



**FOSTERING STUDENT ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS IN SSHS.
THE CASE OF “IMPRESA IN AULA”**

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Article info

Date of receipt: 25/01/2020
Acceptance date: 14/09/2020

Keywords: Soft skills;
Entrepreneurship education; Social
sciences and humanities

doi: 10.14596/pisb.2825

Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of universities in stimulating students' entrepreneurial skills. After analysing innovations introduced by European policies, the study discusses the main limitations of the scientific debate on entrepreneurship competences and education. Aiming to fill this gap, the research presents the results of a survey involving 75 students of the University of Macerata (Italy), who participated and did not participate in “Impresa INaula”, a project promoted by the Regional Government of the Marche Region in 2019. The quali-quantitative research allows both to measure students' personal, interpersonal and technical skills and investigate teamwork propensity and participants' perception of “Impresa INaula”. The study aims at understanding the correlation between student participation in experiential learning activities and the development of soft skills, also providing practical recommendations for implementing entrepreneurship education in the field of social sciences and humanities.

1. Introduction

Over the last ten years, soft skills have become a buzzword in the academic debate on Student Entrepreneurship (SE) and Entrepreneurial Education (EE). Universities all over the world have been discussing how to provide students with transversal knowledge and competences needed to cope with both competitiveness and global challenges in different professional fields.

To succeed in a continually changing labour market and achieve high work performances, young generations are required to integrate their technical hard skills with soft skills, meant as a set of knowledge, abilities, competences, attitudes, motivations, values, character attributes and experiences that emerge when a person reacts to the demands of the environment (Carlotto, 2015, p. 29). Graduates who have acquired and developed these skills, particularly entrepreneurial skills, are not only more employable but also better able to obtain and retain jobs.

The present research moves from these assumptions to analyse the role of universities in stimulating students' entrepreneurship competences. The in-depth examination of the recent innovations introduced by European policies suggests that EE should be addressed to students in different fields, including social sciences and humanities (SSHs), to develop holistic personal soft skills and attitudes, rather than providing specific tools solely for students in business studies (Section 2). In this context, the paper discusses the scientific literature on entrepreneurship competences and education, pointing out the main gaps in the current state of theoretical and field research (Section 3). In particular, the need to measure the effectiveness and impact of Entrepreneurship Education Programmes (EEPs) is highlighted, such as experiential learning activities carried out in the field of SSHs. Aiming to fill this gap, a case study is provided, discussing the results of a survey involving undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University of Macerata (UniMC, Italy), a university founded on SSHs (Section 4).

The questionnaire was addressed to students who participated and did not participate in "IMpresa INaula", a European project promoted by the Regional Government of the Marche Region in 2019. The survey measured students' creativity, competence, communication skills, risk aversion, autonomy, goal attainment, empathy and trust by adopting marketing scales and open questions. On the basis of the existing scientific literature, the study seeks to investigate the following research questions:

1. Is there a positive correlation between the participation in experiential learning activities and the development of soft skills in students in SSHs?
2. Does experiential learning equally contribute to the development of personal, interpersonal and technical skills?

3. What practical recommendations can be drawn for implementing entrepreneurship education in universities founded on SSHs?

Conclusions focus on policy implications and future research directions (Section 5).

2. Research context and rationale

EE has been considered in the supranational ambit since 2000 by non-binding acts, aimed to suggest a line of action without imposing any legal obligation on those to whom they are addressed. This kind of acts, while not having a legal effect, can have not under-valuable political and cultural impacts, raising public opinion and decision-makers, enhancing public debate and often modifying national policies, at least in their general direction.

Education and training for entrepreneurship entered the European vocabulary with *The European Charter for Small Enterprises*, approved by the Feira European Council (European Council, 2000). In 2003, the Commission led by Romano Prodi launched a public debate by publishing the first *Green Paper "Entrepreneurship in Europe"*, which includes education as a fundamental factor (EC, 2003a). According to the document, education and training should contribute to encouraging entrepreneurship, by fostering the right mindset, awareness of career opportunities as an entrepreneur and skills. Considering that both personality and management skills are crucial elements for success, personal skills relevant to entrepreneurship should be taught from an early stage and be maintained up to university level. Within universities, entrepreneurship training should not only be for MBA students, but it should also be available for students in other fields.

