

## Entrepreneurship as a key competence for lifelong learning and the role of entrepreneurship education in the Greek educational system

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**Abstract:** The basic key competencies that European citizens should have as part of a lifelong learning context were first identified in 2006 by the European Framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The skills of this Framework are also included in the New Skills Agenda for Lifelong Learning which was adopted in 2016. Entrepreneurship is among the eight basic key competencies listed in this European Framework. The cultivation of entrepreneurship through education and the support of teachers have been, according to European education policy documents, key priorities for the last several years. The role of entrepreneurship is also emphasized as particularly important in achieving European goals, including the creation of a competitive knowledge-based economy with sustainable economic growth and social cohesion. Thus, this article presents entrepreneurship as part of the key competences for lifelong learning as well as the opportunities provided, through the entrepreneurship education programs in Greece, for the cultivation of entrepreneurship in young people. Finally, some research results, regarding the demand and the participation in entrepreneurship training programs of Greek universities, during the period of economic crisis, are also presented

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, key competences, lifelong learning

### 1. Introduction

“Competence” is defined as the combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, appropriate to address effectively specific circumstances. Key competences refer to the ability to support personal development, social inclusion and active participation of citizens. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are important factors of productivity and innovation as well as factors that contribute to meeting current challenges and changes. The role of skills is also emphasized as important for the satisfaction of individuals in their work environment. The contribution of lifelong learning to the development of skills is particularly emphasized. Individuals need to enhance their skills and competences, not only for the development of their personality and their ability for active participation in their society, but also for their ability to respond successfully to new challenges of a changing world (Sipitanou, 2014). Following the achievement of the objectives set by the Europe 2020 strategy and the need to strengthen updated skills (European Commission, 2016a), the European Commission adopted the New Skills Agenda for Europe (European Commission, 2016b). New Skills Agenda which revises the 2006 Recommendation on Basic Lifelong Learning Skills recognizes the investment in skills and competences and the importance of their joint updating (Official Journal of the European Union, 2018).

On the other hand the development and promotion of entrepreneurship is a strategic goal, both of the European Union and its Member States for several years. Specifically, after the Lisbon Council in 2000, which formed the new strategic goal of the Union, a great emphasis on fostering entrepreneurship is being given. The policies are shaped place at a high point the priority of promoting entrepreneurship. Its importance has become even more over the years and potential of entrepreneurship education and its contribution in achieving these objectives is particularly highlighted.

This article attempts an overview of the European competence framework as well as a reference to the importance of entrepreneurship as one of those skills. In addition, entrepreneurship education programs which are provided by the Greek educational system in order to strengthen the entrepreneurship mindset of young people and their participation are presented.

## 2. European Framework of Key Competences and Entrepreneurship Education

The terms "key skills / key competences" define the set of skills (basic and new basic skills) needed in the modern knowledge society" (Cedefop, 2014). These skills include the eight key competencies set by the European Commission in the Common European Framework of Reference for Key Competences. Specifically, the necessity of acquiring key competences by citizens as a precondition for achieving the key objectives of the Lisbon Summit and the 2010 work program orientation is followed by the European's Parliament announcement of the 2006 Recommendation for a European framework for key competences (European Commission, 2003a).

The importance of key competences development for the European Commission is underlined in the context of economic developments and changes in the demand for relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it is necessary for everyone to acquire a set of basic skills - including literacy, numeracy and digital skills. "Critical thinking, creativity and the ability to work as members of a team are equally important for building sustainable careers and activating citizens". The role of education and training in the development of these skills by young people is also highlighted. The importance of effective communication between the needs of the European Union economy and education sector is also mentioned. The acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to alleviate gaps and inequalities in the field of skills is also recognized.

With regard to the European Union's guidelines, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, in their Recommendation on the Key Competences of Lifelong Learning (European Parliament, 2006), in 2006, propose measures to develop key competences that ensure those qualifications required as a basis for working life and to allow adults to update these competences through lifelong learning. It would be useful to mention that training and learning with a view to acquiring competences, (Official Journal of the European Union, 2018), and relevant conclusions on the future objectives of European education and training systems were assessed. Thus, conclusions of previous European Councils, reports and communications, programs, studies and actions (European Parliament, 2006; European Parliament, 2009; Sipitanou, 2014) were assessed, as well as the re-recognition of the conclusions on key competences, skills and the role of lifelong learning, some of which include the following necessities:

