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PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE REAL WORLD: ORAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURS

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship Education provides the opportunities and the training that would enable graduates to be creative thinkers—those with innovative business management skills, strong self-esteem, and the kind of discipline that would ultimately allow them to start their own businesses and create jobs for others. Nonetheless, studies have also shown that graduates who have undergone these courses rarely end up becoming entrepreneurs after graduation; the main reason being the students' lack of communication skills in English as well as the fact that the "whats" to be taught and the "hows" to teach them have not been given due consideration by the designers and course instructors. As such there is a need to examine these elements as they are crucial parts of understanding entrepreneurship education. This paper explores the underlying conceptions of an entrepreneurship education course at a Malaysian public university as to what would prepare students to become global entrepreneurs. An in-depth exploratory qualitative study involving five (5) course designers was carried out and based on the thematic analysis method, four key underlying themes were generated mainly 'Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum', 'Oral English Communication Skills for Global Entrepreneurs', 'Course Instructors' English Proficiency' and 'Challenges in the Entrepreneurial Classroom'. Finally, this paper discusses the implications to be drawn for the teaching of entrepreneurship such that we would be able to create global entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Oral English Communication Skills, Global Entrepreneurs, Course Designers, Course Instructors



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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has become a central focus of nations which aspire to compete in the knowledge-based global market as it is regarded as a means in fostering economic development, reducing unemployment by creating jobs, (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004; Byrne et al. 2014) and offering future entrepreneurs' opportunities to be creative thinkers with innovative ideas (European Commission, 2008:23; Nabi and Holden, 2008). The concept of entrepreneurship is closely related to teaching people to enrich themselves with unique skills and to think outside the box. It also encourages future entrepreneurs to take risks, to inculcate self-confidence and to manage and sustain their businesses on a global stand. All these, to a great deal, has triggered a growing interest among the education sectors in developing educational programs which would make entrepreneurship a central mover in empowering students to have enterprising culture, which are seen as extremely valuable assets to accelerate economic growth of any country. As such, in early 1947 the first course in entrepreneurship education was offered at the Harvard Business School titled "Management of New Enterprise" (Katz, 2003) which became so successful that by 1990 it prompted over 400 schools and other business Universities in the USA to offer similar courses in the field of entrepreneurship (Vesper & Gartner, 1997; Volkmann, 2004). As early as the 21st century, the popularity of entrepreneurship courses spread to more than 50 universities in the USA offering not just one course but a comprehensive program which covers a wider perspective of subjects and skills (Koch, 2003).

Douglas (2014) defined entrepreneurship education as "the purposeful intervention by an educator in the life of the learner to impart entrepreneurial qualities and skills to enable the learner to survive in the world of business" (cited in). Adamu et al. (2019) defined entrepreneurship as a person's capacity to transform ideas into action which comprises the capacity to plan and manage projects in order to reach the intended goal, as well as creativity, innovation, and risk taking. In addition to that, Kourilsky (1995) further clarifies entrepreneurship education as a body of knowledge that teaches skills that are essential in setting up new ventures and the capabilities in identifying potential breakthrough while understanding the risks that come with organization of resources. Further elaboration on the definition of entrepreneurship education is described by Yomi-Akinola (2016) when he mentioned that it is an education intended to change the mind-set of the students to become innovative and enterprising along the way to instill positive "intentions and attitudes towards entrepreneurship" (Cited in Aliko et al. 2019).

The following definition of entrepreneurial education is proposed by Shepherd and Douglas (1997):

"...the ability to envision and chart a course for a new business venture by combining information from the functional disciplines and from the external environment in the context of the extraordinary uncertainty and ambiguity which faces a new business venture. It manifests itself in creative strategies, innovative tactics, uncanny perception of trends and market mood changes, courageous leadership when the way forward is not obvious, and so on. What we teach in our entrepreneurship classes should serve to instil and enhance these abilities" (cited in Fatoki & Oni, 2014 p. 587).

In general, there are multiple aims of entrepreneurship education that have been discussed by some researchers. Hills (1988) posits that the main aim of entrepreneurship education is to open more options for careers and gain increased knowledge in opening new business ventures. Interman (1992) shared a comprehensive typology of entrepreneurship programs which include understanding, business innovation, expansion of small enterprise and trainer development. Comparably, Jamieson (1984) recommended three distinct types of training that entrepreneurship education offers, mainly "education "about" enterprise (i.e., entrepreneurship awareness), education "for" enterprise (i.e., preparation of aspiring entrepreneurs for business creation) and education "in" enterprise (i.e., training for the growth and development of established entrepreneurs)" (cited in Lee and Wong, 2006, p.82). Johannisson (1991), on the other hand, observed that entrepreneurship education has five learning objectives where those taking the entrepreneurship programs "will develop the know why (developing the right attitudes and motivation for start-up); know how (acquiring the technical abilities and skills needed to develop a business); know who (fostering networks and contacts for entrepreneurial ventures); know when (achieving the



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sharp intuition to act at the correct moment); and know what (attaining the knowledge base and information for new venture development) aspects of entrepreneurial learning” (cited in Lee and Wong, 2006, p.82). Supporting this assertion, Gottlieb and Ross (1997) affirms that the aims entrepreneurship education should be viewed in a broader context in terms of engendered characteristics, attainment of business skills, development of new innovative ideas and creation and knowledge in opening new business ventures. In general, the aim of entrepreneurship education is to provide students with the entrepreneurial skills they need to start, run, and succeed in their own businesses. This paper thus attempts to explore and understand the underlying conceptions affecting entrepreneurship education cum oral English communication skills in the quest of preparing students to become global entrepreneurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship Landscape in Malaysia

Entrepreneurship is a crucial and vibrant component of Malaysia's progress toward being a developed and successful nation by 2030. It has valuable traits to contribute to Malaysia's socioeconomic growth and productivity in terms of equitable income allocation. This will improve Malaysians' level of living and quality of life, profiting the society holistically. To spearhead Malaysia's integrated national entrepreneurship growth, the Malaysian government formed the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC) in March 2020, which was later renamed the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC). Since then, the MEDAC has been working hard to create a holistic and inclusive ecosystem in assisting the country's socioeconomic development strategy, thereby attaining Malaysia's goal of becoming an entrepreneurial nation (Ministry of Entrepreneur Development Malaysia).