According to the Summary Report *The public debate following the Green Paper "Entrepreneurship in Europe"*, "entrepreneurship education should be a full part of school curricula" (EC, 2003b, p. 5). In particular, EE should favour the development of a variety of useful skills and personality traits: curiosity, openness to continuous learning, proactive attitude, self-reliance and creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking and interpersonal skills. The report strongly recommended not only to combine school and work, but also to include entrepreneurship in all non-commercial educational paths.

In February 2005, the Barroso Commission proposed a new start for the Lisbon Strategy, focusing the European Union's efforts on delivering stronger growth and providing more and better jobs (EC, 2005a). *The integrated guidelines for growth and jobs (2005-2008)* (EC, 2005b) stress a more entrepreneurial culture in support to SMEs: among other measures, Member States should reinforce EE and training (cross-reference to the relevant employment guidelines).

In the *European Youth Pact*, the European Council called on the Union and the Member States, each within the limits of its powers, to encourage young

people to develop entrepreneurship and to promote the emergence of young entrepreneurs, also expanding the scope for students to undertake a period of study in another Member State (European Council, 2005, Annex I).

In 2006, the so-called *Oslo Agenda for Entrepreneurship Education in Europe* was approved (EC, 2006b). It contains a set of specific proposals that define how to support progress in the field of EE through systematic and effective actions to be implemented at European, national and regional levels (EC, 2006a).

Since 2006, through the *Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning*, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship has been considered one of the eight key competences that everyone needs for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006). This act was replaced by *Council recommendations* in 2018 (Council of the European Union, 2018). According to the most recent definition, entrepreneurship competence refers to the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas, and to transform them into values for others. This competence can be applied in any sphere of life and is founded upon creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving, taking the initiative and perseverance and the ability to work collaboratively in order to plan and manage projects that are of cultural, social or financial value (JRC, 2016). An entrepreneurial attitude is characterised by a sense of initiative, being forward-looking, courage and perseverance in achieving objectives, desire to motivate others and value their ideas, empathy and taking care of people and the world, accepting responsibility and taking ethical approaches throughout the process.

The *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan* (EC, 2013) identified EE as one of the three pillars to support entrepreneurial growth in Europe. On the basis of empirical research (Jenner, 2012), the European Commission considers that investing in EE is one of the highest return investments that could be made. Several Member States have successfully introduced national strategies for EE or made entrepreneurial learning a mandatory part of curricula. However, there is plenty of room for improvement. In particular, learning outcomes for all educators have to be achieved, and Universities should become more entrepreneurial (Dabić, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the European Commission, in collaboration with OECD, developed *A guiding framework for entrepreneurial universities* (EC and OECD, 2012). The framework is designed to help universities assess themselves and improve their capability with tailor-made learning modules. Furthermore, members States are invited, *inter alia*, to boost entrepreneurial training for young people and adults in education through Structural Funds resources in line with the national job plans (European Parliament, 2015; Council of the European Union, 2015).

During this period, several comparative analyses on public policies were undertaken at the national level. In one of the most significant, *En-*

trepreneurship Education: A Road to Success (EC, 2015), the impact created by both specific and broader strategies was examined, concluding that where these strategies and actions are put in place, there is a positive impact on the person, on the training institutes, on the economy and on society.

Recently, in April 2019, the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education published the *Activity Report 2014-2019* (European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, 2019), calling on the Council and the Commission to develop methodological support and tools for national education systems in the area of EE and training, including social entrepreneurship, in particular to establish entrepreneurial traineeships and exchange programmes to give young people hands-on experience; support partnerships between educational institutions and companies via the use of the European Fund for Strategic Investment and the European Social Fund.

In European countries, the situation is slightly varied. On the one hand, in some States, especially in Northern Europe, EE programmes are consolidated. On the other hand, in Southern Europe, EE programmes are quite novel¹. In particular, Italy shows delay in comparison with European States average.

First of all, there is no national plan or strategy for EE. However, some episodic legislative interventions of the State and specific actions of the Ministry of Education could be found in the matter. Despite the fact that there is not any systematic frame of reference, the Italian State has started promoting the cultre of entrepreneurship in the educational system.

