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Attitudes and motivations of Polish students towards entrepreneurial activity

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Abstract

Purpose – The Polish economy is continuing its expansion through the adoption of free market economics in the post-communist era. To encourage this growth in a future where difficult global economic conditions are likely to persist, it is essential that entrepreneurial activity is encouraged within the next generation of graduates. This study aims to explore the attitudes and motivations of Polish students towards an entrepreneurship education programme.

Design/methodology/approach – To achieve the research objectives the methodological approach adopted for this study involved semi-structured interviews undertaken with 122 Polish students. Each student undertook an interview within which they were asked to reflect on the impact of an entrepreneurship education programme on their entrepreneurial attitudes and motivations.

Findings – This study builds on Jones *et al.*, whose “snapshot” study found that Polish students had limited prior entrepreneurial experiences and expectations and welcomed the opportunity to undertake entrepreneurship education. The findings here confirmed the results of the prior study, but also provided greater insight regarding the reasons underpinning respondent behaviour.

Research limitations/implications – The data collected within this study are limited to the experience of Polish students. It is questionable whether the results are generalisable to different nationalities. Additional research must be undertaken to explore this further.

Practical implications – The results have implications for the construction and delivery of entrepreneurship education to student groups.

Originality/value – The study contributes to the extant knowledge in the context of the experience of enterprise education in a developing country. The paper will be of value to enterprise education providers in aiding the construction and delivery of such programmes.

Keywords Entrepreneurship, Education, Poland, Attitudes, Motivations, Students, Entrepreneurialism

Paper type Research paper



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Introduction

This study appraises the impact of a dedicated enterprise education course to a cohort of undergraduate business students within a Polish University building upon the results of Jones *et al.* (2008). The focus of the study is to qualitatively evaluate its impact and effectiveness in encouraging nascent entrepreneurial activity within an emerging European Union (EU) country.

There has been an incredible proliferation in entrepreneurship education provision globally during the last decade owing to its potential social, economic and educational benefits (Charney and Libecap, 2000). For example, in the USA, Kuratko (2005) observes that there are now more than 2,200 courses at over 1,600 schools with another 100 dedicated centres. However, there remains a debate within academia regarding the effectiveness of taught enterprise education and further evidence is necessary to validate its impact (EC, 2007). Rae *et al.* (2011) argue the need for all students to develop an enterprising mindset, skills and experience as part of their programme of study. They also emphasise the importance of developing creative thinking, confidence, social and communication skills. This study will provide rich evidence towards this debate particularly within the context of an emerging European economy. The results suggest that participation in taught enterprise education can have a positive impact on attitudes towards entrepreneurship. This study will inform academia and the enterprise education community and assist the construction of effective programmes of study.

The paper is structured as follows: it commences with a review of the relevant literature and a description of the study locality and the enterprise education programme concerned. Thereafter, the methodology employed within the study is outlined. The subsequent section provides the results of the research alongside the key themes of the results. The study concludes in providing a discussion and conclusion on the significance of the study which are contrasted against the extant knowledge

Enterprise education and training: background context

The small business sector in Europe remains paramount to the success of a local community's economic prosperity and the European Commission (EC) is committed to encouraging business start-up (Jones *et al.*, 2008). The EC recognises that this requires a significant commitment from all parties in both the public and private sectors within and between member nations (Nyman *et al.*, 2006). Baldassarri and Saavala (2006) also highlight that Europe needs more entrepreneurs willing to innovate and initiate business start-up in the current economic climate (Jones *et al.*, 2008).

Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that enterprise start-up and growth activity can assist regions in developing their economies increasing the levels of employment especially those regions that have previously suffered from high unemployment (Hisrich and Drnovsek, 2002; Wolnicki, 2006). Notable European examples include Twente University, which has created over 200 associated enterprises. Arizona University claims that its entrepreneurship graduates have founded over 100 enterprises (Charney and Libecap, 2000), whilst Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduates have created over 4,000 enterprises with associated revenues of \$232 billion (Voisey *et al.*, 2005).

