Research Article

Evaluating entrepreneurial support programs: Insights from trainer experiences

Ludmilla Rawande Chalabi[1] ID

Farid Belgoum[2] ID

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of entrepreneurial support programs in Algeria, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of trainers involved in these initiatives. Through a qualitative analysis of feedback from ten trainers with varying levels of experience, the research explores the impact of these programs on beneficiaries, the strengths of the university- National Agency for Support and Development of Entrepreneurship (NESDA) partnership, and the challenges faced by educators. The findings reveal that while the programs have positively influenced entrepreneurial development. Trainers emphasized the importance of integrating entrepreneurial modules into university curricula and fostering a stronger entrepreneurial culture within academic institutions. The study also highlights the critical role of effective coordination between universities and NESDA in achieving program success. Based on the insights gathered, the paper offers practical recommendations for enhancing the design and implementation of entrepreneurial support programs in Algeria. These include introducing mentorship programs, revising training content to include practical exercises, and creating platforms for better stakeholder collaboration.

1. Introduction

Programs aimed at promoting entrepreneurship continue to evolve through approaches that incorporate project design techniques and practices, engaging professionals in the field to ensure better involvement of future entrepreneurs. Theories in this domain diverge, focusing on various aspects such as personality traits, market dynamics, opportunities, skills, and, ultimately, the training that supports the entrepreneurial process. In Algeria, a new strategy has recently been implemented with the establishment of entrepreneurship development centers. These centers are the result of coordination between universities and the National Agency for Entrepreneurial Development Support (ANADE), the body responsible for validating projects and ensuring funding.

This initiative involves university teachers in various aspects of entrepreneurship, including design thinking, market research, business modeling, finance, and human resource management, alongside NESDA employees who provide practical advice. The objective of this article is to evaluate the experience of supporting entrepreneurship development centers at the University of Oran 2.

The empirical approach is based on a qualitative study involving trainers through a series of interviews to assess their experiences, considered a vector for guiding entrepreneurial strategy in Algeria. This evaluation aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of the support programs and identify areas for improvement to enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country.

[1] Corresponding author, PhD, University of Oran2, Algeria, chalabi.ludmilla@gmail.com,   ID   ORCID: 0009-0004-3195-0380

[2] Professor, University of Oran2, Algeria, farid.belgoum@gmail.com,   ID   ORCID: 0000-0002-8918-2255

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Entrepreneurial Support Programs and Their Impact

Support programs play an important role in the development of entrepreneurship. They involve advice, expertise, and notably, training. According to (Nabi, Liñán, Fayolle, Krueger & Walmsley, 2017), such programs significantly enhance entrepreneurial intentions and capabilities among participants. Similarly, a study by (Martin, McNally & Kay, 2013) found that tailored training programs and mentorship are essential components of successful entrepreneurial initiatives. The study of (Bae, Qian, Miao & Fiet, 2014) concludes that entrepreneurship education is an effective tool for fostering entrepreneurial intentions, but its impact depends on the design, delivery, and context of the programs.

In this context, the process of acquiring skills and competencies takes place between the university, as a research and training center, and socio-professional partners in a way that develops the behaviour of society and individuals. Today, we talk about the entrepreneurial ecosystem, which is considered a global approach to establishing an economic strategy. It includes universities, government, banks, companies...

2.2. University-Industry Partnerships

Collaborations between universities and industry players are vital for entrepreneurial development. (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) introduced the Triple Helix model, emphasizing the importance of university-industry-government interactions in fostering innovation. More recently, (Guerrero, Urbano & Fayolle, 2016) highlighted the role of university-led entrepreneurial ecosystems in supporting start-ups and spin-offs.