Realizing the importance of building a strong pillar for continuous development of the country, the Ministry of Higher Learning Education (MOHE) encouraged the higher learning institutions in Malaysia to adopt entrepreneurship education in their education system to assist with the economic growth (Cheng et al., 2009; Yusuf et al., 2015; Rahim et al, 2015), in creating a society which is more sustainable (Abu Sufian, 2012), and in equipping graduates with essential skills for the work force (Ahmad, 2013). With high rates of unemployment in the country, MOHE hopes that the knowledge, skills, and training received by the students from their entrepreneurship programs will create a wider platform for more graduates to be self-employed (The Star, 2022).

Implementations of Economic Policies

To better grasp the significance of implementing this type of instruction, and acknowledging the importance of entrepreneurship to the society, as well as how it can contribute to the nation, the government has made entrepreneurship a priority since establishment of the 1971-1990 New Economic Policy. Later, it was reviewed, and the 1990-2000 National Development Policy was introduced with more defined goals and aspirations. A decade later another policy was introduced which was the 2001-2010 National Vision Policy, followed by the 2011-2020 New Economic Model with the goals of accelerating Malaysia toward achieving complete development in accordance with the country's Vision 2020. Entrepreneurship is considered as vital in establishing a competitive domestic economy under the same policies (Abdullah et al., 2014). Recently, on 11th July 2019, the New Economic Policy 2030 (NEP 2030) was launched by the former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Under this new policy there are five objectives mainly (1) fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem which caters for holistic and sustainable socioeconomic development (2) building entrepreneurial mindset and values amongst the citizens (3) boosting more capable and resilient first-class entrepreneurs with a global outlook (4) refining the competence levels of the micro, SMEs and cooperatives and (5) establishing entrepreneurship as a career option (Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives, 2019). These objectives are put in place to prepare a more conducive ecosystem and widen the opportunities for all levels of entrepreneurs to excel and flourish on a global scale.

Entrepreneurship education in higher learning education forms as a pillar of educational policies. Many scholars



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believe that by promoting the entrepreneurial skills at the HLIs will build a strong foundation for entrepreneurial mindset and characteristics among the youth which will then create opportunities for them to venture into business (Cheng et al., 2009; Johansen, 2010; Kuratko, 2011; Yusuf et al., 2015). Studies on the positive outcome of this initiative have shown high inclination of students at the HLIs who would like to become entrepreneurs at the end of their studies (Sanchez, 2010; Mwasalwiba, 2010; Abdullah et al., 2014; Maheswari & Kha, 2021). According to Kitz (1991) a successful entrepreneurship education program is the one which recognizes the most efficient approaches in applying teachable skills and takes into consideration the link between the needs of the students and teaching method. Othman (2002) mentioned that “the success of an entrepreneurial program is to produce students with the skills and attitude of entrepreneurship and thus become successful entrepreneurs depending on the suitability of the course content offered by the program” (cited in Mahmood et al., 2020, p. 173).

The Malaysian Education Blueprint

In 2013 the Ministry of Higher Education started developing the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB), a comprehensive review of the education system in Malaysia backed by considerable research with the involvement from extensive local and international sectors and educational experts. The initial push factor for the MEB was to increase the educational standards amongst the students so that they will be ready to embrace the needs of the 21st century education and to fulfil the expectations for a strong policy by the public and parents.

Among the aims of Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for higher learning is to generate graduates who are holistic and balanced with entrepreneurial attitudes and mindset and those who will be job creators rather than just job seekers. These ambitions served as the foundation for the Entrepreneurship Action Plan (EAP) for Higher Education Institutions 2016-2020 and will remain central to EAP throughout 2021-2025. Under this new action plan, two main elements from the Malaysian Education Blueprint for higher education (2015-2025) are used mainly to assist in developing entrepreneurship curriculum as well as improving the entrepreneurship teaching and learning ecosystem at HEIs. To elaborate further, four initiatives are generated for implementation (1) to put in place High Impact Educational Practice (HIEP) that incorporates elements of entrepreneurship into the curriculum and across all areas of study (2) to follow the Job Creator Framework, which includes the 3Es (Empower, Enculture, and Equip) (3) to strengthen the environments that promote the development of student entrepreneurs and (4) to improve instructors' entrepreneurship expertise (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

Entrepreneurship Integrated Education (EIE)

Given the government's emphasis on instilling entrepreneurial values and culture in the education system, the Ministry of Education (MOHE) recently launched the Guide to entrepreneurship Integrated Education (EIE) under the Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2021-2025 with the aim to intensify the entrepreneurial ecosystem with a more holistic approach in order to entice the graduates to start their own business upon graduation. with entrepreneurial mindsets and characteristics. Under this action plan, various entrepreneurship-related events and initiatives have been organized at the HEI level, including strategic alliances with government agencies and private enterprises. This is to promote entrepreneurship and produce entrepreneurial graduates. The goals are to increase awareness in entrepreneurial skills, to make action research as a means to improve entrepreneurship education's ecosystem, and to encourage more research related to the development of entrepreneurship and commercialization. The programs were effective in producing thriving graduate entrepreneurs, many of whom have gone on to become famous chief executive officers of well-known companies. Statistics derived from the review of the implementation of the EIE between 2016-2019 showed a notable improvement in the number of students who ventured in entrepreneurship and the extensive exposure of entrepreneurship programs to all levels of students at the HLIs (Khairuddin et al, 2023). The implementation of the aspiration is carried out through instilling entrepreneurial attitudes in graduates and developing graduate entrepreneurs with the necessary traits, knowledge, and abilities to become long-term, competitive businesses. With this context in mind, the goal is for HEIs to be more effective producers of entrepreneurs who will serve as critical engines for the country's technical progress and economic success.



