

Curriculum Laden Value Creation as Stepping Stone to Link Theory-Practice Dichotomies in Entrepreneurship Education

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education is widely recognized to trigger positive effects through germination of innovative spirit, raising national competitiveness and reductions in crime rates. The aim of this study is to use curriculum laden value creation as stepping stone to infuse entrepreneurship in universities. The study espouses a qualitative research design with conduct of 31 in-depth interviews from CEOs, with grounded theory as strategy of inquiry. The analysis refers to existence of unstitched theory and practice dichotomies which had cascaded a social vacuum at the nexus of academia and industry relationships. There are multiple level problems in curriculum at micro, macro, meso and Nano levels where curriculum is neither horizontally coherent nor vertically integrated. The study highlights absence of field sweat and exposure opportunities for students due to resource scarcity which exhibits itself in lack of soft skills development and hence low value creation capacities. The study contributes with context specific recommendations like inclusion of training companies, kick-off weeks, and field trips which have a practice dimension to imbue value creation spirit in curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum Value Creation, Entrepreneurship Education, Co-curricular activities (CCA), Extra-curricular activities (ECA).

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is popularly acclaimed due to its positive role in employment generation (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2007) stimulating entrepreneurial spirit (Kirkwood, 2007) and improvements in living standards while lowering crime rates (Dana, 2001). Hence, it is no wonder to find entrepreneurship on high government agendas across the world as it serves as a helping hand in governance (Lack  us, 2016). Rising access to higher education in Pakistan has triggered a credential creep (Brown, 2001) for its youth quake population confronted with tight job market. This is where, role and relevance of entrepreneurship comes to fore, amid lack of integrated mechanisms to infuse curriculum laden

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learning through value creation.

Problem Statement

A curriculum of trans-located content creates a paradoxical situation for a variety of stakeholders related to HEIs. This creates a theory and practices dichotomy where fortune 500 based curriculum is taught to students who does not even have exposure to a formal SME or large sized corporation. This is tantamount to outsourcing of curriculum to a publisher who is unaware of the peculiar needs, level and environmental dynamics of learning. The pilot study unveils that invariably across universities most of faculty members erroneously equate curriculum to syllabus. This signals a gap in theory and practice of curriculum planning which necessitates conduct of exploratory studies. The study endeavours to identify curricular, CCA and ECA activities which link theory-practice dichotomies by using entrepreneurship education as instrument to infuse value creation in HEIs of Pakistan.

Research Questions

RQ: What curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities develop value creation capacities in students?

Review of Literature

This study does not strive to delve into useless debates regarding trait and behavioural approaches. Instead, it focuses on importance of behavioural approach by using entrepreneurship education as an instrument to introduce entrepreneurship into HEIs curricula. The authors stress the importance behavioural approaches with special emphasis on stimulating supply side of entrepreneurship through promoting notion of entrepreneurship education.

Theory and Practices of Entrepreneurship Education

Pedagogical challenges arise in entrepreneurship education because it involves novel value creation. Hence, it is usual like all other new fields to experience lack of in curriculum planning and development at HEIs. This phenomenon is more pronounced in Pakistan where natural sciences paradigm is dominant. The prevalent approach to entrepreneurship is individual entrepreneurship (IE) model (Laukkanen, 2000) where individual is the unit of attention as against a systematic approach. The more distant and systematic approach is lacking (Mainardes, Alves & Raposo, 2010). The new contemporary approaches instils spirit of third academic revolution (Etzkowitz, Webster, Gebhardt & Terra, 2000)

which culminates in beneficial industry-academia linkages through exchange of products, process and input to policy.