To encourage such entrepreneurial activity within the UK, a wide range of developments have occurred involving the higher education (HE) sector which include the development and widespread provision of entrepreneurship education, increased linkages between industry and academia, the growth of science parks, business incubators and business support and spin-out programmes (Voisey *et al.*, 2005). In terms of measuring the utilisation of enterprise education within HE, the NIRAS (2009) survey noted that five out of the 21 million (24 per cent) HE students in Europe were engaged in enterprise education, with 48 per cent of HEIs providing it within the

curriculum. The National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship's annual report noted that HE student engagement in the UK was 16 per cent whilst 77 per cent of HEIs in England offered enterprise education as part of their curriculum (Rae *et al.*, 2010). Gibb (1993) noted its major objective is to assist develop enterprising people and an attitude of self-reliance through the process of learning. Enterprise education should therefore develop entrepreneurial people and their aspirations by providing individuals with the appropriate understanding and skills to instigate and maintain enterprises (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010; Gatewood *et al.*, 2002). Given the importance of SMEs to the world's major economies (Hisrich and O'Conneide, 1996, Jones *et al.*, 2008) the importance of enterprise education as a vehicle for new enterprise start-up should not be underestimated.

In terms of gender, Allen *et al.* (2007) and Bosma and Harding (2006) indicated that males were twice as likely to start a business as females. Correspondingly, the EC (2000) noted that female entrepreneurs face particular problems in setting up in businesses that are different from those encountered by male-owned enterprises. Furthermore, women may face considerable problems raising finance and may also have had less opportunity than a comparable male business owner to acquire the necessary confidence, skills and networks required to start and grow a successful enterprise (Jones *et al.*, 2008). In addition, gender-specific discrimination by finance and support providers, customers or employees may represent a further barrier (Lituchy and Reavely, 2004). Therefore, the provision of basic enterprising and business skills can assist initiate and sustain potential enterprises.

Entrepreneurship in Poland

With the increasing expansion of the European Union it is essential that member states network and share their expertise and talent. In 2004, Poland and nine post communist states became an integral element of the European Union (Nikodemaska-Wolowik, 2006). Countries such as Poland offer several advantages for business including competitively priced educated workforce, proximity to the centre of the EU and a huge indigenous market (BIM, 2006; Por and White, 1991). Since the collapse of communism in Eastern European countries, expectations were raised within the population of improved standard of living (Foley *et al.*, 1996, Reichal and Rudnicka, 2009). Indeed, the contribution of the private sector to GDP rose from 18 per cent in 1989 to around 60 per cent by 1999 (Osborn and Slomczynski, 2005) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rising from EUR 46 billion in 2002 to EUR 107 billion at the end of 2007 (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010).

The transition from a centrally controlled command system to a liberalised free market economy with a shift from public to private ownership, re-privatisation and the encouragement of entrepreneurship has, however, been challenging (Gordon-Dickinson, 2000; Kostera, 1995; OECD, 1998; Socha and Weisberg, 2002). Nelson and Taylor (1995) suggested that the culture of large companies mired the desire for improved competitiveness. New enterprises often lacked the necessary support and there was often a deficiency of entrepreneurial and managerial expertise (Nelson and Taylor, 1995). Eastern European countries have struggled to compete with their European counterparts in terms of productivity and competitiveness (Giffin, 1994). In addition, Poland is currently faced with rising unemployment of almost 11 per cent (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010). Previously Nefedova (1994) claimed that Eastern European was

lagging up to 60 years behind the West; a gap that has been difficult to resolve to date. Grzegorz Grosse (2006) supports this claim, noting that Poland was at a different stage of development to other European countries and has experienced development problems due to an incomplete economic transformation.

