

Entrepreneurial Attitudes of Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education is one of the most important topics in higher education all over the world. Students are interested in successful start-ups, innovation driven enterprises and are inspired by well-working entrepreneurial ecosystems. They also would prefer to work for their own, to build a successful business as an entrepreneur. In order to explore the attitudes and motivations of university students about entrepreneurship, a four country wide research was conducted. Students of different higher educational institutions were surveyed in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia about their knowledge, experiences, attitudes and plans about starting new enterprises. The main goal of the research – besides to give an analysis about the present situation – was to give a feedback for us, educators, about the knowledge and attitudes of students, which results should be built into our curricula. This paper highlights the results of the research related to questions of entrepreneurship (students' motivations, knowledge and intentions). Research results showed that entrepreneurial attitudes of Central and Eastern European students are very strong: not only in business-type courses, but also at courses of agricultural, engineering, human resource and pedagogical studies. Our findings call attention for the different economic knowledge level of students with various specialization, which should be considered during the development of teaching materials and curricula. Based on the findings of the research, new teaching methods are suggested to be implemented into management subjects.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial attitudes, university students, Central and Eastern Europe

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship and business success of small and medium enterprises is one of the most widely discussed topics of our times. Enterprises are the main pillars of national economies and the accelerators of economic growth all over the world, in well-developed and underdeveloped countries as well.

To be an entrepreneur, to start a new enterprise is an open working opportunity for anyone, both for young or older generations. The main intention comes from the business idea and the personality of the future entrepreneur, and after checking the feasibility of the idea, a business model should be developed (Vecsenyi, 2011, Vecsenyi & Petheő, 2017). Of course, for successful start and operation various skills, knowledge and experiences are needed, which knowledge could be attained through learning, getting experiences and accepting good practices.

In Central and Eastern European countries – as in most of the former socialist countries – the historical heritage strongly determined the entrepreneurial attitudes and motivations as their economic circumstances turned upside down after the political and economic changes of the 1990s and even after the EU accession in 2004. Small businesses still have to face the problem of entering into the international market, and there is a huge gap between different age groups about the assessment of working as employees or being self-employed. (Swadzba & Cekiara, 2015; Zozulak & Zozulaková, 2015; Dunay et al., 2017; Szerb, 2017).

Many international literature sources dealt with the financial knowledge and entrepreneurial attitudes of the young generation and discussed different aspects of financial and economic culture in different countries (Otter, 1991, Veciana et al. 2005, Sieger et al., 2011; OECD, 2013; Kovács et al., 2013, Farkas & S. Gubik, 2013; S. Gubik, 2014; Dunay et al. 2015).

This paper focuses on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial attitudes of students in the four Visegrad countries, which have many similarities in their historical background, traditions and economic situation. The aim of the paper is to give insight into the opinion of university students on entrepreneurship, to answer the questions about their motivations and attitudes on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities focusing on the Visegrad countries.

Methodology

To explore the current need for students' economic awareness, knowledge and intentions towards entrepreneurship, an international survey was conducted by an international group of experts representing CEE countries. The research project entitled „The economic awareness of the young generation of Visegrad countries” has been conducted under the support of the International Visegrad Fund Standard Grants. The project has been finalized by the collaboration of four partner universities: the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland, the Palacky University in Olomouc, Czech Republic, the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia and the Szent István University, Gödöllő, Hungary.

The economic awareness and entrepreneurial knowledge and attitudes of university students were surveyed by questionnaire method with mostly closed questions. The same questionnaire was used in all the four countries, which will allow the full international comparison. The research topics focused on the following topics: the economic awareness of the young generation, the general system of values of the university students and the entrepreneurial attitudes of this generation (Cekiara, 2018; Dunay et al., 2018; Swadzba & Zak, 2018; Swadzba et al, 2018).

The sample of the survey covered nearly 1600 students of the four countries, all research groups surveyed 400 respondents from the different faculties of their universities (faculties of Agriculture, Arts, Economics, Engineering, Social Sciences, Pedagogy and Technology), i.e. students of business and non-business type courses were examined.