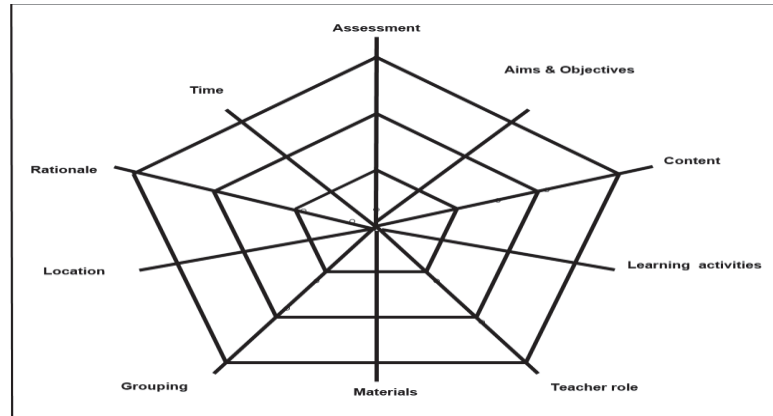
Curriculum and Syllabus Planning

The roots of curriculum can be traced to its Latin origin “curere” denotes a race track (Su, 2012). A logical extension of this is “curriculum vitae” which was first used by Cicero and denotes course of one’s life (Pratt, 1994). Kerr and Berman, (1969) definition of curriculum entails, “*all learning which is planned and guided by a school, whether it is carried out in groups or individually, inside or outside of school*”. Contrarily, syllabus can be considered a sub-set of curriculum and specifically includes course contents, teaching and assessment methods (Nađrag & Soare, 2012). However, despite its importance and widespread usage, considerable confusion prevails among many who use both interchangeably (Barnett & Coate, 2004). Moreover, in curriculum planning importance of CCA and ECA activities is widely established in theory but sparingly in practice. According to Keen and Hall, (2009) CCA are supervised and monitored by sponsoring institution which complement curricular objectives. While, ECA are undertaken outside school on voluntary basis and does not hold any academic credits (Seow & Pan, 2014).

Entrepreneurial Education and Value Creation in Curriculum

In addition to entrepreneurial education related classification, another approach appertains to new value creation philosophy. This concept stresses diversity and novelty aspects of new venture creation in terms of new value which had not existed before. This creates challenges for educators to infuse entrepreneurship in curriculum as it is not wedded in past. The complexity of curriculum is manifested by Akker, Kuiper and Hameyer, (2003) in the form of curricular spider web having ten salient components as shown in Figure 1. This model indicates interconnectivity and vulnerabilities in a manner similar to notion that no chain is stronger than its weakest link (Goldratt & Cox, 2016).

Figure 1: Curricular Spider Web Components



Source: (Adopted from Van Den Akker et al, 2003)

In curricular spider web organizational aspects operate at meso (institution) level which includes location, time, learning activities and grouping. Likewise, rationale, aims, objectives and contents constitute macro (national) level components (Schmidt, Boraie & Kassabgy, 1996). Materials, grouping and time are micro level (class room) elements, while teachers role is both universal as well as individual and hence operate at Nano level of curriculum (Yousafzai et al, 2016).

Methodology

The research espouses interpretive ontological worldview, qualitative episteme and grounded theory has been used as strategy of inquiry. Qualitative research in regards to interpretive studies emphasizes meaning in contrast to frequency of occurrence to decipher a social phenomenon through iterative fine-grained human judgment (Eisenhardt et al, 2016). The nature of research questions and relatively unexplored area of study offers reasonable grounds to justify inductive-qualitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The grounded theory methodology requires concurrent data collection and analysis through three coding phases for which I collect first-hand data from 31 CEOs across a diverse spectrum of industries in accordance with conventions of inductive qualitative studies.

Sampling Procedure & Interview Guide Development

The methodology part here subsumes the data collection procedure as dictated by journal requirements. In data collection for grounded based study we employed theoretical sampling and constant comparison which works in tandem with three successive coding phases. In open coding sampling is purposive in nature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), in axial coding we espoused systematic sampling, while in selective coding a systematic

sampling procedure is used (Feldman et al 2018). In addition to above mentioned 31 interviews, 06 pilot interviews were conducted with graduates and university faculty to achieve a better understanding of topic and refine initial research questions. The interview protocol was refined several times in a recursive manner (Seidman, 2013). Ethical considerations in line conventions of qualitative research were exercised by giving opportunity to interviewees to know about the nature of researcher, its objectives and regarding recording of interviews.

