

DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURSHIP KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS BY MASTER OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING (MTEVT) STUDENTS OF KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

For the last few decades, academicians have been debating on developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills through different higher education programs. At this backdrop, Kathmandu University started Master of Technical and Vocational Education Training (MTEVT) in 2018 with a purpose of enhancing entrepreneurial ideas and skills on the learners of coming generation. This study explores and analyzes the strategies of developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, acquired and applied by MTEVT students at Kathmandu University. This study set out the journey with a research question: How have MTEVT students of Kathmandu University been developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills? This is a qualitative research and based on interpretivist paradigm within narrative method. The information collected from in-depth interviews of four participants were transcribed, coded, categorized, thematized and meanings were made. The study found that MTEVT students at Kathmandu University School of Education gained entrepreneurial knowledge and skills by courses and mentorship from experts. They were involved in hands on experiences during the course where they engaged themselves in elaborating cognition, networking and seeking advice from successful entrepreneurs. Even more, they were participating in events, workshops, webinars and conferences and being open to new ideas and talking calculative risks. Developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students has become a pressing need in order to help them see opportunities and become self-sufficient. Students in Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) programs must be creative and innovative in order to demonstrate what they are learning, being, and doing in their field. Courses, hands-on experiences, broadening knowledge horizons, networking, participation in events and conferences, and international exposure have all contributed to the development of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge among Kathmandu University School of Education MTEVT students.

Keywords: Strategies of Developing, Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Skills.

Abbreviations: Master in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (MTEVT); Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FNCCI); Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT); Center on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems (CEMETS).

INTRODUCTION

Setting the Scene

Realizing the importance of entrepreneurial soft skills like persistence, networking, self-confidence, startup knowledge, business planning, financial literacy and managerial skills, Kathmandu University School of Education designed a course entitled ‘Entrepreneurship, start-ups and Enterprises Development’ to the students of Master in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (MTEVT). These soft skills are echoed with theoretical foundations in which, Glaser (1984) argues that competence can be acquired. Also, entrepreneurs have agency over their actions (Bandura, 1999). Their cognitive development is important for understanding various choices around the social context Cope (2011) and entrepreneurs’ performance takes place in a social space (Gultafsson, 2006). In this connection, we, the researchers were interested to delve into the deeper layer meanings of strategies adopted by the program for the students of Master in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (MTEVT). Are these underlying entrepreneurial values being inculcated among students? Are these values aligned with the aforementioned theoretical orientations? What are the experiences and stories of graduated students from the Master in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (MTEVT)? What are the approaches used by the school through the MTEVT program to develop entrepreneurship knowledge and skills among students? These arguments created a roadmap for three of us to engage into the contour of narratives of graduate students of MTEVT program of the School of Education Kathmandu University.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills has recently received increased attention in the education sector in order to ensure scalability and sustainability. In this regard, Keij (2022) claims that students do not enter academia knowing how to develop a business strategy; rather, education improves their skills and abilities. Tittel & Terzidis (2020) advocate that the goal of entrepreneurship education is to prepare students to gain a competitive advantage by recognizing the possibilities of ventures in this complex world. In light of this, Leon (2017) emphasizes that entrepreneurial skills such as performance orientation, creativity, taking initiative, risk taking, perseverance, leadership, communication, collaboration, teamwork, learning, and time management will be incorporated into the curriculum to better equip graduates. One question here is how academia is developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students. To answer this question, Sousa (2014) emphasizes that academia is now more responsible for providing entrepreneurship education to students enrolled in various programs, focusing on skills such as cognitive, technical, social, business and service management, marketing, financial management, and soft skills. Subedi (2019) has pointed out that higher education has a new dynamism to connect with entrepreneurship activities as a performative strength. University Grant Commission’s Guidelines for Faculty Competency Development (2022) has also pointed out the focus of knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship in The Fifteenth Five Year plan as responsibility of higher education institutes. This response raises the question of how Nepali universities and programs are moving in the direction of developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students. And how do students feel

about what the literature has so far suggested for developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills? This argument serves as the foundation for this study to investigate a deeper layer of meaning that has remained in the experiences and stories of MTEVT students at Kathmandu University.

Research Question

How have MTEVT students of Kathmandu University been developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills?

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research and based on interpretivist paradigm within narrative method. We purposefully selected four participants to elicit information for this study with the in-depth interview. Among them two participants were from the first batch of MTVET, Mr. Hari (pseudo name) and Mr. Krishna (pseudo name); and other two participants were from 2019 batch, Ms. Ritu (pseudo name) and Ms. Rashmila (pseudo name). Hari has been working in an academic institution, related to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), for two years. Likewise, Ritu has also been working in a TVET related academic institution for six months. Other two participants Krishna and Rashmila have been working in TVET related development organizations for three years and one and half years respectively. The collected information from the four participants were transcribed, coded, categorized, thematized and meanings were generated by relating the essences of the study to relevant literature and theories.