Results

Firstly, were asked about *the current conditions* for the development of entrepreneurship in their countries: how do they assess the political, economic, social, technological and legal background of existing and newborn enterprises according to a 5-grade Likert scale (definitely good, rather good, rather bad, definitely bad, hard to say). The answered were grouped as positive (definitely good and rather good), negative (definitely bad and rather bad) and neutral (hard to say). Most of the students think that current legal and economic conditions of starting and operating enterprises in their countries are not proper enough. As it is shown in Figure 1, most of the positive answers was given by Polish students: 33,6% think that the economic and legal background is strong enough to start and operate an enterprise. Czech students are the second most positive (29,1%), Hungarians are the third with almost 26%. Slovak students formed the most negative opinion about economic background.

	Polish (n=400)		Czech (n=400)		Slovak (n=387)		Hungarian (n=369)	
Definitely good	1,3	33,6%	1,3	29,1%	0,8	11,1%	1,4	25,8%
Rather good	32,3	positive	27,8	positive	10,3	positive	24,4	positive
Rather bad	37,4	52,4%	50,5	56,0%	61,2	78,8%	51,2	65,6%
Definitely bad	15,0	negative	5,5	negative	17,6	negative	14,4	negative
Hard to say	14,0		12,1		10,1		8,3	
No response	0,0		2,8		0,0		0,3	
Total	100,0		100,0		100,0		100,0	

Figure 1: Opinion about the current conditions for the development of entrepreneurship (%)

The next question was related to the *entrepreneurial family background*: ‘Does anyone in your close family (grandparents, father, mother, brother or sister) run own business?’ Answers are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Family background: entrepreneurial activities or business ownership in families (%)

Answer	Polish (n=400)	Czech (n=400)	Slovak (n=387)	Hungarian (n=369)
Yes	51,8	47,8	<i>40,6</i>	55,8
No	48,3	48,8	58,9	43,6
No response	0,0	3,5	0,5	0,6
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

For this question, 55,8% of the Hungarian students answered that someone in their close family run their own business (in any industries and sectors, including agriculture). Present or past entrepreneurial activities in the families of Slovak students was 40,6%, while 47,8% of Czech and 51,5% of Polish respondents indicated that their families have entrepreneurial experiences and/or perform business activities.

After excluding the non-informative 'no response' category, a Chi-square test was conducted. Its results ($P < 0,01$) showed significant differences in the opinion of students from different V4 countries about entrepreneurial experiences and business ownership in their families. In Table 1, grey colored cells show the significantly higher, the numbers in italic refer to the significantly low proportions based on the Adjusted Residuals. The answers of the Hungarian students showed significantly higher business activities in the family background, while Slovak students have a significantly lower entrepreneurial family background. In case of Czech and Polish students, the proportion of families with entrepreneurial activities was relatively closer to the average of the Visegrad countries.

Students were asked about their *motivations, intentions and attitudes about entrepreneurship*, entrepreneurial life. A relatively high share of Polish respondents (43,5%) showed interest in having own business in the future. This proportion was 28,9% among Slovak students and 27,1% in Hungary, and only 19,3% of the Czech respondents showed intentions towards starting own business in the future.

4,1% of the Slovak students have already owned enterprise at the time of the survey, their Czech and Hungarian fellows were both represented by 3,5-3,5%. Polish respondents showed the lowest results, only 1,5% of them owned and operated their own enterprise. 2,8% of Polish, 1,9% of Hungarian, 1,3% of Slovak and 0,3% of the Czech students have had negative experiences in entrepreneurial life: they have already started enterprise unsuccessfully and they do not intend to start again.

Polish students showed a high uncertainty in answering the question (17,3% marked the answer 'hard to say'). 40,9% of Hungarian students have thought about starting a new enterprise, but have not decided yet. 20,5% of the Czech respondents have never thought about entrepreneurship and 21,5% of them did not take entrepreneurial life into account in their future plans.