Data analysis

The standards pattern of limited grounded theory analysis is carried out in three successive phases of open, axial and selective coding (Thornber & Charmaz, 2014). The empirical data from interviews has been interwoven in a logic diagram to visualize data for better analysis. The diagrams have condensed heaps of data in a meaningful manner with nodes and sub-nodes offering leeway to keep at bay self-delusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and provide help in tolerating anxiety (Yin, 2015). In this study theoretical saturation started unfolding on 26th interview after which gradually relevant insights ceased to emerge.

Grounded theory analysis through three coding schemes

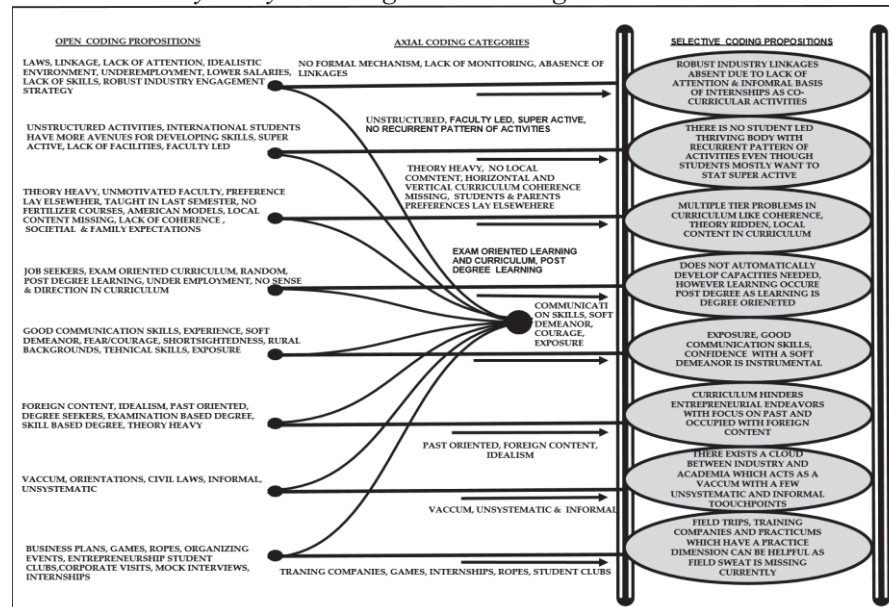


Figure 2: Data analysis logic diagram for three coding stages

The Figure (2) shows open, axial and selective coding schemes

associated with RQ of study. In order to holistically understand the causal conditions and relationships in a social phenomenon of interest further eight sub questions were posed. The first question asked pertains to internship opportunities. Initial analysis, unveils importance of internships in setting up graduate expectations as well as help understand dynamics of job market. The axial coding reveals absence of academia-industry relationships for student placement and internships as internships are awarded personal contact. Exceptions are present in fields of chartered accountancy and medicines where internships are paid and credited. The selective coding highlights absence of robust academic-industry linkages partly due to non-enforcement of laws and rules.

The next question probes provision of soft skills in HEIs through CCA and ECA activities. A recurrent theme refers to lack of vibrant student bodies due to unsystematic and unstructured pattern of scattered activities undertaken at HEIs. This is partly due to cost based positioning of universities as well as lack of any mechanisms for student led societies. Moreover, analysis indicates that CCA activities occur in unsystematic manner mainly due to scarcity of finances, and on-campus facilities. Super active students in university societies show greater propensity to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours. In similar vein, a third question elicits responses regarding issues with curriculum. The coding analysis entails that same curriculum is followed for full-time studies and executive level studies with overemphasis on foreign content. Moreover, entrepreneurship is taught in final semester without any fertilizer courses which does not augur well in terms of timing, and content. The analysis indicates lack of coherence in curriculum both vertically and horizontally.