- European framework defining the new basic competences to be provided through lifelong learning,
- importance of competences in transforming economies into knowledge-based economies,
- emphasis on the fact that people are the main capital of Europe,
- development of skills for the knowledge society and in particular the promotion of language learning and the development of entrepreneurship,
- development of lifelong learning with particular emphasis on active measures for the unemployed,
- contribution of education to the preservation and renewal of the common cultural background and to the learning of basic social and political values, in particular those of citizenship, equality, tolerance and respect,
- importance of teamwork and the ability of organisations to identify competences that encourage the development of 'learning organisations' but also improve the competitiveness of enterprises
- mitigation of the gap between the levels of education required by new jobs and the levels of education achieved by the European workforce (European Parliament, 2006)

Developing key competences and supporting young people with a lack of education due to personal, social, cultural or economic conditions are among the main objectives. Thus, the European Parliament's recommendation proposes that measures be taken to develop key competences and actions to support their respective policies. The key competences set out in the Common European Reference Framework are:

- Communication in a mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages
- Mathematical scientific and technological competences
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn
- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/development-skills\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/development-skills_en)

- Cultural awareness and expression (European Parliament, 2006)

Entrepreneurship's definition as "a social and dynamic process, where individuals, alone or in cooperation, identify and act on opportunities for innovation by transforming their ideas into practical and targeted activities within a social, cultural or economic context" (European Commission, 2006) highlight the role of the education process in the development of entrepreneurship. It is also important to mention that following the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 (Conclusions, P., 2000), the next relevant decisions of the Barcelona Council (European Parliament, 2002) and the Education and Training 2010 work program (European Council, 2009), in 2006 the Council and the European Parliament adopted the Recommendation on the European Framework for the Reference of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Council, 2006), according to which initiative and entrepreneurship are among the eight key competences for citizens (Papagiannis & Sipitanou, 2018).

Although the concept of entrepreneurship has not been attributed to a single definition, commonly accepted, it can be said that entrepreneurship includes activities involving the creation of new businesses, the renewal of existing ones and the introduction of new products and technologies. It is also defined as seeking business opportunities and trying to turn initiative into results and idea into action. Recently, however, the term entrepreneurship has included the concepts of culture and entrepreneurial mindsets. Self-employment as a professional choice, willingness to take risks, understanding business opportunities and interpreting them, based on the creativity, imagination and social parameters of economy are some features of the entrepreneurial mindset.

Thus, various forms of educational interventions, such as courses and traineeships, have been implemented in many school and universities from several countries in Europe and America. As noted in the literature, entrepreneurial skills can be taught, as they do not refer to the predetermined personal characteristics of each individual. These skills have also contributed to the success of people who have started a business (Valdivia & Karlan, 2006). Entrepreneurship education programs enhance its promotion while business plan competitions provide a wide range of benefits to participants, such as developing business skills, enhancing accessibility to businesses, supporting of business networking, developing confidence and willingness to take future business actions (Russell et al, 2008). Providing information through seminars, and competitions of business ideas help both to broaden the learning horizon of entrepreneurship education and to identify future training needs (Kuratko, 2005).

### 3. Methodology

Greece's support through the European Union's financing programs is linked to the goals set by the Union. Following the Lisbon Council of 2000 and its targets for the period after 2000 emphasis is placed on promoting entrepreneurship and on the role of entrepreneurship education in this direction. Also as already mentioned entrepreneurship is among key competences of the European Framework of Competences for Lifelong Learning. The methodology used to highlight research questions is the literature research and the search of statistics data from secondary research sources. Thus, through the literature research and following the above presentation of the key competences of the European Framework useful conclusions are drawn for the role and types of entrepreneurship educational programs provided within the Greek educational system.

On the other hand, the rate of change in the selection and attendance of entrepreneurship education programs by young people is recorded. The data refer to the particularly critical period of the economic crisis in Greece, in the period after 2009. The reference to this period is due to the inclusion of entrepreneurship education programs, such as courses, seminars and competitions in most universities compared to the past. These programs are offered to students who optionally choose to attend them. The collaboration of the entrepreneurship and innovation structures of the universities contributed decisively to the presentation of the research results.

### 4. Results

#### Entrepreneurship as a priority of the European Union

The sense of initiative and entrepreneurship as a key competence of European Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes innovation and risk-taking, creativity as well as the ability to plan in order to achieve specific objectives. "It supports people, not only

in their everyday lives, both at home and in society, but also in the workplace, particularly in terms of being aware of the context of their work and seizing opportunities. It forms the foundation for the specific skills and knowledge needed by those who are active in or contribute to social or commercial activity” (Papagiannis & Sipitanou, 2018).