	Level of Entrepreneurial attitude	Polish (n=400)	Czech (n=400)	Slovak (n=387)	Hungarian (n=369)
I already own (co-own) a private company	high	49,0	31,0	38,2	37,9
I want to soon start my own company					
I'm thinking of starting my own business in the future					
I have thought about it, but have not decided	medium	20,3	25,8	29,2	40,9
I have never given it much thought	low	13,6	42,3	31,0	19,0
I do not take this into account in my plans for life					
I had my own company and do not intend to assume the next					
Other possibilities/ hard to say/no response		17,3	1,1	1,6	2,2
Total		100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Figure 2: Entrepreneurial attitudes of respondents

After excluding the non-informative ‘other possibilities’, ‘hard to say’ and ‘no response’ categories, a Chi-square test was conducted. Its results ($P < 0,01$) showed significant differences in the opinion of students from different V4 countries about their affinity towards starting a new enterprise. By combining statements concerning entrepreneurial attitudes, three (high, medium and low) levels of entrepreneurial attitudes were generated (Table 2).

We also examined the possible relations between the different fields of study (polytechnic/agricultural/medical; economics; social; arts/humanistic) and the level of entrepreneurial attitude of the research sample, using Chi-square test (Table 2).

Table 2: Entrepreneurial attitudes of respondents related to field of study (%)

Country	Field of study	Level of Entrepreneurial attitude			Chi-square test
		low	medium	high	
Hungary	Polytechnic/Agricultural/Medical	19,0	40,0	41,0	$p=0,987$
	Economics/Management	18,8	42,4	38,8	
	Social	20,3	42,0	37,7	
	Arts/Humanistic	23,5	47,1	29,4	
	Total	19,4	41,8	38,8	
Slovakia	Polytechnic/Agricultural/Medical	19,8	28,1	52,1	$p < 0,01$
	Economics/Management	19,0	31,6	49,4	
	Social	37,2	31,9	31,0	
	Arts/Humanistic	47,3	26,9	25,8	
	Total	31,5	29,7	38,8	
Czech Republic	Polytechnic/Agricultural/Medical	36,9	24,8	38,3	$p < 0,01$
	Economics/Management	13,5	33,7	52,8	
	Social	72,6	17,9	9,5	
	Arts/Humanistic	55,4	28,4	16,2	

	Total	42,7	26,0	31,3	
Poland	Polytechnic/Agricultural/ Medical	9,9	25,9	64,2	p=0,040
	Economics/Management	9,3	24,4	66,3	
	Social	26,4	22,0	51,6	
	Arts/Humanistic	19,2	26,0	54,8	
	Total	16,3	24,5	59,2	

Based on the results of the Chi-square test, significant differences were detected between the fields of study and the level of entrepreneurial attitude in case of Slovak, Czech and Polish students (grey colored cells show the significantly higher, the numbers in italic refer to the significantly low proportions based on the Adjusted Residuals).

The students learning in Polytechnic, agricultural and medical fields and Economics and Management represented a greater share in high entrepreneurial attitude, compared to their fellows at Arts/Humanistic field in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In Poland and Czech Republic, the students of Social field of study represented a lower proportion of high entrepreneurial attitudes. In case of Hungarian students, we could not find significant differences in the entrepreneurial attitudes of students at different fields of studies.

These findings about entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions of university students of different fields of studies should be considered in the future work of educators at higher educational institutions, particularly in developing new curricula, subjects and educational materials. If students can achieve an appropriate knowledge on entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, they might be more enthusiastic and motivated and will be more open for self-employment.

Students also were asked about their opinion, whether they have the *necessary abilities* (e.g. *knowledge, experiences and skills*) which may help them to be self-employed. When we ranked the results according to positive answers (Definitely yes and Rather yes answers) it is seen that Polish students represent 46,1%, Czechs 56,3%, Slovaks 74,4% and Hungarians 67,7%, i.e. they think that they have abilities to be an entrepreneur. However, there is a relatively high proportion of those respondents, who did not give a real answer (Hard to say) or did not respond (17,8% of Polish, 12,8% of Czech and 15,1% of Hungarian students).