Poland has historically faced high unemployment (18.2 per cent in 2005, the highest in the EU), corruption, excessive bureaucracy and migration of skilled workers to other EU member states, issues which remain ongoing concerns (Smallbone and Welter, 2001; BIM, 2006, KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010). The ongoing decline of the public sector controlled coal mining industry has caused further problems in the Upper Silesia region which has been criticised for its lack of entrepreneurial activity, although benefiting from EU assistance (Blazyca *et al.*, 2002; KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010).

There have, however, been some major improvements (Kostera, 1995). For example, Poland has benefited from significant foreign investment from major manufacturing companies including Fiat, Hewlett Packard, Toyota, Cadbury, Dell and Sharp (Foley *et al.*, 1996; Packham *et al.*, 2010) aiming to capitalise from the lower operating costs. Moreover, Waters (1999) notes that there has been significant growth within the retail service sector driven by the introduction of multinational companies such as Tesco (Corporate Watch, 2004) and McDonald's (FCSR, 2010).

Coleman (1997) suggests that a strong entrepreneurial culture has emerged in Poland. Recently, KSV1870 Holding AG (2010) notes the increased interest and relevance of encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour through sensible policy making with the support of academia. However, the measurement of entrepreneurial activity within nations can be a difficult and subjective especially within a developing country such as Poland (Jones *et al.*, 2008). When the demographic profile of Polish entrepreneurs is considered, Coleman (1997) notes that they are typically well educated, innovative, had prior managerial experience, multi-lingual and between 35 and 45 years of age. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (Acs, 2004) report claimed Poland was ranked 12th out of 34 nations, with a total entrepreneurial activity rating of 8.8 against a global average of 9.3 (Acs, 2004). This evidence suggests an entrepreneurial culture exists within Poland (Jones *et al.*, 2008). Moreover Jones *et al.* (2008) suggests cultural barriers do not constrain entrepreneurial orientation and younger age categories assign a high social value on such a career option.

Polish entrepreneurs by gender

The literature on gender diversity in Polish entrepreneurship literature is limited. Zapalska (1997) noted that female entrepreneurship had flourished in Poland because they were able to recognise and exploit opportunities in the new market economy. Jones *et al.* (2008) suggested that females were more likely to enter self-employment and pursue an entrepreneurial career. Packham *et al.* (2007b) assert that issues such as gender, regional identity, national culture and industrial heritage need to be considered when designing and delivering entrepreneurship education. Jones *et al.* (2008) also noted that female students needed to be informed regarding the accessibility of an entrepreneurial career. By contrast, male students were more interested in the mechanics of business planning. Both gender-specific groups recognised the value of the course in enhancing their entrepreneurial knowledge and future entrepreneurial intent.

Enterprise education in Poland

Poland's economy has undergone a seismic change from the 1980s with its transition to a market economy and the emergence of the private sector in conjunction with an ongoing reduction in public sector employment (Kostera, 1995; Socha and Weisberg, 2002). Kierulff (2005) suggests that Poland has rich entrepreneurial potential which is being realised with the emergence of an entrepreneurial community despite limited effective governmental support (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010). Gordon-Dickinson (2000) and Kierulff (2005) acknowledge that Polish nationals exhibit appropriate entrepreneurial traits and skills but there is still a necessity to produce the next generation of entrepreneurs. Coleman (1997) posits that younger generations of Polish people assign a high social value on becoming an entrepreneur.

Issues remain, however, in encouraging the process of an entrepreneurial career even though the economic conditions in Poland are favourable (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2008). Recently, Poland was the only member of the EU to have enjoyed 200 per cent growth in its economy during the last decade, which is forecast to expand further in 2011 (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010). However, current high levels of unemployment (10.9 per cent in 2009) mean that individuals are being pushed into becoming an entrepreneur without due consideration and training (KSV1870 Holding AG, 2010). Moreover, Socha and Weisberg (2002) and Kierulff (2005) recognise the need for ongoing educational and short-term training programmes to enhance entrepreneurial and business skills.