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The Importance of English Oral Communication Skills in Producing Effective Global Entrepreneurs

Nonetheless, despite its success in empowering students at the HLIs to gain knowledge and training and start their own business (Morris et al., 2013; Solomon et al., 2002; Othman & Othman, 2019) several studies have underlined the need for improvements in entrepreneurship education further (Cheng et al., 2009; Mansor & Othman, 2017). Based on research carried out by Yusof et al. (2015), which reviewed several factors of entrepreneurship education courses of 20 public universities in Malaysia, revealed that issues pertaining to funding, lack of cohesiveness and ambiguity in the aims and policies, instability of support from the institutions and ineffectiveness of the delivery mode need to be addressed. Another significant finding was the lack of soft skills amongst the graduates, mainly the English communication skills. The findings are consistent with the National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 and 2013-2025, which specified that one of the problems of graduate unemployment was due to a lack of English language skills (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010; Yusof et al., 2015; Ministry of Education, 2012).

It needs to be noted that in today's rapidly evolving global landscape, effective communication skills have emerged as a cornerstone of success in the entrepreneurial realm. As aspiring entrepreneurs navigate a complex and interconnected world, the ability to communicate proficiently in English has become paramount. Language is a powerful means of successful communication among people (Roshid and Kankaanranta, 2003), and English is recognized as a business lingua franca (Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta & Lu, 2013). This is supported by Mydans (2007) when he contends that business success is primarily dependent on effective communication in English, which is the main language of international business, negotiation, education, science and technology, and occupation. As such, English plays an important role in global entrepreneurship. McKay (2002) writes in her book *Teaching English as an International Language: Rethinking Goals and Perspective* that by having good proficiency in the English language skills supports individual growth as well as increasing national wealth by drawing international investment and interest. As such integrating comprehensive English oral communication skills into the entrepreneurship education curriculum is essential to foster the development of effective global entrepreneurs. According to Roshid et al. (2018), "English language skills empower business individuals and organizations by creating opportunities for material gains in the form of suitable jobs, positions, and salary status, which in turn contribute to the country's economic growth, poverty reduction, and overall sustainability development" (p.3). In addition, findings from a study done by Erling et al. (2012) shows that English language communication abilities and relevant professional skills are essential to a successful career path in the era of globalization.

According to the findings of Rahman (2012), career success in the current era of globalization is dependent on communication abilities in English, as well as other essential professional skills at work, and it is required by every firm. Thus, English skills are valuable soft skills - a source of empowerment, a kind of capital, and a method of development. Learning one or more languages for communication can be viewed as an investment in human capital that can provide users with various economic and social benefits (Grin, 2003; Zhang & Grenier, 2013).

Undeniably, entrepreneurship is no longer limited by geography; it spans cultures, languages, and markets. In today's interconnected global economy, entrepreneurs must have the traits of a global standard as they must interact with a wide range of stakeholders, including investors, consumers, partners, and collaborators, many of whom speak a different language. Global entrepreneurs with fluency in English oral communication can transcend linguistic gaps and promote meaningful relationships. Global entrepreneurs demonstrate a high degree of flexibility, innovation, and adaptability. They leverage their expertise, networks, and resources to establish and grow businesses that transcend national boundaries, often involving international trade, supply chain management, and cross-border collaborations. Key traits of global entrepreneurs include a strong understanding of international markets, cultural sensitivity, effective communication skills, strategic thinking, and a willingness to embrace and manage risk. They may establish subsidiaries, joint ventures, or strategic alliances in various countries, allowing them to tap into diverse markets while also leveraging local expertise and resources.

Swift and Wallace (2011) examined the problems faced by German employees at multinational company for internal



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communication with their international subsidiaries. The findings of the study showed that English fluency issues caused challenges in meetings and discourage some people from participating. This shows that effective communication skills are essential for establishing and maintaining connections with a wide range of stakeholders. Entrepreneurs must negotiate contracts, form alliances, and work with people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Having a strong hold on English oral and written communication proficiency develops an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding, paving the way for fruitful cooperation.

As such, English language skills are an important part of entrepreneurial skills and should be embedded and taught in the course to produce capable global standard graduates who be able to excel their businesses globally. It was discovered that the English oral communication skills in the entrepreneurship education curriculum was not given any emphasis even though English is the main language of global business. Furthermore, students are not exposed of the significance of learning and improving their English skills as an important aspect of being a successful entrepreneur - especially important when empowering students for whom English is a second or foreign language, as it will not only encourage them to use English more but will assist them in overcoming difficulties in using English. Even though one of the main objectives of the National Entrepreneurship Policies is to produce “quality, viable, resilient, and competitive entrepreneurs with a global mindset” (NEP, 2030, p.iii), these critical factors have not been given attention in the implementation of the entrepreneurship education curriculum. As English language has now become an important bridge between businesses around the world, it is crucial that emphasis is given to the inclusion of the oral English communication skills in the course content of the entrepreneurship education program. Course designers and course instructors have an immense role to play in ensuring that students are well-equipped with a strong foundation of what needs to be taught and the right methodology to be used to be effective and successful global.

