to be captured into actionable results in various stages of the “prospective entrepreneur” involvement, is another competence that need to be adapted in the curriculum.

4. Education to match my stage of business growth competency:

A workable structure for the different stages of the startup and entry criteria for each stage, and probably different courses as electives throughout the education journey of the prospect would help in populating the competency development framework further.

5. Practitioner’s perspective to Entrepreneurship Education – understanding case study- competency:

Case Study Workshops on not just case writing but on ways and means for the entrepreneur engagement in both the “Success and Failure” intervention methods could be evolved as competency.

6. ‘Able to employ and depend on external motivators and consultants for improving my game’ – competency:

Consultancy services establishment for the Small Businesses and not necessarily the entrepreneurial alone. This could consider the GEM 2001 – onwards, newer motivations to start businesses that include, Opportunity Driven, Necessity Driven and Improvement Driven Entrepreneurship.

7. Local business development and a ‘me-too’ business that can evolve into an innovative future business- competency:

The creation of “non-innovative” bulk of small businesses that cater to local needs as sources of Self-employment motivations or otherwise through semi-technical inputs from existing institutions in the Sultanate can make a contribution.

8. Start early in the school and what have I learnt in early education- competency:

The Early-Stage Education at the school and how this has an influence on the next levels may be addressed.

9. In a highly connected world, what is my understanding of the politico-legal system- competency:

Studies on the politico-legal system and what enables and what holds back the process of Entrepreneurship should be taught as a trainable competency.

The Task Environment:

1. Relating to the research culture and my relevance in it – competency:

The research culture that is currently championed by a central body the TRC (The Research Council) may be looked for parallel set-ups or different ones exclusively for start-ups and their understanding as a competency.

2. The policy frameworks and what is in it for me as a practitioner- competency:

The National Innovation Strategy that is being worked out in the Sultanate can seek relevant inputs in the “Entrepreneurship Domain” either as relevant course developments for achieving objectives or play a

catalyst in setting-up of supporting organizations and their experience as collaborators as a trainable competency.

3. Commercialization, funding, and its understanding as a competency:

The applied dimensions of commercialization cycle through incubation units and the managing the same as an experience can become a competency as well. There needs to be a demand supply of both these in the ecosystem. Organizing funding events and roadshows that culminate in sustainable enterprises.

4. Taking a tech approach and relating to an interdisciplinary nature of work as a competency:

The “Tech” approach to enterprise creation as future and innovative work that has inter-disciplinary research work are good learnings for a competency point.

All suggestions on the general and task environment intervention should be handled on a turnkey basis from end-to end starting with course design, training of trainers and sustainable functioning in the local ecosystem.

The Key Activities

- In the Higher Education a closer look from Business Lifecycle perspective helped understand the “Value Addition”
- Not just focus on “me-too” small and medium enterprises, but progress on the value chain towards creative and innovative enterprises for the knowledge economy.
- This is the key to the National Innovation Strategy of the Sultanate that is in line with the Oman Vision 2040.
- Higher Education can become a factory for innovation and an important pillar.

Conclusion: The Faculty Professional Development program, named the Certified Entrepreneurship Educator (CEE) in line with relevant benchmarks and best practices in successful economies is a step in the right direction for an evolving ecosystem. The exploration of specific competencies that could serve the local needs of the environment and its exploration is a key takeaway of the review and has scope for further research on defining the scope of the competencies and their specific successful applications to defined environments, that can help in building trainable sets of competencies that are measurable against objectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A note of thanks is registered here to the Ministry of Higher Education, Sultanate of Oman, for enabling the participation in the “Faculty Professional Development Program” named the Certified Entrepreneurship Educator.

REFERENCES

1. Burns, P. D. (1993). Introduction. In P. D. Burns, *Small Business Management* (pp. 1-2). London: Macmillan Small Business Series. Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Colin, L. (2014). Using ICTs and Blended Learning in Transforming
3. TVET PERSPECTIVES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING USING ICTS AND BLENDED LEARNING IN TRANSFORMING TVET.
4. Gibb, A. (2020). Remembering Allan Gibb. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship*, 38(8) 798-8.
5. Grant, M. J., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, 91-108.
6. Manimala, M. (2012). Promoting Entrepreneurship. (p. Moving Mountains: Entrepreneurship through

Higher Education). MoHE.

7. Ministry of Higher Education. (n.d.). <https://mohe.gov.om/InnerPage.aspx?id=4f2165e0-f35341aa-8b47-012d17eba09a&culture=en>. Retrieved from mohe.gov.om.
8. Ramachandran, N. (2013, July 31). Bank Muscat CEO meets Omani Entrepreneurs. Times of Oman.
9. SMEF Launches Faculty Forum. (2016, Sep 4). Times of Oman.
10. Naqvi, S., Matriano, M., & Alimi, J. (2023). Student and faculty perceptions on an entrepreneurship course: an exploratory study from Oman. *Journal of Science and Technology Policy Management*, 14(5), 885-911.
11. (1996). *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*, Anna Lee Saxenian. 1994. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. 240 pages. ISBN: 0-674-75339-9. \$24.95. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 16(3), 146-147.