Encouragingly, Matlay (2001) established that SME owner/managers in Eastern Europe had positive attitudes towards entrepreneurial and vocational education and training. Owner/managers were perceived to be industrious, courageous and risk takers. The provision of entrepreneurial and vocational training was, however, minimal with 95 per cent of micro, 93 per cent of small and 52 per cent of medium enterprises having no provision within a 12-month period. This was attributed to a lack of relevant training programmes, cost and available time. Therefore, one can argue that there remains an imperative to imbed an entrepreneurial mindset within the Polish population particularly the younger generations within School and University (Jones *et al.*, 2008).

Elements of entrepreneurial training

In terms of the entrepreneurial experience, there remains ongoing debate regarding the effective construction of an enterprise education programme (Hytti and O'Gorman, 2004; Kierulff, 2005; Kirby, 2002). Gibb (1999) posited three main objectives for effective enterprise education namely; to obtain an understanding of entrepreneurship (Chen *et al.*, 1998; Jack and Anderson, 1999); second, to acquire entrepreneurial skills (Jack and Anderson, 1999; London and Smither, 1999) and third, to learn how to initiate business start-up (Kierulff, 2005; Solomon *et al.*, 2002). Matlay (2005) amongst others recognises the need for further empirical research to examine the impact of enterprise education.

The authors initiated a research agenda evaluating the impact of an enterprise education programme in several different contexts. Previously, the impact of the course on student entrepreneurial attitude has been explored within Germany (Jones *et al.*, 2007b), France (Jones *et al.*, 2007a) and Poland (Jones *et al.*, 2006, 2008) and comparatively contrasted (Packham *et al.*, 2010). All these studies identified that the

course had positively informed career choice. Furthermore, the studies within France and Poland noted that the course had a positive impact on students' entrepreneurial attitude. Further studies (Packham *et al.*, 2007a, b) have been undertaken to contrast the differences in entrepreneurial attitude within several European countries. Polish students were found to exhibit the highest levels of entrepreneurial attitude and German students the lowest. A limitation of the Jones *et al.* (2008) study was that it was a quantitative snapshot study and further evidence was required to fully explore student's attitudes towards entrepreneurship motivations and reflections on best practice.

In conclusion, therefore, the literature review has revealed a limited literature exploring the deployment and experience of entrepreneurship education within Poland. This study will therefore qualitatively explore the entrepreneurial attitudes, motivations for study and student reflections on best practice. This study will enhance the knowledge base and provide key guidelines to enhancing enterprise education in a developing country such as Poland. The following sections provide context to the study by describing the institution, region of delivery, pedagogy and content of the learning experience.

Region and institution of delivery

The course was delivered in the Karol Adamiecki University of Economics (KAUE) based in Katowice, Poland. Katowice is a metropolitan area, with 500,000 inhabitants and is the capital of the province of Silesia located in the southern most region of Poland. KAUE was founded in 1936 and is one of the most prestigious economic universities in the country and the oldest institution of HE in the region of Silesia with over 13,500 students. KAUE claims to be committed to becoming an intellectual force behind Poland's access to the EU and hopes to achieve this by adding a European dimension to its programmes.

The starting of a new enterprise (SANE) course

The central mission of the Centre for Enterprise within the University of Glamorgan is to encourage entrepreneurial uptake. The associated Department for Enterprise and Economic Development (DEED) has been at the forefront of the development and provision of education and support for entrepreneurs and enterprise within Wales, by establishing the first enterprise club in Wales, and offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate entrepreneurship courses. A central pillar to this strategy is the SANE course, which was developed as a mechanism to encourage an enterprising student mindset. The course focused around two key elements, the role and key attributes of the entrepreneur, and the development of a viable business idea. Within the first section, students considered the nature of effective entrepreneurial behaviour and the characteristics and motivations of the successful entrepreneur. In the second section, students identify and thereafter appraise a start-up idea in terms of sector, customers, competitors and business structure. The rationale for the selection of the content was to inform the nascent entrepreneur of fundamental entrepreneurial knowledge, which included awareness of the entrepreneurial personality and skills required for successful business management and the evaluation of a valid business idea. This enabled students to consider the skills and traits of the entrepreneur and assess their own personal entrepreneurial qualities, thus demystifying the concept of