The question is that they just refused answering, or they are uncertain at the moment, because of young age or lack of knowledge, skills, experiences etc. 36,3% of Polish students consider that they have no entrepreneurial abilities, while 27,5% of Czech students think that perhaps they have not got enough entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to be an entrepreneur. Slovak students represented the higher proportion of 'Definitely yes' answers and positive answers. Hungarian students were the second most confident national group as 53,1% responded with 'Rather yes' answer.

Table 3: Entrepreneurial attitude related to the opinion about having necessary abilities to be self-employed (%)

Country	Opinion	Entrepreneurial attitude			Chi-square test
		low	medium	high	
Hungary	Definitely yes	1,9	17,3	80,8	p<0,01
	Rather yes	9,8	47,9	42,3	
	Rather not	42,6	40,7	16,7	
	Definitely not	87,5	12,5	0,0	
	Total	16,2	40,6	43,2	
Slovakia	Definitely yes	23,1	19,2	57,7	p<0,01
	Rather yes	28,9	31,7	39,4	
	Rather not	50,0	35,5	14,5	
	Definitely not	66,7	22,2	11,1	
	Total	31,8	28,5	39,7	
Czech Republic	Definitely yes	20,0	13,3	66,7	p<0,01
	Rather yes	21,2	34,6	44,1	
	Rather not	71,3	23,1	5,6	
	Definitely not	80,0	20,0	0,0	
	Total	38,6	27,8	33,6	
Poland	Definitely yes	22,7	13,6	63,6	p<0,01
	Rather yes	5,6	19,4	75,0	
	Rather not	25,5	34,7	39,8	
	Definitely not	63,2	10,5	26,3	
	Total	17,7	23,7	58,7	

Based on the results of the Chi-square test, a significant relation was found between the students' entrepreneurial attitude through their opinion about having necessary abilities and their motivation towards starting a new enterprise and being self-employed in the sample of all Visegrad countries (Table 3). Those students, who think that they have the abilities, knowledge and skills to be an entrepreneur; they have a higher level of entrepreneurial attitudes.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, entrepreneurial attitudes, motivations and ambitions of the young generation play an increasingly important role all over the world, but it has a special focus in the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Our results showed that entrepreneurial attitudes in the CEE countries are influenced by the relatively short period have been passed since the political transition in the 1990s. There is a strong social and traditional background (family traditions, lack of motivations, lack of 'Good practices') which influences negatively the entrepreneurial attitudes of the young generation. Nevertheless, there is a strong entrepreneurial spirit among young people. Our results showed that university students have intentions to be self-employed and they are attracted by the opportunities and the creativity of entrepreneurs.

In general, students from the examined four countries showed interest towards entrepreneurial activities, they are attracted by entrepreneurial life and think about

being self-employed in their long-term life plans, and they are interested in starting their own businesses. Polish students were the most opened in the sample for starting an own business: 49% of them showed high level of entrepreneurial attitudes. A higher proportion of Czech students would not start a new enterprise (42,3% had low level of entrepreneurial attitudes), while the affinity of Hungarian and Slovak students towards entrepreneurial life did not differ significantly from the average of the four Visegrad countries. It is very important to highlight that there are differences in entrepreneurial attitudes according to the students' field of study and their attitudes are strongly determined by their family background.

Their attitudes and inspirations may be and shall be supported by educational institutions as well, by developing well-built courses, which provide appropriate knowledge and practical education for the students with different background. The results highlighted the role of educators in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the importance of entrepreneurship education as it was already discussed by international authors from and outside the Central and Eastern European countries (Szerb & Márkus, 2007; Gibcus et al., 2012; Imreh-Tóth, 2014; Illés et al, 2016).

The attention of professors and lecturers should be focused on the need for preparing new curricula in the subjects related to entrepreneurship education, where practical knowledge and experiences are in the center (with invited lecturers, field trips, case studies etc.). In addition, new techniques, teaching methods should be used in order to improve practical skills and practical knowledge of students. A special field related to psychological and self-managing skills should be also included in entrepreneurial subjects, which may help to raise self-estimation and problem solving attitudes of students, i.e. the future entrepreneurs.

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