This paper highlights the findings of a case study on the significance of English language skills in assisting students in becoming global entrepreneurs. It also focuses on the course designers and course instructors’ perception of the course content and implementation. The paper also describes the challenges faced by the course instructors while teaching the course. Finally, implications are discussed on how the course should be effectively designed.

METHODOLOGY

Exploratory qualitative case study was the empirical inquiry used in gaining in-depth understanding the complexity of the above issue within its real-life setting (Creswell, 2015). A focused group interview which was carried out with the course designers cum course facilitators from the Business Management Department of a public university in Malaysia involving a list of 14 semi-structured interview questions in the quest of eliciting the participants’ views on the components included in the course, the skills taught, opinion on the importance of including English oral communication skills in the course, the effectiveness of the course components, the delivery method and the challenges they faced while teaching the course.

Participants

The five (5) participants were selected using purposive sampling technique and they are the course designers who are also the course facilitators of the Entrepreneurship Education from the Department of Business Management. All of the participants have been teaching the entrepreneurship education course for more than three years.

Data Collection

Prior to the focus group session, the researcher was given the consent from the faculty and participants to carry out the study. Subsequently, appointments were set with five of the course designers who are also the course facilitators from the Department of Business Management. The time and venue were set by the Head of the Department. The interview took place at the meeting room of the Entrepreneurship Division Centre (EDC). Interview questions and interview protocols were prepared by the researcher prior to the interview sessions. The participants were briefed on the objectives of the research to be carried out before the session. Focused group discussion was carried out with



the course designers and course facilitators for this study. To save time and resources, the researchers simply organized one group discussion with the participants rather than one-on-one individual interviews. As stated by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), group interviews are preferable than one-on-one individual sessions since they can be intimidating for some. Groups also bring people with varied viewpoints and ideas together and connecting with such people at the same time helped cross-checking of the information presented.

The participants took turns to respond to the interview questions and the oral session was recorded with their consent.

Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Themes

Two inter-raters with more than 10 years of teaching in the field of language education were identified to rate the credibility of the generated themes and the average percentage of inter-rater reliability produced an average of 95.0% of agreement. Furthermore, the themes were validated by the participants, member checks, and they agreed that the themes resonated their views.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the focused group discussion was arranged according to the interview questions from each of the participants and transcribed and analysed for key themes using several analysis templates of Ahmad (2017). The following Figure 1 summarises the key stages used by the researchers in generating the themes from the transcribed data.

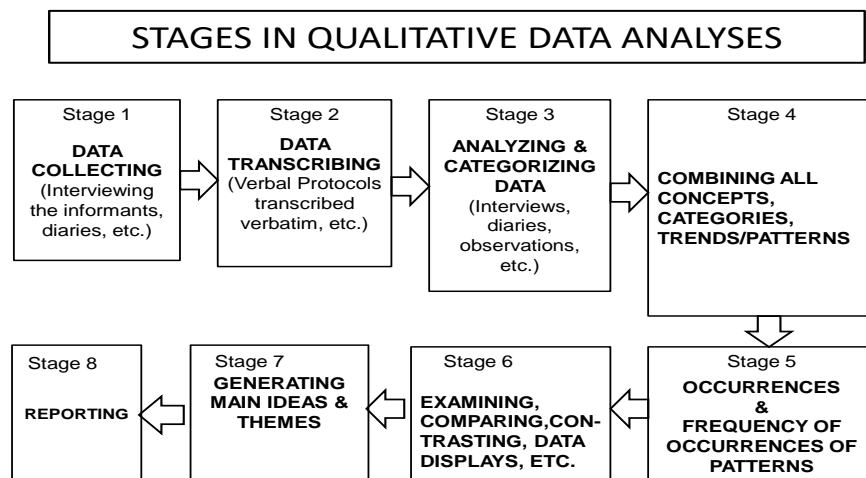


Figure 1. *Key Stages in Generating Themes*

Source: Ismail Sh. Ahmad (2017). *Doing Qualitative Research for Beginners: From Theory to Practice*. Partridge, Singapore.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section summarizes the study's four (4) key emerging themes, as shown in Figure 2, based on a rigorous analysis of the main ideas from the focused group interview. The discussion of the findings is centered on the highlighted key themes and supported by sub-themes for some of the key themes in the following text.



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THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entrepreneurship course content• Communication skills
2. Oral English Communication Skills for Global Entrepreneurs.	-None-
3. Course Instructors' English Proficiency	-None-
4. Challenges in the Entrepreneurial Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Soft skills• English language skills competence.

Figure 2. Four key themes and sub-themes

Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum

Theme 1 shows the importance of having a solid foundation of entrepreneurship education curriculum in producing effective global entrepreneurs. The two sub-themes, entrepreneurial course content and communication skills, demonstrate the underlying critical ideas in the quest of creating a proper entrepreneurship curriculum.

- ***Entrepreneurship Course Content***

On the content and curriculum of the entrepreneurship education course, the participants had similar outlook of the appropriate curriculum and subjects which need to be included to establish a strong foundation to prepare students for global business. According to them, an effective curriculum must strike a balance of theory and practical skills which will allow for greater understanding of the concept of creating, maintaining, and expanding business from a wider perspective. The following quotes demonstrate the evidence to the effect.

“Understanding the concept of the business by itself and the most important thing is to...I can say that is to share the knowledge to ensure that they will be able to apply them”.