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pursuing such a career. Similarly, students were requested to identify and develop a basic start-up idea into a business proposal, with the underpinning rationale to demonstrate the attainability and potential of such a process. The course was designed to support multiple pedagogies including face-to-face and e-learning delivery to provide delivery flexibility. Consequently, it could be delivered in a variety of ways including block (e.g. over five days) or long (e.g. over ten weeks). The content of the course was customised to include more European entrepreneurs, companies and products. To date, this course has been delivered to over 5,000 students throughout Europe. The course has received excellent student feedback and achieved successful completion rates of over 96 per cent.

Design/methodology/approach

In total, 122 students from KAUE who had undertaken the SANE course were involved in semi-structured interviews between the years 2006-2010. Participating students were drawn from cohorts of Business and Finance undergraduate programmes on a random sample basis, although allowing for an equal gender-specific distribution. The data collected was limited to the experience of Polish students with other nationalities excluded. Each student was interviewed individually on a face-to-face basis for around 30 minutes. An equal gender split was achieved, with 60 male and 62 female students interviewed, all between the ages of 18 and 24.

Procedure

A semi-structured data collection method was selected to enable the study to explore the themes identified in Jones *et al.* (2008) namely entrepreneurial attitudes, motivations for study and reflections on best practice. The semi-structured data collection method would reveal the “rich” data underpinning these themes without an element of bias (King, 1994). Within the interviews there was a degree of flexibility for the interviewer to allow the interviewer to fully explore the emergent themes. The questions of enquiry were developed from the research instrument utilised in Jones *et al.* (2008) where the issues of entrepreneurial attitudes and motivations were explored. The evaluation of attitude is topical (Packham *et al.*, 2010) and recognised as a valid form of academic enquiry towards entrepreneurial activity (Krueger *et al.*, 2000). Entrepreneurial attitude is recognised as an accurate predictor of planned behaviour and has been considered in several prior studies (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003; Souitaris *et al.*, 2007).

The objective of this research was, via open-ended questions of inquiry, to explore these issues in more depth. Open-ended questions were designed to explore student attitudes towards entrepreneurial education, future career motivations and best academic practice. Questions were banded into themes that followed a sequence that was utilised by the interviewer. The interviewer had a set number of suggested questions to ask although this evolved as the interview schedule developed and new themes emerged (Silverman, 2000). This method enabled flexibility so that the interviewer could elaborate or clarify any answers provided around the key areas of perceived impact of the course. The respondents (students) were asked to reflect upon their attitudes, motivations and suggested best practice towards the course. The approach enabled more latitude to the interviewer to probe beyond the initial responses (Silverman, 2000).

The questions were of three types i.e. introductory, follow-up and probing. The introductory questions allowed the respondent and researcher to familiarise themselves to the research process and led to the important research questions. That is not to say that the introductory questions are not valid and useful but the purpose of the questions were to open further avenues of conversation around the key research themes. Follow up and probing questions allowed the researcher to elicit additional data and elaborate and confirm particular issues of relevance (Aaker *et al.*, 1998). All interviews were undertaken on a face-to-face basis in KAUE following the SANE course. Each interview was digitally recorded with permission being sought on initial contact with the respondent. Thereafter, the content of these interviews was transcribed and contrasted and compared to identify the key emergent themes (Packham *et al.*, 2006). This process was informed by Miles and Huberman (1994), who proposed a procedure of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification in the analysis of qualitative data.

Results

This section considers the findings of the study by focusing on the key emergent themes of the study namely the impact of the course on student's entrepreneurial attitudes, motivations and attitudes towards the learning experience.