Secondly, in the State main documents, the notion of EE is borrowed from the first *Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning*, dated 2006, and it is not always up to date to the new cultural acquisitions. In consequence of this reductive point of view, a choice of field emerges: the business aspects tend to prevail over humanistic and social ones. Indeed, according to the more recent shared vision (JRC, 2016), EE aims at (and is useful for) the development of holistic personal soft skills and attitudes, rather than specific tools for business actions; creativity, ability to catch opportunities, to be innovative and connected with the contexts wishes to create value for others in any sphere of life. So, it is intended as education also planned to promote active citizenship and social and ethic awareness, a profile that in the Italian legislation seems to be recessive.

¹ Many institutions and documents furnish comparative data. Among the more recent studies, a policy experimentation project, conducted by the Innovation Cluster for Entrepreneurship Education (ICEE), started in January 2015 and ran until January 2018. The project was assigned by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Programme. The cluster produced a comparative analysis of eight national strategies on EE (involving Belgium/Flanders, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, and Norway). All good practices selected by are available online at the following URL: <http://innovation-clusters.icee-eu.eu/ICEE/National-Strategies>.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Entrepreneurial competences

Entrepreneurial competences are broadly defined as knowledge, skills and attitudes which represent the key for starting or growing a business (Mitchelmore and Rowley, 2010). Several international institutions and scholars have attempted to describe what entrepreneurial competences are, their role and contribution to the development of students' career. The Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education (2004) states that the desired competences for budding entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial skills, ready skills and business functions. In particular, entrepreneurial skills are the unique traits, behaviours and processes which differentiate an entrepreneur from an employee or manager. Then, ready skills include communication, team skills, and critical thinking/information literacy/research skills. Whereas, business functions concern the traditional business activities performed in starting and running a business, such as financial management, resource management, information management, marketing management, operations management, risk management, and strategic management.

According to the OECD (2009), entrepreneurial skills are divided into three areas: a) acquisition of basic skills concerning the level of general knowledge, communication, science, technology and problem-solving for the effective function in a working environment and the design of a professional career; b) development of personal and social skills, including teamwork, taking risks, self-esteem, self-knowledge, problem-solving, creativity and desire for innovation; and c) breathing skills which focus on the creation of companies or the financial management, such as composing business plans, marketing, sales, human resources management and designing plus drawing personal and business budgets.

On the other hand, drawing from the works of Gibb (1993) and Shook *et al.* (2003), Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006) suggest that the entrepreneurial individual should develop a range of both skills and attributes. The category of skills includes problem-solving, creativity, persuasiveness, planning, negotiating, decision-making, while attributes are self-confidence, autonomy, achievement-orientation, versatility, dynamism and resourcefulness. Then, the work of Henry *et al.* (2005) identifies three categories of entrepreneurial skills: technical skills, business management skills, and personal entrepreneurial skills. Technical skills are written and oral communication, technical management, and organising skills. Business management skills are managerial skills such as planning, decision-making marketing and accounting. Finally, innovation, risk-taking and persistence are personal skills. Despite the current emphasis on hard entrepreneurial activities, such as patenting or the creation of academic spin-offs (Aureli, 2010;

Candelo *et al.*, 2016; Salvador, 2007; Thomas *et al.*, 2014), softer activities and soft skills also play a crucial role in EE. Passaro *et al.* (2018) and Philpott *et al.* (2011) suggest that universities should focus more on practice-oriented entrepreneurial courses and collateral activities, such as projects and training, to involve students, university staff and entrepreneurs.

Indeed, the works of Preece *et al.* (2011), Mora *et al.* (2015), and Goethner and Wyrwich (2019) emphasise that EE can be regarded as a highly integrative discipline for establishing broader interdisciplinary courses and networks. In particular, EE enables the combination of basic research, knowledge transfer, practical applications, and the interaction with the local communities.

EEPs should equip students with a broader range of marketable skills (Duval-Couetil, 2013) as well as focusing more on creative thinking. Moreover, EEPs should strengthen soft skills such as relational, conceptual, organising and commitment competences (Man *et al.*, 2002), problem recognition and problem-solving (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006; Lautenschläger and Haase, 2011), negotiation, leadership, new product development and exposure to technological innovation (Kuratko, 2005).