Following the proposal of this European Framework the European Union is taking various initiatives to promote these skills. The "Agenda for New Skills and Jobs" initiative sets one of its key priorities in supporting job creation. Promoting entrepreneurship, self-employment and innovation are the means to achieve this objective (European Commission, 2010). It is also stated that SMEs constitute the majority of enterprises in the Union and that they provide two thirds of all private sector jobs. That is why strengthening support policies for these enterprises are important. Moreover, social enterprises, cooperatives and the promotion of self-employment need to be further supported.

Entrepreneurship as an opportunity for job creation but also as a mean of combating social exclusion should be strengthened through educational systems. The member states of the European Union should, as it is pointed out, integrate entrepreneurship in the curricula enabling the development of skills related to the entrepreneurial spirit and the abilities of young people for starting and running a business as well as identifying entrepreneurial opportunities. “Cross-border cooperation between universities and research centers in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship” should be promoted. At the same time, it is stated that the Commission will present a proposal for the extension and transformation of the “Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs” action into a permanent program and will support specific teacher training programs as well as exchanges of best practices (European Commission, 2010).

According to European Commission (2005), entrepreneurship education is a lifelong process as "entrepreneurship is a social and dynamic process where individuals, alone or in collaboration, identify opportunities for innovation and act on them by transforming their ideas into practical and targeted activities within a social, cultural or economic context ". Entrepreneurship education is not only a continuous process of the individual characteristics development but it also aims to provide information and professional guidance. It is also noted the important role of entrepreneurship education as “a critical determinant of the supply of entrepreneurship through the formation of (potential) entrepreneurs and by helping to foster entrepreneurship. In this context, entrepreneurship education should not only focus on limited tools (start the company, managing financial and human resources) but on broader behaviours” (OECD, 2008).

### **Entrepreneurship education in the Greek educational system**

The reference to the concept of entrepreneurship in the context of Greek primary education most often appears through activities and programs. The implementation of corresponding programs, which are not part of the formal curriculum, is not possible without the enthusiasm, active participation and initiative of teachers, as these programs usually focus on team working methods and in mentality, with a greater emphasis on creativity and collaboration (European Commission, 2002). Entrepreneurship education is mainly the content of economics courses. Thus, in primary education, where economics is not taught as a separate subject, economic concepts are included in courses on the subject of the environment.

In high school there is no specific reference to entrepreneurship since the course where there are economic subjects are more related to nutrition, environment and general awareness of young people (European Commission, 2002). The acquaintance of students with the term “entrepreneurship” is only possible through career programs or other creative projects. It is also worth mentioning the pilot program "Youth Entrepreneurship" in 2001-2002 year school period. In upper secondary education, entrepreneurship is included in economics courses, which are part of the national curriculum but also through educational visits to enterprises. Although very limited, references to entrepreneurship are found in the courses "Political Education" and "Economics". Various approaches to entrepreneurship are possible in the course "Principles of Business Organization and Management" but also in other courses in the field of economics of vocational education. It should be noted, however, that in the above courses the references to entrepreneurship are limited to its definition and meaning (Papagiannis, 2012). Finally, noting that "the education system can provide both the skills and a suitable environment for entrepreneurship development" (European Commission, 2003b), it is worth mentioning the "Virtual Business" program of the Junior Achievement network of Greece, which has enabled, for many years,

secondary school students to get acquainted with practical issues of establishing and operating an enterprise. But this possibility depends directly on the initiatives of the teachers themselves.

In higher education, the concept of entrepreneurship is in various teaching units both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. However, according to the views of experts, entrepreneurship education, particularly in the first years after 2000, is provided only to students of financial and business sectors, while supply remains very limited for students from other disciplines, such as science, engineering, arts and crafts. This is one of the reasons for proposing the general teaching of entrepreneurship which will not be limited to specific courses and disciplines, “as entrepreneurial skills and competences may be necessary in every sector of human activity” (European Commission, 2002).