Students' entrepreneurial attitudes

Students were asked to consider the impact of the course on their entrepreneurial attitudes and career aspirations. The following statements were representative of the respondents:

I found it really interesting the course was very applied and closely associated to the subject of entrepreneurship. It certainly has made me consider the opportunity offered by an entrepreneurial career.

In my degree, we consider the traditional subjects like economics, statistics and accountancy. The Entrepreneurship programme was very different, in that it applied all the theory in a practical way, which was both interesting and understandable. Being taught just entrepreneurship was different and made me think about the opportunity it offered.

These comments indicated that students valued the applied nature of the learning experience. Moreover, entrepreneurship being taught as a specific subject rather than embedded within our subjects enhanced relevance for the students. The respondents' comments suggest that SANE had made them reconsider their future career options:

I feel I gained real value from the course. Prior to it, I was not considering the option of an entrepreneurial career. Since the course I am rethinking my options.

Yes it has made a difference to me. I was thinking about an entrepreneurial career previously, this course has meant that I am definitely going to go for it.

These representative remarks confirm that an entrepreneurial education programme can inform student attitudes and encourage them to consider the viability of an entrepreneurial career.

Overall, it can be seen that the students had a positive experience which had enhanced and reinforced their entrepreneurial attitudes. Prior to the course students had indicated that they were relatively open minded regarding their future career

option. It was apparent that students enjoyed the exposure to a dedicated entrepreneurial education course whereby they were able to focus specifically on the topic and apply the theory from their degree programmes.

Students' entrepreneurial attitude – by gender

On investigation it was apparent, however, that there were differences in gender-specific attitudes towards the entrepreneurial education experience. Representative comments from male students included:

I believe I have the qualities to be a successful entrepreneur, it's about knowing the process, which is important for me.

This representative remark acknowledges male students confidence in their ability to become an entrepreneur and a preference to acquire knowledge about the business planning process as the significant learning process:

Knowing how to construct a meaningful business plan was a very useful exercise.

I enjoyed learning about successful entrepreneurs, but I think I got more out of the business planning exercise.

These responses confirms the trend previously indicated that male students had a preference for the practical business planning element of the SANE course in preference to the theoretical elements regarding the activities and competencies of an entrepreneur:

Developing a real business plan which drew the marketing, accounting, strategy and human resources elements together, was a really useful exercise and something I had not done previously.

This response identifies that completing a practical business plan was considered a productive exercise enabling the male students to clarify the linkages between individual subject areas.

Representative observations from female students:

Knowing that I could be an entrepreneur was an important discovery for me. I now think differently about my career choices.

This observation recognises that female students lacked awareness of an entrepreneurial career choice and needed awareness raising to overcome this barrier:

The stories of real women entrepreneurs were great. I now understand that anyone, including myself could be an entrepreneur. What you need is drive and determination to succeed. In our degree we don't get examples of women business people and why they were successful.

These responses from female students are enlightening and suggest that they drew significant value from being informed regarding the accessibility of a career as an entrepreneur. The use of representative female entrepreneurs who students could associate with is of central importance:

For me knowing that I can be an entrepreneur is more important at this point than learning about the business plan. I think I can be an entrepreneur now and it's certainly a new career option.

As with the male students, the SANE course seems to have had a positive impact upon entrepreneurial attitude. On completion of the course female students were very positive towards the potential that an entrepreneurial career offered.

In conclusion, it was apparent from the responses that both genders had experienced a beneficial impact on their attitude towards an entrepreneurial career. Interestingly, female students were generally more interested in the entrepreneurial awareness element of the course. By contrast, male students were generally more interested in the business plan component of the course. This result suggests that attitudes towards an entrepreneurial education programme may differ by gender, which may impact on the course construction and delivery pedagogy.

Student motivations

Students were asked to consider what their motivations were post course. The results were very positively skewed towards respondents reconsidering or reinforcing their career choices towards an entrepreneurial career:

The course has told me that I possess an entrepreneurial personality. I believe in myself and am prepared to go for it.