According to Galvão *et al.* (2019), EE has the potential to encourage young people to gain organisational skills, including time management, leadership development and interpersonal skills. Besides that, EE can be a means of equipping students with the skills to identify and catch the opportunities which emerge in the knowledge environment (Hynes and Richardson, 2007), as well as creating their own jobs (Premand *et al.*, 2016). In this context, the analysis conducted by Elmuti *et al.* (2012) empirically displays that EEPs can also contribute to openness, confidence, and trust among students.

In the words of Fayolle (2013, p. 693) two major evolutions might reinforce the future of EEPs: “strong intellectual and conceptual foundations, drawing from the fields of entrepreneurship and education, to strengthen entrepreneurship courses”. In addition, researchers and educators “also need to deeply reflect on practices”, “taking a more critical stance toward a too often adopted ‘taken for granted’ position”.

3.2 Entrepreneurship education: approaches and impact

The study of EE in higher education institutions is a challenging area of research for universities, governments, and industries (Kabongo and Okpara, 2010) because it encompasses a wide range of definitions, objectives, contents and pedagogical methods (Fayolle, 2008). Thus, there is no consensus on what exactly are the components of a quality practice model of higher-education entrepreneurship (Vanevenhoven and Liguori, 2013). The literature debates whether EE is the teaching of a set of skills or it represents the process of creating a mindset (Duval-Couetil, 2013).

From a general point of view, the European Commission (2006a) describes EE as a lifelong procedure which has been incorporated in higher education curricula at different levels, including undergraduate, postgraduate and Ph.D. courses. In addition, there is a growing trend in courses specifically designed for art, engineering, natural sciences and social sciences students (Duval-Couetil *et al.*; 2016; Hahn *et al.*, 2019; Kuratko, 2005).

Falkang and Alberti (2000) attempted to fit EEPs into two categories: (1) courses that explain entrepreneurship and its importance to the economy, where students remain at a distance from the subject; and (2) courses with an experiential component that train students in the skills necessary to develop their own businesses. Indeed, several articles emphasise the importance of “active”, “experiential”, “learning by doing” and “real-world” pedagogies (Fayolle, 2013).

In particular, Chang and Rieple (2013) state that learning to be an entrepreneur is best achieved by “learning by doing” (Politis, 2005), undergoing experiences in real-life situations (Hampden-Turner, 2002), or developed through class-based discussions of case studies or hypothetical questions. Moreover, Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006) trace an interesting possibility in the entrepreneurial-directed approach, which involves co-learning between students and teachers. Students have ownership of their learning, while the teacher acts as a facilitator of the process, supporting them to make their own theoretical interpretations. However, Fayolle (2013) highlights that little evidence is provided regarding the adequacy between methods used and audience specificities, methods and contents, methods and institutional constraints (culture, time, space and resources). In addition, few researchers have examined to what extent differing programme models and experiential activities impact students’ perceptions of their entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy (Duval-Couetil *et al.*, 2016).

The extant literature on EEPs’ impact shows contrasting results (Hahn *et al.*, 2019). On the one hand, the work of Almeida *et al.* (2019) suggests that students enrolled both in junior enterprises and EEPs reported a higher entrepreneurial intention than those students who are only members of a junior enterprise. Then, the findings of Duval-Couetil *et al.* (2016) report that higher perceptions of entrepreneurial knowledge are associated with the number of entrepreneurship courses taken and involvement in experiential learning activities. Moreover, the works of Sánchez (2011) and Karlsson and Moberg (2013) show a positive effect of EE on entrepreneurial skills.

On the other hand, as recognised by Lyons and Zhang (2018), several studies find weak or no effects on short-term outcomes (Fairlie *et al.*, 2015; Oosterbeek *et al.*, 2010; Von Graevenitz *et al.*, 2010). Lautenschläger and Haase (2011) even emphasise that most EEPs are “temporary fashion”. The authors claim that educational systems do not promote creativity, opportunity recognition, and problem-solving skills. The analysis also suggests

to concentrate on the promotion of soft skills rather than on teaching how to start a business.