Unfolding the Experiences

The information of our participants unfolded into five different themes which we generated from the participants' experiences and stories. They are described as below.

Course and Mentorship

Emphasizing the role of the course and mentorship to develop entrepreneurial knowledge and skills one of our participants Ritu opined: I have been developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills based on entrepreneurship course designed and delivered in the program and the mentorship we received from our tutors. In this connection, another participant Rasmila shared "*our program and courses nurture us in a way that we became able to see opportunities around us and to case them for the societal benefit.*" She also shared that she received mentorship from reputed teachers of Nepal, and they were creating their spaces of their own through entrepreneurship orientation. Their stories of struggle and success motivated us to be job creator rather than job seeker. Hu et al. (2021) argue that entrepreneurial mentorship fosters self-efficacy in entrepreneurs with "*parallel learning and motivation from mentors*". Incorporating such values of mentorship in during and after course is essential for enhancing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. University Grant Commission of Nepal (2022) has also mentioned mentoring abilities as evaluation criteria as for faculty in higher education. It demonstrates that the students' growth in entrepreneurship depends on the mentorship they received during and after the course as stated by both participants.

Gaining hands on Experiences

Remembering one event, Krishna narrated that he had been visiting many TEVT schools of Kathmandu Valley to observe, experience and learn from the site. He stayed there for two weeks to have hands on experiences. Likewise, another participant, Ritu shared *“We participated in internship program, apprenticeship programs to have hands on experiences that helped use to relate theory into practice”*. Likewise Rasmila reported that she gained hands on experiences through research activities like proposal writing, tool development, filed work and report preparation, apprenticeship, business plan, idea pitching, training and workshops, seminar and conferences and laboratory works. Remembering business plan preparation competition she narrated *“our teacher asked us to participate in the business plan preparation competition organized by the school. I along with my colleagues participated in the competition. We were asked to prepare a business plan within an hour which may have potential to implement in the market. I prepared a business plan of TEVT Circle of Nepal and submitted. Next day, the school call us for pitching the idea. I pitched it in a dramatic way involving my friends to convey my ideas to the audiences. My idea was selected in the second position”*. Lindner (2020) points out an example of Canadian business school which applied hands-on learning activities and found that the learners were benefitted for conceptualizing and launching their own entrepreneurial ideas. It shows that the opportunities the participants got in the course is preparing them with the real-life entrepreneur skill for future.

Elaborating Cognition, Networking, and Seeking Advice from Successful Entrepreneurs

Hari shared that he widened his horizon contemplating the depth of recent journal articles, books, listening experiences and stories of entrepreneurs of Nepal and abroad, getting network like TEVT Sanjal, participating conferences, interacting with Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FNCCI) and Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) Schools. Likewise, Rasmila opined *“I had a plan to open a TEVT related school in Nepal and I constantly engage with TEVT related leaders who created schools in the Kathmandu valley. I went to their workplace and had several meetings and discussions to fulfil my mission. I am still engaging with them to materialize my dream.”* In this context Ritu shared *“I have a strong desire to establish TEVT related training institute to support local government on TEVT related issues. For this purpose, I took advised from some well-established entrepreneurs in the Kathmandu valley. Their advisory support has given me strength to materialize it”* The discussion prioritizes the network as social factor to enhance social dimension of entrepreneurial learning as well as solving the problems of entrepreneurial journey (Wasim, 2019).

Participating in events, workshops, webinars, and conferences

Krishna shared a short story of conference participation. He participated in an international conference just to understand actual meaning of entrepreneurship. He discussed with friends, involved in the parallel sessions and asked many questions. Fortunately, he asked with one of the professors of entrepreneurship whom he met during lunch hours and shared the same table for the dinner that *“can any venture be entrepreneurship?”* The professor replied that there should be scalability and sustainability to be entrepreneurship.

Hari in this context explained that the course entitled entrepreneurship has been instrumental to develop insights into entrepreneurial knowledge. Our engagement in business plan preparation and working for a startup as per the plan helped us to learning, being and doing. During our course work, we got opportunities to interact with entrepreneurs, participate in webinars, seminars, conferences, TEVT dialogue to develop entrepreneurial knowledge and

skills. He shared that it is very expensive to open TEVT School in Nepal. He, therefore, has prepared TEVT related training package to aware people of municipalities of Nepal. He revealed that he had been chosen to attend a summer camp in Switzerland to take a summer course offered by the Center on the Economics and Management of Education and Training Systems (CEMETS).