“Integrate between theory and also the application. So basically, the course is actually 60 percent on the practical side and the other 40 percent is actually the theory. Nonetheless, communication skills are the most important to make them shine globally”.

“To understand what is the objective of this government and the ministry of education to encourage students to be entrepreneurs so that they can be on their own, to be able to create a job for themselves”.

This is in line with what was mentioned by Garavan and Ocinneide (1994) that the suitability of curricular and training programs is the key difficulty for researchers and educators teaching entrepreneurial education courses. Jack and Anderson (1999) also mentioned that students need to be exposed to the theory of the course so that it will supplement their practical learning experience. They further elaborated that researchers and educators must offer students with a conceptual foundation that allows them to understand and engage with the real business environment. In a similar vein, Alberti et al. (2004) support the idea that there should be a distinctive link between aims of the entrepreneurship program, the content or syllabus, the pedagogy applied and how the course is evaluated which will determine the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education course. This, of course, will open the pathway to preparing future global entrepreneurs.



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A study carried out by Yusof et al., (2015) on entrepreneurial programs conducted and challenges faced by the higher learning institutions in Malaysia in promoting entrepreneurship education found revealed that “Most of the existing entrepreneurship education curriculum emphasizes the theoretical knowledge and gives less attention to the practical application of the subject. The programs accentuate the established knowledge; however, they are frail on skill development and tacit experiences, which are critical features for nascent entrepreneurs” (p.19). This shows that little attention has been dedicated to establishing an experiential learning platform with opportunities for students to practically experience hands-on business activities, which will make them more enterprising. In agreement, Wang (2020) also stated that in universities, the practice platform for entrepreneurship instruction is relatively insufficient. Therefore, a good foundation of student entrepreneurship education practice platform is essential for enhancing entrepreneurship education implementation and improving its educational efficacy.

The subject knowledge of entrepreneurship education is extremely significant in building students' entrepreneurial mindsets and knowledge, as well as in measuring its impact, which can explain the best technique to convey knowledge to students (Okeke & Yong, 2016). Similarly, Gibb (2011) claims that content knowledge structure, as a paradigm for delivering effective entrepreneurship education, can help educators reframe students' conceptual barriers, establish knowledge frontiers, and enhance entrepreneurial competence. Content knowledge is defined by Loewenberg et al. (2008) as the domain knowledge, abilities, and mental habits required to teach and is used in practice by educators. Knowing the topic that students are expected to learn, how to unpack, depict, and make that content learnable, how students think about the specific content, and how to teach the specific content.

In fact, the goal of an entrepreneurial program is to generate students with entrepreneurial skills and attitudes who will go on to become successful entrepreneurs based on the applicability of the program's course material (Othman et al. (2012). The higher learning institutions need to offer courses that meet the needs of business management as well as training derived from education and entrepreneurial training programs. Therefore, in planning the entrepreneurship education curriculum, students' needs should be considered and incorporated based on a systematic framework as a guide (Bridge et al., 2010; Gedeon, 2014; Tang et al., 2014). All these should be integrated as a multidisciplinary content that puts the focus on experiential and service learning (Wang et al. 2010). This is in line with what was discovered in a study conducted recently on entrepreneurship education mismatch at the higher learning institutions in Malaysia. The study reviewed previous literature on entrepreneurial growth in Malaysian higher education where it was noted that the ineffectiveness of the present entrepreneurship program is linked to the curriculum content being too vague and brief, and there is a need to reconsider the curriculum contents (Khairuddin et al, 2023).

- **Communication Skills**

The second sub-theme emerged from the responses was the importance communication skills in the implementation of the course, which is seen as an important element for global business to be successful. As most of the content of the entrepreneurship courses included practical skills such as group discussions, brainstorming, planning, presenting, interviewing and negotiating, which use a lot of verbal communication, the skills in communication in entrepreneurship education “are based on goals and needs, abilities and wishes of young people to apply theory in practice, to be free initiators of ideas, projects and to achieve possible practical actions” (Modrea, 2012, p.1090).

Srivastava (2018) lamented that in general communication is the process by which verbal and nonverbal messages are delivered orally or verbally from the sender to the receiver. It refers to the ability to deliver information effectively and efficiently. As a result, successful communication necessitates listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. These abilities are prerequisites for a person's ability to communicate successfully. Furthermore, conversational abilities are highly valued in the business sector



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and can have an impact on personal and professional development. Communication can take place in two ways: orally and in writing. Oral communication occurs when the sender communicates information orally and the receiver receives it through listening. Written communication occurs when the sender delivers information in writing and the receiver responds after reading and digesting the information (Modrea, 2012; Srivastava, 2018).

However, when asked if the students who took the course possessed good communication skills, most of the participants shared that some of their students had difficulties in communication effectively during the course, which caused some groups to lack motivation and interest. The following sentiments were expressed by a few participants:

“Most of my students are not really ready when it comes to communication, especially in English”.

“Some of them lack in terms of communication skill but some of them are quite good”.

“The issue of lack of effective communication in class activities distorted their real expression of ideas and problem solving”.

“Having good communication skill is an important element for a global entrepreneur. However, the students do not possess good communication, especially oral English communication. This in a way hindered their confidence level and their ability to present their business ideas”.