Given the lack of jobs and the personal qualities that I possess, I think it is a sensible career option to consider setting up a business.

I was thinking about looking for public sector employment, this course has been me think again about becoming an entrepreneur.

As part of the SANE course students undergo a self-evaluation exercise of their entrepreneurial personality. The students' responses suggest that this was a valuable process and enabled them to identify the linkages between their current skills set and those of the successful entrepreneur. This exercise effectively demonstrated that they believed that they had the requisite skills required to be a successful entrepreneur:

In the future and after more experience, I will certainly pursue an entrepreneurial career.

This quote suggests that students feel informed by the SANE course and are able to make a calculated career choice towards a future entrepreneurial career:

The course has told me that I need to be enterprising and more entrepreneurial in my mindset, whichever employment choices I chose.

This student's comment is testament to the value of the self-reflection element of the course and the necessity to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset whatever career choice is adopted. Thus in this case, the student's motivation has been informed towards the recognition of acquiring a more enterprising mindset to benefit their future career option:

This course has made me reconsider my future. I think an entrepreneurial career option is a real alternative after completing my degree.

The students' response suggests that the course has been able to inform Polish student motivations and influence participants to consider an alternative future.

It was apparent from the above evidence that student motivations towards their career choices had altered as a result of the entrepreneurship education experience. The quotes suggest that Polish students discerned real value from entrepreneurship

education and were able to reflect on its value in assisting their future career choices. Interest in an entrepreneurial career was heightened as substantiated within Jones *et al.* (2008) with several students eager to launch their business idea immediately.

Best practice

The study respondents were asked to identify the elements of the entrepreneurial experience that they had enjoyed and or positively benefited from. Representative comments included:

This learning experience was very different from our normal course, which tends to be very formal and didactic. SANE was interactive with several activities built into it, which made it very enjoyable and interactive.

This statement is representative of the several similar responses. Several students recognised that the learning experience in terms of delivery pedagogy was significantly different from their traditional course of learning. Polish students were extremely positive about an interactive pedagogy as a tool to aid learning:

The use of women entrepreneur's stories and why they grew their companies was great. We normally only get examples of large businesses and not the story behind them.

This observation supports the need to provide gender-specific material to enhance the learning experience for female students. The evidence from this study suggests that this made a real difference towards the relevance of the learning undertaken:

I liked the use of multi-media. The real entrepreneurs explaining their stories were excellent. Much better than an academic reading from a book!

The case histories of entrepreneurs was the most useful and enjoyable thing for me.

Combining these observations together it can be seen that students value the use of multimedia to hear and see the stories of the actual entrepreneurs. It was apparent that this made the subject real and attainable for the students:

Constructing a building plan within a team was a very powerful learning experience.

In conclusion, this evidence suggests that for entrepreneurship education to make an impact it must be delivered employing a dynamic pedagogy, utilising a range of interactive delivery methods, including multimedia. Polish students are used to a didactic and structured method of learning. The respondents, however, preferred the more dynamic and applied delivery method used within SANE. Furthermore, consideration must be given to the learning requirements of both genders, for example in the provision of case histories representing both genders.

Discussion and conclusions

Overall, the study confirmed that entrepreneurial education can positively reinforce student attitudes towards an entrepreneurial career choice within a developing country such as Poland. The quantitative evidence within Jones *et al.* (2008) is qualitatively confirmed and enriched in this study. It was apparent that student's entrepreneurial attitudes increased and they demonstrated heightened interest in the opportunity of a future or immediate entrepreneurial career. Unquestionably, Polish students in this study and Jones *et al.* (2008) demonstrate entrepreneurial traits and skills. Students

commented that they would now seriously consider the option of a future or immediate entrepreneurial career post graduation due to the SANE course. Other respondents noted that they had not previously considered an entrepreneurial career. Post course, they now regarded it as a viable alternative to public sector or similar employment. Students recognised and appreciated the concept of adopting an enterprising and entrepreneurial mindset to enhance their self-employment or employability options. Thus this study can be added to the body of evidence indicating that enterprise education can positively impact on both entrepreneurial attitudes and career choices.