In Algeria, since 2022, new procedures have been implemented to facilitate the creation of startups within universities. This step is considered one of the most important decisions to encourage students to develop their own projects. The process is outlined in the figure below.
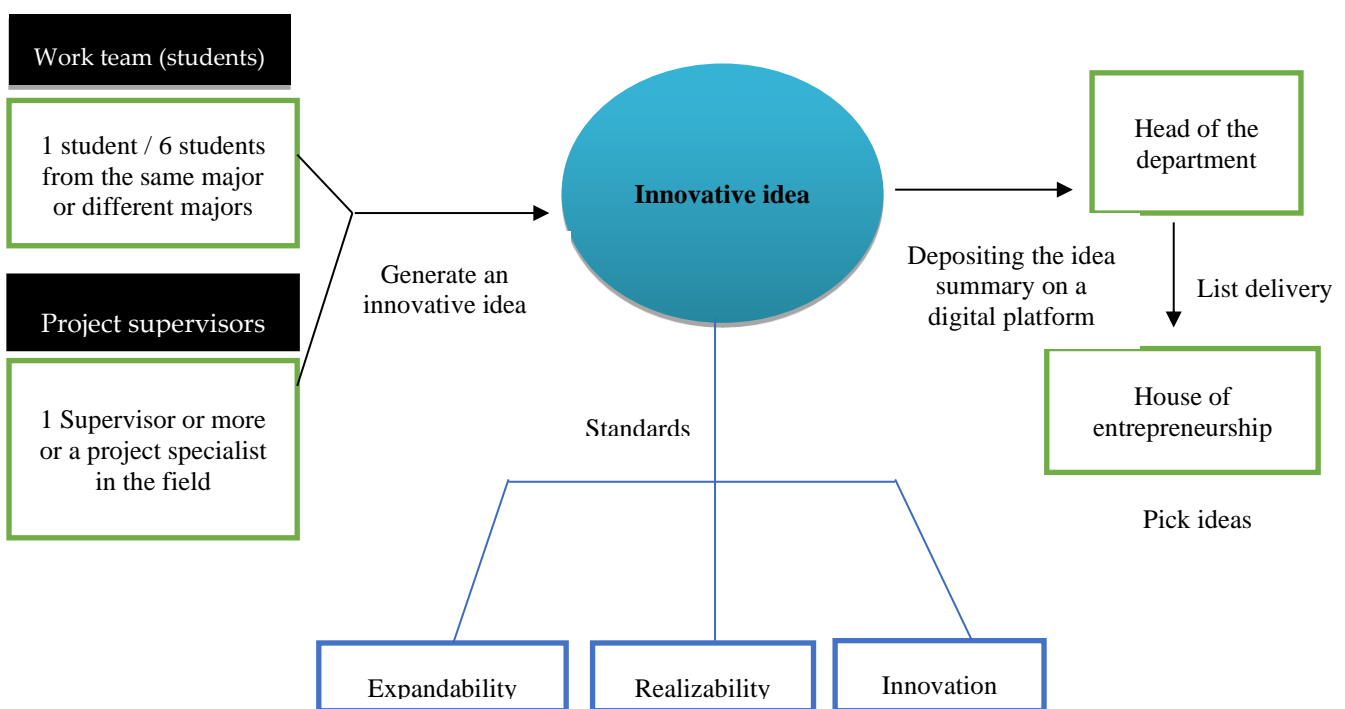
Figure 1. Stages of registering a start-up idea at the university

Source: (Belgoum & Benessalah, 2023)

2.3. Training Needs for Entrepreneurial Teaching

According to (Neck & Greene, 2011) teaching entrepreneurship as a method is more about developing practical skills and fostering an entrepreneurial mindset. It requires students to actively engage in real-world scenarios, experiment, and learn from their experiences. This approach is often more effective in preparing students for the unpredictable

and dynamic nature of entrepreneurship, as it emphasizes practice and application over passive learning. In essence, while understanding the process is important, learning the method—through practice and action—is often more valuable for aspiring entrepreneurs.
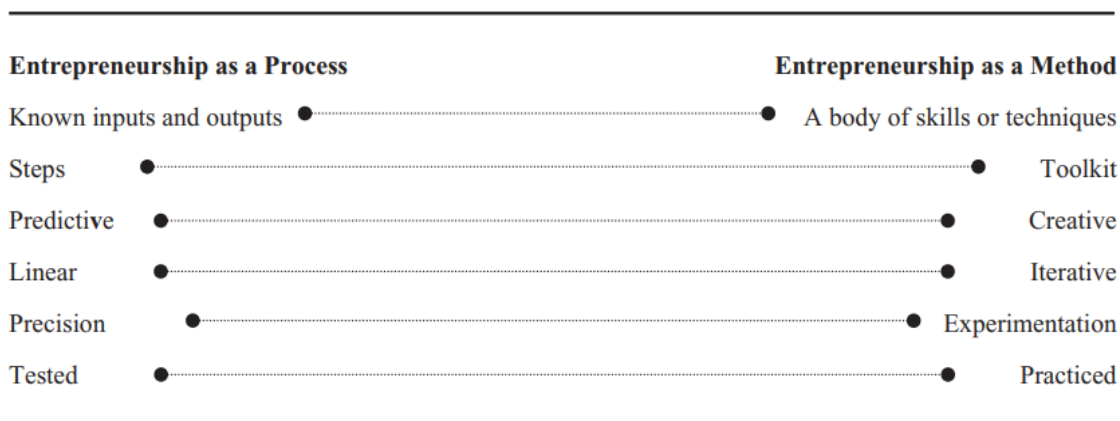

Entrepreneurship as a Process — **Entrepreneurship as a Method**

Entrepreneurship as a Process	Entrepreneurship as a Method
Known inputs and outputs	A body of skills or techniques
Steps	Toolkit
Predictive	Creative
Linear	Iterative
Precision	Experimentation
Tested	Practiced

Figure 2. Process versus Method

Source: (Neck & Greene, 2011)

Effective entrepreneurial education requires well-trained educators. Lackéus (2015) showed that educators need continuous professional development in pedagogical methods and digital tools. Similarly, a study (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015) emphasized the importance of experiential learning and practical training for entrepreneurial educators.