The ability to communicate and engage in English is critical for entrepreneurs to remain competitive in the commercial world. However, most higher education institutions' curricula do not adequately foster the development of communicative English. Not many studies have been done on this issue in the context of entrepreneurship education. In Malaysia, communicative skills in language classrooms have been taught since childhood, however the state of the English language for communication is still in distress (Soo et al., 2018). A study conducted by Marzuki et al (2017) on the view of employers on the importance of English proficiency and communication skills for employability of Malaysian graduates revealed that oral communication skill is the most required skill among the employers and business partners as it distinctively differentiates the good candidates to stand out during the interview. This is similar to the findings of other studies done in Malaysia, Thailand, United States, and Australia (Singh & Singh, 2018; Pattanaoichet & Chinokul, 2011; DuPre & Williams, 2011 and Crebert et al., 2004).

Confidence and great communication abilities are required in the business sector. As English is the dominating language of business negotiation globally, non-native English speakers are recognizing the importance of mastering business English to grow in their jobs. The goal of business English is to improve your capacity to interact with people and businesses from English-speaking countries.

Oral English Communication Skills for Global Entrepreneurs

All the participants agree that for students to choose entrepreneurship as their career choice and to reach the global standards in business, English language skills are extremely important to be mastered, especially the oral English communication skills. These notions are shared by the participants in the excerpts below;

“Sure, because in business they have to deliver everything to the customers in the global marketplace for example. As such it is very important that they use oral English communication skills. Even in China some of them use English language. For me, it's considered to be very paramount and they need to do that”.

“Because my students are actually doing the online marketing sometimes, they do get customers from outside the country and even sometimes come from Singapore...so they need to communicate with these people. So, if they are



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really well equipped with good oral English...of course they can sell their products more”.

“I think English is important and I think most of the IIUM students are well equipped with English conversations but I think the most important thing is they need to learn how to improve their English and use it for the oral communication...the art of communication itself means how to convince people, how to persuade people, how to make their conversation successful when dealing with people”.

From the above perspectives, it is clear that the importance of English oral communication skills in the entrepreneurship education curriculum cannot be overstated. Aspiring global entrepreneurs must possess the ability to communicate fluently and persuasively in English to navigate the complexities of today's interconnected business landscape. English proficiency enhances entrepreneurs' ability to tap into international markets and access a wider customer base. Clear and persuasive communication is essential to crafting marketing campaigns, tailoring messages to resonate with diverse audiences, and adapting branding strategies to different cultural contexts. By integrating English oral communication skills into the curriculum, educational institutions can equip entrepreneurs with the tools to navigate the intricacies of global marketing effectively.

According to the concept of communication in entrepreneurship, having the competency in communicating with the stakeholders is seen as very essential (Avdeeva et al., 2019). A study by Baron and Armstrong (2007) categorizes this competency as social skills and puts them into four sets of abilities, mainly the ability to preserve other people's perception, authentically portray feelings, portray good initial impressions, and react correctly to a social circumstance relation to the social situation.

In lieu of the above, Buschow and Laugemann (2020) in their observation found that graduates with poor communication skills were unable to create strong entrepreneurship intention or behaviour. They also observed that inadequacy among university graduates in social skills such as communication skills would hamper their opportunity to successfully enter the job market.

Entrepreneurship researchers generally believe that good communication skills are an important predictor of successful entrepreneurial management (Men et al, 2021). In a recent study by Dimitriadis and Koning (2022), which carried out a prognostic on the impact of communication abilities on future entrepreneurial business success, revealed that entrepreneurs who received prior training in communication skills made 20% more money a year later compared to those who had no formal training. Further investigation on the importance of communication in entrepreneurial endeavors showed that entrepreneurs with excellent communication skills promote more effective cooperation and exchanges with colleagues and prospects, which has a favorable overall impact on the performance of their new enterprise (Dimitriadis & Koning, 2022). Both these findings highlight the significance of having good command of communication skills in a wide range of entrepreneurial activities such as problem solving, business pitching, negotiating, expansion of networking and so on (Hasan et al., 2017).

Course Instructors' English Proficiency

Another theme that emerged from the research is on the pedagogical approach of the course. Most of the participants expressed agreement that to ensure the effectiveness of any course, the lecturer or the course instructor has to have the knowledge, skills and aspiration to deliver the objectives of the course in accordance with the policy of the institution. They further shared that the role of the course instructor determines the attitude, motivation and intention of the students (Fayolle and Linan, 2014). Facilitators who do not possess the right skills nor have the capabilities in developing and engaging their students in entrepreneurial activities and preparing them for the real world, may face with students who would develop hostility and discontent with passive attitude towards the course or may not have the entrepreneurial intention to be self-employed after graduation (Ismail and Ahmad, 2013; Otache, 2019). The following quoted support the statements:



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“The instructor has to be the role model to the students. His or her experience will be the basis of the students’ motivation to become a good entrepreneur”.

“One of the biggest challenges faced by the course instructors is making sure that the students are being guided clearly on the conception of the course, linking entrepreneurship education with the broader business ecosystem, and equipping them with all the necessary knowledge and language from our experience and business skills”.

To discuss the statements above, it can be agreed that entrepreneurship education is widely acknowledged to be more than just training some to run a business; more importantly it is about inspiring a strong feeling of self-worth and empowerment, and inventive thinking (Gautam and Singh, 2015; European Commission 2021a). However, it is the instructor who has a vital stand in realizing the goals of entrepreneurship education and providing the future entrepreneurs with the necessary entrepreneurial competencies (Birdthistle et al. 2007).

Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship education course in producing self-employed graduates. Quite a number have shown positive results on the outcome of the course in terms of understanding the concepts, skills and intentions (Upton et al., 1997; Kolvereid and Moen, 1997), however, not many of the graduates who have undertaken the theory and practical training of the entrepreneurship course have become entrepreneurs after their graduation. For example, a study conducted by Othman et al., (2012) revealed that out of the 1,968 Malaysian undergraduates who took the entrepreneurship education course, only 24 became self-employed. Another study carried out to emphasize the necessity of entrepreneurial instructors, Ismail and Ahmad (2013) concluded in their study that apart from the inefficiency of the entrepreneurship curriculum in Malaysian polytechnics, the lack of sufficient entrepreneurial skills amongst the course instructors also hindered the outcome of the entrepreneurship education.