Students viewed undertaking a dedicated entrepreneurial education course as a rewarding and different experience to that of their normal programme of study. The students appreciated the applied and interactive pedagogy that enabled them their theoretical knowledge in an applied and practical manner. Use of quizzes and business games enriched the learning experience. The students also valued the use of multimedia to enable them to hear the stories of successful entrepreneurs from a firsthand perspective. The construction of the SANE in terms of content with focus on the concept of entrepreneurship, requisite skills and business planning was well received and confirms the suggestions of Gibb (1999) and Jack and Anderson (1999). Several students commented that they would welcome the opportunity to undertake further such courses and would recommend it to others. Thus the opportunity to undertake a dedicated entrepreneurial programme was regarded as both rewarding and educationally beneficial towards their development. From the University perspective, entrepreneurial activity and engagement could be encouraged by providing incubation support facilities to effectively facilitate the start-up process.

It was apparent that there was a different perception according to gender towards course content. Female students stressed the importance of raising their awareness and self-confidence regarding the opportunity of an entrepreneurial career. In other words, they need to be convinced that becoming an entrepreneur is an achievable and rewarding career alternative. In SANE, this was achieved by the use of female case studies highlighting the underpinning reasons for success and attainability of an entrepreneurial career option. This study confirms the findings of Jones *et al.* (2008) that female students have an entrepreneurial mindset and are predisposed to the consideration of such a career. However, this study highlights the need to provide focused gender-specific entrepreneurial education for female students, utilising stories of successful women entrepreneurs that they can relate to. Female students, on completion of the course, recognised the value and rewards that an entrepreneurial career might provide as noted by Zapalska (1997). This issue supports the prior research of Lituchy and Reavely (2004), who found previous discrimination against women entrepreneurs. This might result in a lack of cultural belief by females in Poland regarding the accessibility of an entrepreneurial career. By contrast, male students were found to be more self confident in their own entrepreneurial predisposition and more interested in the minutiae of the business planning process. In other words, the male students believed that they had the skills to be entrepreneurs but needed assistance in the development of their business plans.

In conclusion, it is apparent that Polish undergraduate students have an entrepreneurial mindset and an appetite for entrepreneurial education to acquire relevant knowledge that they can utilise to inform career opportunity and choice as proposed by Socha and Weisberg (2002) and Kierulff (2005). The Polish economy needs

to develop its next generation of entrepreneurs from its graduate population as recognised by Baldassarri and Saavala (2006) to initiate further economic growth. However, the Polish HE university system needs to urgently consider how it can effectively embed entrepreneurship education across and within its curriculum using the appropriate delivery pedagogy. There is a need to disseminate and share best practice across this sector. The literature review undertaken within this study revealed minimal literature examining the developing of an entrepreneurial culture within graduate students in Poland. The results of this study suggest that male and female Polish students have different perceptions and attitudes towards an entrepreneurial career and there is a need to provide tailored provision to meet their gender-specific needs. This study suggests that entrepreneurship education is best delivered utilising a student-centred pedagogy that involves applied student learning potentially built around real entrepreneurial experience.

The authors recognise that the findings of this study are limited to one institution within one geographical area of Poland. Collecting the qualitative data over a five-year period (2006-2010) can lead to criticisms regarding the comparability of the results. However, the authors are confident that the cohort results are comparable given that all students were undergraduates on the same programme of study with similar ages and backgrounds. Moreover, the rate of economic change in Katowice during this period was relatively static in comparison to previous years. The impact of hindsight bias on the student group was reduced by interviewing students individually following the SANE programme.

Further research is required to explore whether these results are generalisable across other universities and regions and indeed other nationalities. Longitudinal research needs to be undertaken to explore the economic impact of SANE students who choose to undertake an entrepreneurial career option.

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