Samwel Mwasalwiba (2010) highlight a several methods of teaching used in entrepreneurship education, including traditional Methods: Lectures, case studies, and theoretical instruction.

Experiential Methods: Business simulations, internships, and hands-on projects and Interactive Methods: Group discussions, mentoring, and guest lectures by entrepreneurs. The study emphasizes that experiential and interactive methods are more effective in achieving the objectives of entrepreneurship education compared to traditional methods.

The training does not focus solely on programs but also on interactions between educators and actors in the ecosystem, as well as situational cases. For instance, when an educator participates in a project evaluation commission alongside representatives from banks and entrepreneurial support organizations.

2.4. Challenges in Entrepreneurial Education

Entrepreneurial educators face numerous challenges, including low participant engagement and inadequate resources. (Pittaway & Cope, 2007) identified the mismatch between theoretical knowledge and practical application as a significant barrier. Additionally, (Jones & Iredale, 2010) highlighted the need for more interactive and hands-on training methods.

Additionally, awareness of the technical aspect is very important in the context of the startup movement, where there is a need to teach students concepts of computer science and cybersecurity(Belgoum, Adnani Nizar & Benessalah, 2024). Trainers must be well-informed about these aspects to support them in a highly effective manner.

Several studies have identified best practices for entrepreneurial support programs. Neck & Greene (2011) advocated for a lean start-up approach, emphasizing experimentation and iterative learning. Additionally, a report by the OECD (2017) recommended the integration of entrepreneurial modules into formal education systems to foster a culture of entrepreneurship.

The main challenge will be to ensure better success for the projects initiated by students, and this involves integrating several key factors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

2.5. Entrepreneurship Development Center Programs

The entrepreneurship development center is a support structure established between the university and the National Agency for Support and Development of Entrepreneurship (NESDA). It plays a role in fostering entrepreneurship by providing guidance, training, and resources to students and aspiring entrepreneurs.

The National Agency for Support and Development of Entrepreneurship (NESDA), is a government body with a special status. This agency provides support to project holders for the creation and expansion of small businesses producing goods and services.

The National Agency for Support and Development of Entrepreneurship aims to (NESDA, 2024):

•Encourage the creation and expansion of goods and services production activities by project holders.

•Promote all forms of actions and measures aimed at fostering an entrepreneurial spirit.

To benefit from the privileges offered, project holders must meet several conditions:

● The individual must be between 18 and 55 years old.

● They must hold a degree, professional qualification, and/or recognized skills certified by a diploma or other professional document.

● They must contribute personal funds at a level matching the minimum required amount.

● They must complete the training provided through Entrepreneurship Development Centers.

In this context, the Entrepreneurship Development Center offers comprehensive training programs designed to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in entrepreneurship. The programs are structured into several key modules:

Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship: Introduces essential concepts and skills for aspiring entrepreneurs. This includes:

- Understanding entrepreneurship and its economic and social importance.
- Steps to start a business, from idea generation to implementation.
- Developing a sustainable and profitable business model.
- Basic business management concepts (planning, organizing, controlling, directing).
- Personal skill development (communication, leadership, problem-solving).

Strategic Planning and Organizational Development: Focuses on strategic planning and developing strategies to achieve organizational goals. This includes:

- Analyzing internal and external environmental factors.
- Setting organizational goals and vision.
- Developing specific strategies to achieve objectives.
- Implementing strategic plans effectively.

Operational Management and Resource Utilization: Emphasizes efficient management of operations and resources. Topics include:

- Planning daily, monthly, and annual operational goals.
- Organizing internal processes for efficiency.
- Executing plans with performance monitoring.
- Managing human, financial, and material resources effectively.
- Improving processes to enhance efficiency.

Business Creation and Legal Aspects: Covers the legal and procedural steps to establish a business, Like: Choosing the appropriate business structure, preparing legal documents for registration, and Managing legal issues (contracts, intellectual property).

Growth Strategies, Innovation, and Value Proposition: Focuses on achieving sustainable growth through innovation and value creation. Topics include:

- Developing growth strategies (market expansion, new markets).

- Encouraging innovation and new product development.
- Marketing innovative products and services effectively.
- Improving internal processes using technology.
- Delivering added value to customers through unique services and solutions.
- Implementing long-term sustainable growth strategies.

These programs aim to provide participants with practical skills, strategic insights, and legal knowledge to successfully launch, manage, and grow their entrepreneurial ventures.