The issue of who is eligible to teach the entrepreneurship education course is still an ongoing debate in the field. This depicts that not everyone is qualified to be the instructor or lecturer of this course. Entrepreneurship, in and of itself, necessitates passion. Entrepreneurship is essentially a subject that should be taught with enthusiasm. As a result, entrepreneurship instructors must be enthusiastic about the course in order to instill entrepreneurial culture in their pupils. Their attitudes, intentions and behaviours must promote the core aim and desired outcome of the course, which is to generate fully fledged entrepreneurs of a global standard. They need to be inclined entrepreneurially (Lope Pihie & Bagheri, 2011). This means that if the instructors are educating students to be creative, innovative with strong business skills, they must also be creative, innovative and possess adequate business skills themselves. If they want to produce students who can present themselves well with good command of the English language, then they also need to have a strong grasp of the language. It is not necessarily that they become business owners or have background experience before teaching the course, but they need to be. This will have an impact on the students as they will see the instructors as role models and their intention to be entrepreneurs. To add, existing research has shown that role models such as parents who have succeeded in their business and other successful entrepreneurs bridges a strong link in the association between entrepreneurship education and students' entrepreneurial intention (Fayolle et al. 2006; Farrington et al., 2012).

Rahim et al., (2015) in their findings on the issue related to the competence of the course instructors of the entrepreneurship education in Malaysian higher learning institutions found that, “... the competency of educators in Malaysia is still lacking in terms of entrepreneurship competency. 50% of lecturers in HLI are experience in entrepreneurship education but only 20% of lecturers have attended entrepreneurship training programmes and less than 20% of lecturers have attended entrepreneurial mind-set pedagogy training. The numbers are quite alarming as this situation may be interpreted as most of the lecturers that taught entrepreneurship education have not gone for proper training”. (p.7). Another crucial issue is insufficient knowledge, lack of language proficiency and irrelevant experience of some of the instructors who are given to lead entrepreneurial programs (Yusof et al, 2014). This is a critical issue if the entrepreneurial programs are to be successful. This situation may indicate that certain HLI's management are not giving much needed emphasis on promoting the entrepreneurship education courses. It



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must be understood that for a entrepreneurship education course to be effective and be able to produce global standard entrepreneurs who will help accelerate the country's economy, it has to offer a strong and robust curriculum and pedagogical approaches which should be reviewed occasionally, opportunities for practical and real life business experience for the students, trained and qualified instructors who are able to use their experience with a sound intended language proficiency and a strong institutional support (Rahim et al., 2015; Wang, 2020).

Challenges in the Entrepreneurial Classroom

The final theme that emerged from the research is the challenges faced by the course instructors of the entrepreneurship education course. The sub-themes were soft-skills and English language skills competence.

Four out of five of the participants shared that they faced some challenges during the implementation of the course. Since the students were from different majors and came from different backgrounds with different learning exposure levels of language proficiency, the level of motivation and enthusiasm were not the same, and this put more pressure on the instructor to create activities and opportunities to sustain their retention and interests. The following quote was shared to illustrate the findings.

“Some students were not as fast in solving problems given in groups or were able to respond to situations that needed critical thinking. This caused a bit of an issue with their course mates. Since the class comprised of groups of students with different proficiency levels, it was quite daunting to achieve a successful outcome of the objectives.”

What can be interpreted from this quote is the absence of soft skills and language skills amongst the students which could hinder the learning process and uncertainty of the course outcome.

- ***Soft Skills***

The effectiveness of today's economies is proportional to the rate of development and entrepreneurial activity. Realizing the importance soft skills for graduates to acclimatize and function successfully in this fast-moving world, higher learning institutions are spearheading towards providing adequate and impactful strategies imperative for an entrepreneurial career (Yan et al., 2018). In the field of entrepreneurship, higher learning institutions almost have to make students aware of the value of soft skills and actively seek out and take advantage of teamwork opportunities for students in order to help them perform better and realize their professional aspirations as global entrepreneurs (Sadq, 2019). Dixon (2010) describes soft skills as a combination of social and interpersonal skills, such as communication skills, negotiation, problem solving, critical thinking, leadership skills, time management and decision-making skills, which are self-taught, participatory, and transferrable.

The students' lack of soft skills in entrepreneurship education courses is not a new issue (Khalid et al., 2014). It is seen as one of the most challenging factors for course instructors to teach in preparing students to have the confidence to venture into business. So, it is not a surprise that this factor has emerged as one of the main challenges for the instructors in their classrooms. As highlighted by Yusof et al, (2015), in their research on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship courses among 20 public universities, the most significant factor that contributed to the ineffectiveness of the implementation of the courses was lack of soft skills among the students registered in the courses. They further elaborated that “students enrolled in entrepreneurship programs lacked communication skills, leadership abilities, knowledge of marketing tactics, general business knowledge, and networking ability” (p.22).

Soft skills are crucial in entrepreneurship education courses since they are required for developing well-rounded and effective entrepreneurs. These programs stress the development of interpersonal and personal skills, which are critical for success in the entrepreneurial sector, in addition to technical knowledge. A study by Tem et al., (2020) listed three essential soft skills which should be embedded in the



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EE course mainly, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills and communication skills. They stressed the importance of soft skills, which may help businesses not only compete in the formal labor market, but also reduce youth unemployment, boost economic growth, and alleviate poverty.

