Chapter 13

Does Entrepreneurship and Innovative Education Matter to Increase Employability Skills?
A Framework Based on the Evidence From Five European Countries

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ABSTRACT

The present study proposes a framework of key skills to improve the HEIs current curricula through entrepreneurship and innovative education. The approach is based on a questionnaire applied to key stakeholders, students (from economics, business and engineering subject field of studies) and academics, from five European countries. The results allow to identify the graduates’ skills shortages and the best covered skills in current curricula. Those skills are in accordance with the 21st century skills and constitute the foundation of the proposed framework that suggests that this mix of skills should be integrated and implemented into the curricula degrees of HEIs, through a group of innovative and entrepreneurship education initiatives to promote graduates’ employability.

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INTRODUCTION

The high levels of unemployment registered after the European economic crisis of 2008, in particular among recent graduates, led to an increasing worry among policymakers and scholars regarding this problem. European Union (EU) in collaboration with member state governments, institutions and scholars established a list of skills that graduates’ need to possess for the 21st century, thus trying to equip students with the skills and competences that fulfill the needs of the current and potential labour markets.

EU through the Europe Strategy 2020, in particular based in the flagship of ‘New Skills and Jobs’, tries to stimulate and anticipate the changes in the skills needed for the future at a higher education level. This policies and measures led to reforms meant to stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation through education, with the aim of improving university technological knowledge as well the knowledge transfer to the productive sector and to the society. With this concerns in mind, High Education Institutions (HEIs) became aware of the need to develop tools such as entrepreneurship and innovative forms of education to a better impart the adequate mix of skills that graduates need to enter in the labour market and to be successful as well more competitive professionally.

The present chapter has as main purpose to contribute to the skills agenda debate, as well as to improve universities’ assessing, mapping and reporting employability skills outcomes, proposing a mix of key skills framework, which may be used to inform and structure entrepreneurship and innovation education in the current curricula. The skills framework, based on these objectives, has been developed and applied within the EuropeHome project1. To reach the chapter main propose, the authors define a set of questions that they tried to answer with the empirical applied study that involved 1507 students and academics from five European universities:

- Which skills do students consider they need the most in order to get a job in their own fields?
- Which skills do students consider were most improved at the university?
- Which skills academics consider the students need the most in order to get a job in their own fields?
- Which skills academics consider were most improved at the university?
- How can HEIs deal with the gaps found?

From the data obtained were identified the graduates’ skills shortages as well as the best covered skills in the current HEIs curricula. The skills identified were: personal, interpersonal, communication, intercultural, thinking and entrepreneurial skills. These skills mix are the foundation of the project proposed framework that should be integrated into the economics, business and engineering academic curricula through a group of innovative and entrepreneurship education initiatives, such as learning materials and e-modules focused on the relevant mix of skills in labour markets for the 21st century, aiming to impart these skills through workshops and interactive learning at HEIs. The final employability skills outcomes must allow a better alignment between graduates’ needed skills and the skills best covered in the academic curricula, and thus enhancing graduates’ future employability.

After this introduction, the following section addresses the literature review, focusing the graduates’ employability importance and the skills needed in the current labour market to achieve that employability, and also the adopted framework of entrepreneurship and innovative education. In the next section is
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