3.3 Entrepreneurship education: research gaps

The first EEP was created at the end of the 1930s in Japan. Only 40 years later, in the 1970s, EEPs started flourishing in American universities (Bell *et al.*, 2004). During the last two decades, EEPs have further expanded in most industrialised areas, including many of the European countries (Matlay and Carey, 2006; European Commission, 2012). Indeed, the number of higher institutions investing in EEPs has grown exponentially (Kuratko, 2005; O'Connor, 2013; Winkel, 2013). Furthermore, an increasing number of publications and conferences has focused on EE (Fayolle, 2013).

EEPs are established to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to create economic value and jobs (Duval-Couetil, 2013). In fact, European policy makers have been mainly driven by the urge to foster employability skills (Etzkowitz *et al.*, 2000), to reduce graduate unemployment (Onuma, 2016) and to support companies to solve economic underperformance (Matlay, 2006).

The literature has attempted to define the expression “entrepreneurship education”. Among the several definitions, Kourilsky (1995, p. 10) states that EE represents an “opportunity recognition, the marshalling of resources in the presence of risk, and building a business venture”. However, “acting entrepreneurially” does not exclusively relate to typical venture creation processes, but also to entrepreneurial behaviour in existing organisations, forms of social entrepreneurship, and even daily life situations (EC, 2004; Fretschner and Weber, 2013).

While the growing demand for entrepreneurial skills has led to a widespread rise in EEPs, key issues remain (Fayolle, 2013). The literature has stressed that the impact and effectiveness of EEPs are still under dispute (Donnellon *et al.*, 2014; Fretschner and Weber, 2013; Huber *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, EEPs have not been accompanied by rigorous, consistent and sustainable evaluations (Fayolle and Gailly, 2009).

Fayolle (2013) underlines the need to further investigate the appropriateness, the relevancy, the coherency, the social usefulness and the efficiency of initiatives and practices in EEPs. Furthermore, Duval-Couetil (2013) claims that the extent and nature of the outcomes of EEPs have not been well explored. In particular, few studies have analysed the short- and long-term influence of EEPs on student attitudes, behaviours, career goals, and professional competence.

According to Fayolle and Gailly (2013), and Vanevenhoven and Liguori (2013), there is little attention on how EEPs impact on students in terms of changes in attitudes, perceptions, intentions, motivations, identity and

how these outcomes translate over time into career decisions and performance. However, confusion regarding the impact of EEPs may result from the wide diversity of pedagogical methods employed (Ghulam *et al.*, 2017).

In addition, it is a matter of debate the extent to which entrepreneurship is teachable, or even worth teaching (Hynes, 1996), what should be taught and how it should be taught (Matlay, 2008; Ronstadt, 1987). Indeed, Morris and Liguori (2016, pp. XV-XVI) recently stated that “the emergence of entrepreneurship education has occurred so rapidly that it has outpaced our understanding of what should be taught by entrepreneurship educators, how it should be taught, and how outcomes should be assessed”.

4. A case study

In the context of recent European policies on EE, universities are required to properly face the challenges emerging in the scientific debate. On the one hand, they are invited to improve practice-oriented entrepreneurial courses, projects and training, involving not only students, but also entrepreneurs and scholars in different disciplines (Passaro *et al.*, 2018; Philpott *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, they should pay more attention on measuring and assessing the impact of EEPs on students’ perceptions, intentions, motivations and behaviours (Fayolle and Gailly, 2013; Vanevenhoven and Liguori, 2013).

The field research presented in this section aims at contributing to fill this gap, by analysing a practice-oriented project carried out by a university in the field of SSHs which involved both students and scholars. The research discusses the effect of the participation in experiential learning activities by measuring students’ perceptions of their personal, interpersonal and technical skills (Heinon and Poikkijoki, 2006; Henry *et al.*, 2005; OECD, 2009).

4.1 *UniMC and Impresa INaula*

During the last years, UniMC has developed several initiatives concerning EE to support its talents and to valorise the economic and social context. UniMC enacts the claim “Humanism that Innovates”: the humanistic approach can facilitate the understanding of the complexity of the current social, cultural and environmental issues, as well as generating collaborative strategies to identify business opportunities.

Among the initiatives underpinned to foster EE, UniMC joined “Impresa INaula” in 2019. “Impresa INaula” is a project promoted by the Regional Government of the Marche Region. The project aims to stimulate an entrepreneurial approach among students and scholars, as well to link teaching and research to industry. “Impresa INaula” is an initiative which

was previously launched by the Region of Valencia (Spain) under the name Aula Emprende and later included in the European project – Interreg Europe iEER – Boosting innovative Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Regions for young entrepreneurs². The Marche Region is a partner of the iEER project. More recently the iEER project has been added among the finalists of RegioStars, an award promoted by the European Commission.