Remembering her engagement during the program, Ritu opined that she went beyond the box of the program to get into the horizon of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. She participated in training programs, entrepreneurial workshops, webinars, internship and research activities. Recalling her past experiences, she shared I engaged in a community of practice that we graduated students created from our own efforts to share and reflect our practices. I also develop a culture of reading books to widen my horizon of thinking so that creative and innovative ideas can be generated. I also practice resilience that is I translated ideas into practices but that did not work. I learned from my failure. I also participated in idea pitching competitions organized by the university and other organizations to prove myself that I can be visible in the marketplace through my ideas.

Being Open to New Ideas and Talking Calculative Risks

Krishna shared that he is open to new ideas whatsoever come in the education sector. He tries to implement but before implementation, he carries out the risk analysis. Hari in this connection shared *“I made a market analysis of TEVT sector and came to this point of understanding that establishing a TEVT school is a big challenge from an individual side. Now, I have developed a model called Government + Private and International (GPI) to materialize it and we are discussing in our community of practice integrating international organizations”*. In this connection, Ritu shared *“I have designed a project to link schools with a mission learning and earning”*. The name of my project is agro farming. I have a plan to take 30 ropanies of land in lease to streamline this project. In my view, this farm will be a lab for schools to learn and earn. We have a group of like-minded people. *“We have made a feasibility study and analyzed calculative risks.”* Now, Ramila has half a dozen innovative ideas which she wants to pitch sooner or later to attract like-minded people to invest on their ideas to make them visible in the marketplace. In this connection, Rustambekov (2012) highlights that institutional environment, aspirations of executives and interlocking directives in boards are calculated to be open to new ideas and these areas have a strong connection with Behavioral theory, prospect theory and agency theory.

Key Insights

As researchers, we noticed that MTEVT students at Kathmandu University School of Education gained entrepreneurial knowledge and skills by courses and mentorship from experts, gaining hands on experiences, elaborating cognition, networking and seeking advice from successful entrepreneurs, participating in events, workshops, webinars and conferences and being Open to new ideas and talking calculative risks.

DISCUSSION

Based on the experiences of my participants, we came to the conclusion that courses such as entrepreneurship and mentorship help students develop entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. This understanding is consistent with Leon (2017) and Ahmad (2015) believe that academic

courses designed and delivered in universities can help promote entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students. In this regard, if we combine the underlying value of Theory of Reason Action, which advocates that a person's behavior is determined by his or her intention. Likewise, we also understood that MTEVT students at Kathmandu University School of Education developed entrepreneurial knowledge and skills through hands on experiences. This key insight is echoed with the key insights developed by Breznitz & Etzkowitz (2017) Aleksei & Svetalkina (2015) and Lakeus (2013). If we fuse Learning by Doing Theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978) we come to know that all learnings originate from social interaction. Students learn in a social context actively engaging in practical activities and tasks which demand hands on experiences. In this study, we found students to have involved in internships, practicum and apprenticeship programs. In this study, we unearthed that students developed entrepreneurial knowledge and skills elaborating cognition, networking and seeking advice from successful entrepreneurs. This understanding of our study is aligned with (Mitchell et al., 2002; Su et al., 2020). In this connection, the underlying values of the Theory of Diffusion of Innovation is aligned with this key insight that is entrepreneurial competencies and skills are transmitted to a wider population through networking, knowledgeable persons and though we believe in walk in the talk (Roger 2003). We also came to this point of understanding that students develop their entrepreneurial skills through participating in events, workshops, webinars and conferences and being open to new ideas and taking calculative risks. This key insight is aligned with key insights of (Keij, 2022; Tittel & Terzidis, 2020; Leon, 2017; Ahmad, 2015). In this regard, if we combine the theory of Planned Behavior, we learn that students rationally broaden their knowledge horizons based on their attitudes, subjective normed and perceived behavioral control. Why? They want to be successful entrepreneurs in the future.

CONCLUSION

Developing entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students has become a pressing need in order to help them see opportunities and become self-sufficient. Students in TEVT programs must be creative and innovative in order to demonstrate what they are learning, being, and doing in their field. Courses, hands-on experiences, broadening knowledge horizons, networking, participation in events and conferences, and international exposure have all contributed to the development of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge among Kathmandu University School of Education MTEVT students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are thankful to our four participants who shared their experiences and stories as data to our study. We are also thankful to Prof. Mahesh Nath Parajuli, who gave feedback to our article to improve it. Likewise, we are thankful to Dr. Siddhartha Dhungana and Dr. Shri Krishan Wagley for English language corrections of our article.

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Received: 12-Sep-2023, Manuscript No. AJEE-23-14056; **Editor assigned:** 14-Sep-2023, Pre QC No. AJEE-23-14056(PQ); **Reviewed:** 28-Sep-2023, QC No. AJEE-23-14056; **Published:**30-Sep-2023