The next sub question is regarding development of planned curriculum. The evidence suggests random implementation of curriculum which exhibits contradictory objectives of MBA programs to prepare managers instead of entrepreneurs. Curriculum is prepared from examination view point and lacks any sense of direction. The axial analysis indicates that majority of in-demand capacities are developed after graduation which causes longer duration of unemployment as well as underemployment. Selective coding analysis confirms emergence of credential creep due to dichotomies prevalent in curriculum to informal business practices in Peshawar.

The fifth question pertains to qualities needed to become entrepreneurs. The open coding informs regarding inadequate soft skills and exposure due to rural backgrounds of graduates. There is severe lack of confidence and opportunities for international mobility as industry pain points largely remain unheeded. The selective coding analysis shows lack soft

skills such as soft demeanour and even serious deficiencies in hard skills are observed. The existence of severe dichotomies between theories taught in universities to business practices hinder development of graduates in universities in terms of entrepreneurship education.

The sixth sub questions pertains to ways in which curriculum develop business practices. A recurrent pattern refers to outdated curriculum even at leading HEIs in Peshawar. This is partly attributed to lack of futuristic thinking in curriculum development. The axial coding analysis underscores the importance of industry-academia linkages towards solving industry pain points through policy, products and processes. The selective coding analysis indicates that curriculum mostly hinders in development of market oriented entrepreneurial capacities.

A penultimate question refers to corporate sector participation in activities of HEIs. The analysis reveals low level involvement of industry in CCA and ECA of HEIs lacking any long-term partnership. The axial analysis highlights the informal and ad-hoc nature of linkages due to lack of incentives on both ends. While, industry is interested in applied solutions on the other hand HEIs are interested in basic research. The selective coding analysis pinpoints existence of a social vacuum at the heart of industry-academia nexus in Peshawar.

The final sub questions pertains the CCA activities undertaken at HEIs which instil value creation capacities. The open coding highlights importance of business plans, online games, student clubs and societies. Other than this, externships, company visits and mock interviews were also reported to improve student perception of job market. The analysis informs regarding importance of training companies and societies which are considered instrumental. The selective coding analysis highlights lack of field sweat and exposure which can fill up theory and practice dichotomies. Integration of aforesaid activities in curriculum will germinate entrepreneurial spirit, instil innovation and imbue value creation capacities in students of universities in Peshawar.

Conclusion

This study strives to identify elements which contribute to infusing curriculum based value creation through a blend of CCA and ECA. The research questions posed for the study were purposely set to offer an emic perspective on how value creation unfolds at HEIs in Peshawar. In line with conventions of GT inspired researches, this study offers a social description of related phenomenon requiring further empirical validation.

Value creation through curriculum: A Social Vacuum

This study has established to conclude that curricular, CCA and ECA

provide excellent platform to imbue value based entrepreneurship education in HEIs. However, their balanced integration in the form of a blend of CCA and ECA is a challenge HEIs are confronted. This is partly attributed to fragile and unlinked value chains of HEIs due to weak linkages between industry and academia. In addition to this, there is lack of student-led societies, having dedicated budget and cyclical nature of activities undertaken on regular basis. It can be said, metaphorically that a social vacuum exists between academia and industry which act a cloud in the face of stitching mutually beneficial endeavours. The evidence thus far concludes that CCA and ECA provides ideal upshot to infuse entrepreneurship in curriculum. There are however, multiple problems at various tiers of micro, macro, meso and Nano curriculum. Due to problems of content, coherence and theory-heavy nature it is concluded that presently curriculum does not facilitate development of entrepreneurial capacities. The current study favours the conduct of training companies; field visits and practicum which have a strong practice dimension are helpful in absence of field sweat and exposure. Finally, the prevalent curriculum and practice dichotomies hinder the development of soft skills needed in informal business practices.

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