3. Method

The study adopted a qualitative research design to gather in-depth insights from trainers involved in entrepreneurial support programs. This approach was chosen to capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and recommendations of the participants, which are essential for understanding the effectiveness and challenges of the programs.

A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect data from the trainers. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to allow for better data collection.

The sample consisted of ten trainers with varying levels of experience in entrepreneurial training, ranging from less than one year to over five years.

The questionnaire covered several key areas, including the impact of the programs, strengths of the university-ANADE partnership, training needs, challenges faced, recommendations for improvement, coordination between stakeholders, and opportunities for expansion.

4. Results and Discussion

For the impact of entrepreneurial programs on beneficiaries, the trainers generally perceive the impact of entrepreneurial programs on beneficiaries as positive. Several respondents highlighted the effectiveness of networking resources and tailored training programs in fostering entrepreneurial skills. However, some trainers noted that the impact is moderate, suggesting that while the programs are beneficial, there is room for enhancement. One trainer emphasized the need to integrate entrepreneurial modules into university curricula to achieve broader objectives.

In the other hand, the collaboration between universities and ANADE is seen as a significant strength. Key advantages include access to students and recent graduates, networking opportunities, and adapted training programs. The partnership also benefits from funding opportunities, which support the implementation of these initiatives. The ecosystem created by this collaboration is considered adequate for fostering entrepreneurship, though some trainers believe it could be further strengthened.

However, trainers identified several areas where they require additional training to improve their skills. These include new pedagogical methods, digital tools, and innovation management. Sharing experiences with other trainers was also highlighted as a valuable practice. The need for specialized software and technical support was frequently mentioned, indicating that access to modern tools is essential for effective training delivery.

In this context, the University of Oran 2 has entered into an agreement with Maastricht University in the Netherlands to enhance training through workshops. The exchange of expertise has contributed to improving the effectiveness of the training provided to students.

Also, trainers face several challenges in their roles, including low participant engagement, inadequate alignment between expectations and program content, and a lack of pedagogical resources. Some trainers also noted the necessity for participants to have basic knowledge of corporate finance, especially those from diverse academic backgrounds. These challenges underscore the need for more tailored and practical training approaches.

To enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurial programs, trainers recommended several improvements. These include introducing mentorship programs, revising training manuals, incorporating business simulation exercises, and providing follow-up support after the launch of new ventures. Additionally, trainers suggested organizing more seminars and creating advisory and expertise offices to better support entrepreneurs.

Analysing the coordination between universities and NESDA is generally viewed as good. Effective communication, resource sharing, and follow-up with trained entrepreneurs were cited as positive aspects of this collaboration. This mechanism involves the participation of trainers in all actions initiated by NESDA to familiarize them with the environment in which project evaluation takes place. This approach will be shared with new project holders to better prepare them for the business world.

As for the impact of training programs on entrepreneurial development in Algeria is perceived as moderate to strong. Trainers believe that these programs help participants better understand the obligations and duties of entrepreneurs, as well as the financial evaluation of projects. However, several obstacles to entrepreneurship were identified, including informal constraints, lack of skills and training, political and economic uncertainties, bureaucracy, and administrative barriers.

Speaking of opportunities, trainers see opportunities for expanding and improving entrepreneurial support activities. Suggestions include creating a platform that connects all stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, internationalizing support programs, and increasing efforts to embed entrepreneurial culture within universities. Emphasizing the motivations of entrepreneurs and dedicating more resources to these initiatives were also recommended.

Some trainers offered additional comments and suggestions, such as dividing entrepreneurial support into two phases: coaching and monitoring. They also encouraged dedicating more effort and resources to better implement entrepreneurial culture among students, staff, and teachers. Overall, the feedback reflects a strong commitment to advancing entrepreneurial support in Algeria.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that support is crucial for the success of projects, especially when it begins at the university level by training future entrepreneurs in their initial environment. The experience of associating the university with the National Agency for Support and Development of Entrepreneurship (NESDA) was designed to harness the potential of young entrepreneurs and guide them toward opportunities.

In this context, the trainers at the Entrepreneurship Development Center involved in this process have demonstrated a strong capacity for adaptation and the execution of programs aimed at students. At the end of the training, an evaluation committee convenes to assess the project presentations by the holders, with a grading system that will be used for subsequent funding requests.

Like some studies that provide recommendations to improve education programs (Samwel Mwasalwiba, 2010), we see that updating programs, providing ongoing trainer training, and ensuring sufficient pedagogical and material resources remain key factors that these organizations must address to ensure the success of this support strategy.

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ETHICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

The author(s) declare that ethical rules and scientific citation principles were complied with throughout the preparation process of this study.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCHERS' CONTRIBUTION RATE TO THE ARTICLE

1st author contribution rate: 50%

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