It should be noted that universities, as autonomous institutions, provide courses and programs in the field of entrepreneurship on their own initiative. The European programs of the funding period 2007-2013 support the teaching of entrepreneurship subjects with corresponding courses in the content of many of the Greek university curricula. However, in most cases, the students themselves are given the opportunity to choose whether to attend the specific course or not. Also, the Employment and Career structures are created, where Innovation and Entrepreneurship Units are part of them. Important actions of these structures are seminars, events, workshops as well as competitions of entrepreneurial ideas where students from different university departments and faculties can participate. Liaison offices and traineeships also contribute by coordinating specific actions. Statistics data that are indicative of the increase in the number of students who choose to attend entrepreneurship education programs at universities are presented in the graphs below. Specifically, in the particularly critical period of the beginning of economic crisis in Greece an increase in the number of students who choose to attend an entrepreneurship course is recorded (Figure 1). Finally, for the same period, courses are the type of entrepreneurship education programs that is offered by most universities. Fewer universities offer entrepreneurship seminars and entrepreneurial ideas competitions but nowadays they are offered by almost all academic institutions (Figure 2).

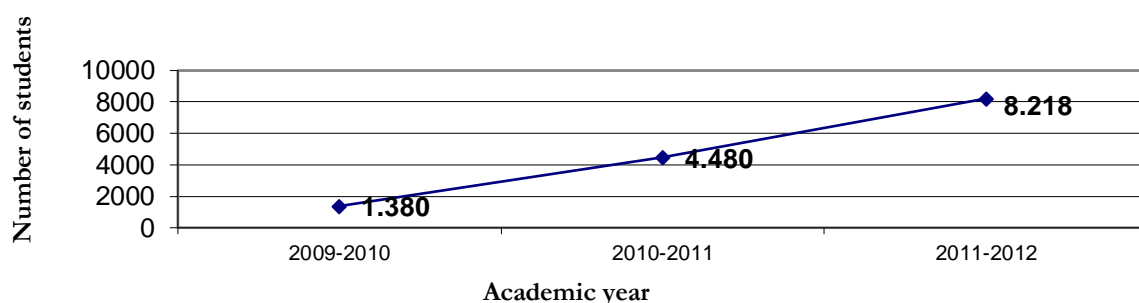


Figure 1: Student's participation in courses of entrepreneurship

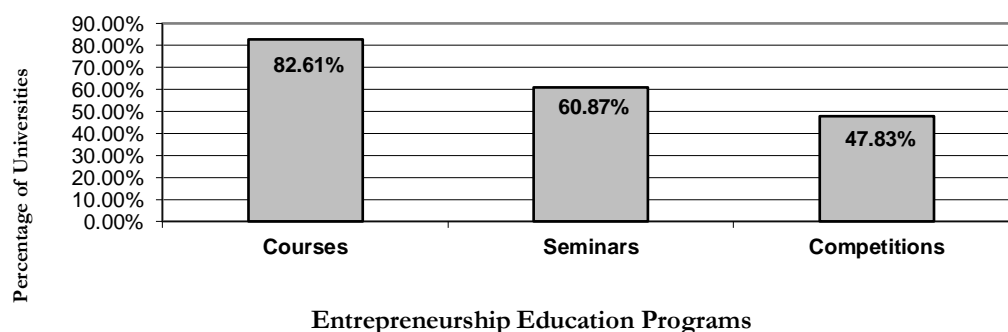


Figure 2: Entrepreneurship education programs in Greek universities during the period of economic crisis in Greece



## 5. Conclusions

The necessity and importance of developing entrepreneurship is substantially demonstrated by the reference to entrepreneurship as one of the key competences in the European Framework for lifelong learning. One of the objectives of this framework is to enhance innovation and creativity as well as entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. Thus, improving research conditions and creation of a more favorable climate for entrepreneurship with the aim of increasing competitiveness in the European Union is emphasized (Official Journal of the European Union, 2009).

In Greece, although many activities are ongoing at all levels of education, most of them are not integrated into the formal curriculum. The official school curricula do not include specific entrepreneurship courses but only scattered concepts, mainly in lessons of economics. Thus, there are concerns about the content that should be included in an entrepreneurship course and research on this topic could help in this direction. Entrepreneurship is most often seen as an extracurricular activity or as part of a seminar and later as an elective course in higher education. The result is that most of the students do not have the opportunity to participate in entrepreneurship courses and programs.

In recent years, attempts have been made to export research results on entrepreneurship education and the contribution of various forms of entrepreneurship education programs. Exploring the relationship between the learning process and the development of appropriate skills is important for the designing of suitable educational programs. However, there is an immediate need for the formation of appropriate educational programs by state educational institutions that in their goals will include these characteristics of entrepreneurship which highlight its economic but mainly its social benefit.

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