Several factors have been identified for the lack of soft skills in graduates at the higher learning institutions in the literature. Firstly, soft skills are not given priority in the curriculum and are placed far later in the learning process compared to technical abilities (Fogleman, 2019). Second, the curriculum is not updated as frequently as it should be to reflect current market realities (Obinna et al, 2014). It was also found in the literature the trainers' inability to evaluate the soft skills of their students, which is linked to the trainers' lack of soft skills background (Danial, Bakari, & Mohamed, 2014; Fogleman, 2019). Additionally, according to Fogleman (2019) there is a lack of consistency in the teaching and evaluation of soft skills, which has led to a variety of individuals using multiple definitions of soft skills, confusing instructors and students. Lack of knowledge of the value of soft skills among both students and instructors has placed less focus on the importance of inculcating soft skills in the teaching and learning process (Wood, 2018). In addition, poor teaching methodologies and inefficient teaching approaches, incapacities of instructors structuring and replicating lessons in a way to ensure students' practical training of soft skills is legit (Richard and Govahi, 1983). Important aspects such as teaching and learning infrastructure have also been highlighted as important factors to graduates' lack of soft skills, with suitable classrooms and instructional materials not being sufficiently equipped for students to absorb skills (Ravindran and CYMSS, 2015). Ineffective education and development initiatives that ignore soft skills are another issue raised in the literature.

The literature claims that certain current policies place an emphasis on technical skills related to graduates' areas of expertise while disregarding nontechnical qualities like leadership skills, management skills, communication skills, critical thinking and other fundamental abilities that employers want (Richard, 2018). Finally, it appears that there is a disconnect between current education policy and development plans. This shows that educational programs have not taken into account the needs of the job market, including the addition of soft skills for students, which is a crucial component of employability and general development. It can be said that higher education generates graduates that do not fulfill crucial soft skills employability norms (Richard, 2018; Williams, 2015). With that in view, the issue of lack of soft skills in an entrepreneurial course must be addressed with a holistic approach by the authorities.

To be a global entrepreneur one must have soft skills to manage the complicated and interwoven world of international business. Soft skills improve their cross-border communication, adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities, eventually contributing to their success in the highly competitive and interconnected world of international business. Entrepreneurs that focus and develop these talents will be better positioned to flourish in a global economy.

- ***English Language Competence***

The second most challenging factor mentioned by the participants was the lack of English language competence of some of the students in the course. Below are the excerpts from the focused group discussion.

"I can see that their different background plays a role. Those who are from the urban area can deliver effectively in English compared to those from rural areas. I think maybe because of background education and family background as well".

"It was very challenging to deliver some parts of the course especially when explaining the business terms and business concepts as the level of language competency varied."

"Some students were unable to fully contribute to the group activities, negotiation practices and the mock



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interview because they lacked the English language competence”.

The statements above reflect how having competence in English for entrepreneurs is vital in achieving the aims of the course. English language proficiency is essential for global entrepreneurs. It enables them to reach a larger audience, communicate effectively, gain useful information, and handle the difficulties of international commerce. Entrepreneurs who focus and improve their English language abilities will be better positioned to capture opportunities, create meaningful relationships, and prosper in the global entrepreneurial arena as globalization continues to transform the corporate environment (Johnstone et al., 2018, Ahmad and Khan, 2023).

As discussed earlier in the paper, English has become a worldwide business language globally. Many respected firms throughout the world use English as a medium of communication in everything from emails to company documents to widely read business materials and business pitching. Entrepreneurs who seek investment or finance from overseas sources are generally obliged to propose their ideas and company plans in English. The capacity to properly express their vision and plan can have a substantial impact on their success in obtaining investors. Over 70 countries have made English their official language and by that having the competence in the language opens great opportunities for business collaborations, partnerships and ventures (Rao, 2019; Altan, 2019).

While no particular studies have been conducted explicitly to connect language competency with entrepreneurship success, the practical value of these skills in the global business scene and its significance in the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship education courses should be acknowledge and emphasized. Entrepreneurs who can speak effectively and convincingly in English are better positioned to exploit international opportunities, extend their firms across borders, and negotiate the global marketplace's intricacies. It is recommended that the English language skills be embedded in the entrepreneurship courses to strengthen the language proficiency of the students so that a higher percentage of global standard entrepreneurs can be produced by the higher learning institutions.

CONCLUSION

The capacity to interact with people in an efficient manner is essential for becoming a successful global entrepreneur. For students taking the Entrepreneurship Education course, mastering the skills, especially oral English communication skills, is seen as crucial because it increases their confidence in vividly expressing their vision, their ideas, and their innovative strategies. However, all this may not be realized if the people teaching this course do not possess the same or if not higher level of the oral English communication proficiency. The English language is the main link connecting businesses across the globe. Students' inclination to become global entrepreneurs will be stronger if they are trained and guided by role models. Entrepreneurship education course instructors impart entrepreneurial information and skills to students from a practical standpoint. However, before they can impart their knowledge and abilities to students, the instructors themselves must have entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. More significantly, they should exhibit specific entrepreneurial traits like imagination, ingenuity, and self-assurance, among others, and they should exhibit these traits for their students to emulate. Entrepreneurship seeks to sustain relationships and charismatic leadership in which effective business presentations, meetings, negotiations, mediating conflicts, and building rapport with existing or new business partners all play significant roles. By integrating language skills into an entrepreneurship course, it is essential to expose students to English language skills alongside entrepreneurial abilities in order to generate successful entrepreneurs of a worldwide standard who will save a nation's global economy.



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