



Inspiring University Students to Develop an Entrepreneurial Mindset

Nicholas Dimmitt, Ph.D

Associate Professor

Dept. of Humanities & Social Science

College of Arts and Science

Khalifa University, UAE

Email: nicholas.dimmitt@ku.ac.ae

UAE

ABSTRACT

This action research study examines the development of a university undergraduate course on Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The goal of the course was to develop an entrepreneurial mindset that would help students be more innovative and creative in their choices and decisions. A design thinking process was the framework applied to the course content and activities so that students could explore challenging issues with inspired and imaginative strategies to discover better solutions. There were numerous iterations to the curriculum and pedagogy to customize and improve the efficacy of the entrepreneurial issues and challenges for the students. The core question that has guided the development of this curriculum is 'How can we inspire students to make the best decisions and choices that will create enhanced outcomes in their careers and personal lives?'

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Innovation, Growth Mindset, Design Thinking, Creativity

Introduction

In the 21st century, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship acumen have become increasingly important skills for individuals to possess. This is because the rapidly transforming workplace environment demands individuals who are capable of adapting to change, new innovative ways of thinking, and creating pioneering opportunities. The ability to think creatively and find innovative solutions to complex problems is a skill that is highly valued by employers. Consequently, universities are now offering more courses that focus on teaching these skills, to help students develop an entrepreneurial mindset that enables them to be more innovative, imaginative, and better problem solvers.

This action research study focuses on the development of an innovation and entrepreneurship undergraduate course at a top-ranked university in the United Arab Emirates. The course was developed to help students cultivate a growth mindset and to introduce them to the Design Thinking Process (Brown, 2020), which would enable them to investigate challenging problems and find innovative solutions. The main research question guiding this study was "How to inspire students to make the best decisions and choices that will create enhanced outcomes in their careers and personal lives?" This question is relevant because it seeks to understand how such a course can help students develop the skills needed to be successful in a dynamic, ever-changing workplace and cultural environment.

Relevant Literature

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in teaching innovation and entrepreneurship at the university level (Kim et al., 2019). The traditional model of education is no longer sufficient to prepare students for the ever-changing career arena, which demands individuals who are capable of adapting to change and thinking outside the box. As a result, universities are offering courses that focus on teaching these skills, intending to help students develop an entrepreneurial mindset that enables them to be more innovative, creative, and better problem solvers.

One of the key aspects of these courses is the development of a growth mindset (King et al., 2018). A growth mindset refers to the belief that skills and intelligence can be developed with hard work and perseverance throughout one's life (Dweck, 2006). A growth mindset is vital in the context of innovation and entrepreneurship because it enables individuals to take risks and tackle challenges without fearing failure (Ries, 2006). This mindset is crucial for individuals who want to be successful in today's swiftly transforming work world, where adaptability and a willingness to take risks are essential.

Another important aspect is the use of the design thinking process (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). Design thinking is a problem-solving approach that involves empathizing with users, defining problems, ideating solutions, prototyping,



and testing. This approach is effective and powerful in promoting creativity and innovation in students (Razzouk et al., 2017). In the context of an Innovation and Entrepreneurship course, design thinking provides students with a framework for solving real-world problems, giving them the skills to think creatively with a growth mindset.

Methodology

Action research used in this study complements the design thinking approach in that it investigates issues from the stakeholder's perspective and encourages dynamic participation and input from them. It is an iterative process of reflective inquiry and improvement. It takes action based on the input and data gathered by evaluating the results and using the findings to inform and guide further action. The goal is to bring about positive change by involving those who are directly affected by a problem in the process of finding and implementing solutions (Sagor, 2000)

The pedagogical approach applied to the course content and activities in this study was the design thinking process. The course was designed to provide students with hands-on experience in solving real-world problems, using design thinking as a framework. The course consisted of introductory discussions, group activities, and team project work. Students were required to collaborate in teams to identify real-world problems and use design thinking to find innovative solutions to those problems. It was stressed that the students needed to get out into the real world to talk to the people, users, and/or customers that have the need or problem and work on the solution from their perspective.

The course was taught over 15 weeks, with 2 and a half hours of class time each week. The course consisted of the following components:

1. *Introductory Discussions: These brief preparatory lectures/discussions provided students with an overview, with examples, of the design thinking process step by step and its application in the context of innovation and entrepreneurship. The objective was to, as quickly as possible, get the students into activities where they could learn by doing (Thompson, 2010).*
2. *Group Activities: These were designed to help students apply the design thinking process to real-world problems.*
3. *Project Work: The project work was the culminating assignment of the course. Students were required to cooperate and work in teams to identify user needs and apply the design thinking process to discover effective, useful solutions. The project work was an opportunity for students to dive deeper into what they had learned in the course and demonstrate their problem-solving skills and innovative ideas.*

Results

There have been a variety of iterations to the curriculum based on the action research approach to customize and improve the relevancy of the entrepreneurial issues and challenges in this course. The most important improvement, based on class observations and student feedback, was to increase the number of team projects, and to give the students added experience in using an entrepreneurial mindset to discover more effective and innovative solutions for peoples' needs and problems.

The results showed that the course was effective in developing the students' entrepreneurial skills and mindset. The students demonstrated a significant improvement in their problem-solving skills, creativity, and innovation, as well as their ability to identify and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. This suggests that a course on Innovation and Entrepreneurship can help students develop the skills they need to succeed in the rapidly changing world of work.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that an Innovation and Entrepreneurship course can motivate students to develop an entrepreneurial and growth mindset, which are essential skills for success in a dynamic and evolving job market. The study also shows that a design thinking process can be an effective approach to teaching these topics, as it provides students with a framework for solving real-world problems, encouraging them to think creatively and innovatively. The findings of this study have implications for universities, as they suggest that incorporating a course on Innovation and Entrepreneurship can help prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in the future.



Moreover, the study highlights the importance of designing and adapting courses using creative and innovative approaches. Adopting an action research method of continual iterations and improvements, helped to ensure that the course was effective in developing the students' entrepreneurial skills. The results of the iterations provided valuable feedback for future improvements to the course and similar courses in the future.

It is important to note, however, that the development of an entrepreneurial mindset is not a one-time event, but a continuous process that requires ongoing practice and development. Therefore, universities need to continue to incorporate opportunities for students to practice and develop these skills, such as internships, mentorship programs, and real-world projects.

In addition, further research is needed to determine the long-term impact of such courses on students' careers and personal lives. This could involve tracking the career paths of graduates who have taken this course, as well as conducting surveys to assess their level of innovation and creativity in their personal and professional lives.

The results of this study suggest that an innovation and entrepreneurship course, using a design thinking process and a creative problem-solving approach, can help students develop these essential entrepreneurial skills. The findings have implications for other universities, as they suggest that featuring this type, of course, can prepare students for future challenges and opportunities and equip them with the abilities they need to succeed in an ever-changing world.

References

- Brown, T. (2020). *Design thinking*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Brown, T., & Wyatt, J. (2010). *Design thinking for educators*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Kim, Y., Park, J., Lee, J., & Kim, D. (2019). The effect of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurship intention: Evidence from South Korea. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 25(2), 368-386.
- King, A., & Grace, D. (2018). Entrepreneurship education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 20(2), 213-232.
- Ries, E. (2006). *The lean startup: How today's entrepreneurs use continuous innovation to create radically successful businesses*. Crown Business.
- Sagor, R. (2000). Action research: An educational leader's guide to school improvement. *Educational Leadership*, 57, 6-11.
- Thompson, P. (2010). Learn-by-doing. *Handbook of the Economics of Innovation*, 1, 429-476.