“IMpresa INaula” involved the four universities of the Marche Region, namely the University of Macerata, the University of Urbino, the University of Camerino and the Marche Polytechnic University. The project was structured in two steps:

- 1) EEP for scholars. In particular, 20 scholars (5 scholars for each university) joined lectures on motivation, creativity, innovation and idea generation;
- 2) EEP for students and preparation for the final event on business idea presentation.

During the second step, UniMC scholars selected 40 students within their courses to form 5 teams that were coordinated by the personnel of the Office for the Valorisation of Research – ILO (Industrial Liaison Office) and Placement of UniMC. Scholars and students mixed their backgrounds because they belong to different departments of UniMC, namely Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism; Political Sciences, Communication and International Relations; Human Sciences; Law; Specialisation School in Artistic and Historical Heritage. Then, the students attended an interdisciplinary course on entrepreneurship, humanism, creativity and innovation, in order to acquire and strengthen their soft skills. Students were also stimulated to transfer their academic knowledge to the business environment by means of “hands-on” group activities. Furthermore, the teams developed 5 business ideas for the valorisation of the Marche Region. The ideas mainly focused on cultural and creative sectors, including tourism, food, art and mobility.

The final event of “IMpresa INaula” took place in June 2019. UniMC teams presented their business ideas in a 3-minute English pitch in front of a panel of judges, including Rectors, Rector Delegates, scholars, entrepreneurs, professionals, innovators and representatives of the Marche Region and the Valencia Region. In addition, UniMC teams designed the business models and the prototypes of the services and products they offered. Furthermore, they created posters to describe their projects. The ideas were assessed on the capacity for innovation, social impact, market potential, business model, progress, clearness and accuracy of both presentation and information, and ability to answer the questions of the panel of judges.

² See: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/ieer/>.

4.2 Research methodology

To investigate the effects of “IMpresa INaula” training programme on students, we run a survey. First of all, we created a questionnaire that we administered online through the software SurveyMonkey.

The questionnaire was composed of eight already tested scales, three open-ended questions and some demographics. Specifically, scales were selected from the marketing literature (Dellande *et al.*, 2004; Hoffman *et al.*, 2010; Kim and Labroo, 2011; Sharma, 2010; Taute *et al.*, 2011; Thomson, 2006) to measure three different kinds of skills:

- 1) *personal skills*, i.e. creativity, competence, risk aversion, autonomy, goal attainment and self-esteem;
- 2) *interpersonal skills*, i.e. empathy;
- 3) *technical skills*, i.e. oral communication (Tab. 1).

Results showed acceptable reliability for all the scales used since Cronbach’s Alphas score higher than .6.

Open-ended questions investigated teamwork propensity and students’ perception of “IMpresa INaula” (what they have learnt from the project, what they would have learnt but did not find in the project, the level of development of technical skills and further suggestions).

Students enrolled at the University of Macerata, who had attended one of the classes coordinated by the five involved scholars during spring 2019, were invited to take the survey on a voluntarily base. We contacted 388 students and got a response rate of about 20%. In the end, the sample was composed of 75 students (mean age 24 years old); among them, 30 participated in the “IMpresa INaula” project, and 45 did not.

Tab.1: Eight tested scales composing the survey

SCALES	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
CREATIVITY (Hoffman <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	$\alpha = 0.637$
1. I consider myself to be a creative person.	
2. Creative endeavours are important to me in my life.	
3. My best friends consider me to be a creative person.	
COMPETENCE (Thomson, 2006)	$\alpha = 0.737$
1. I feel that I can successfully complete difficult tasks and projects.	
2. I feel that I can take on and master hard challenges.	
3. I feel very capable in what I do.	
COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE (Kim and Labroo, 2011)	$\alpha = 0.804$
1. I'm good at presenting a talk to a group of people.	
2. I'm good at talking in a small group of people.	
3. I'm good at talking with a person.	
4. I'm good at talking in a large meeting of people.	

RISK AVERSION (Sharma, 2010)	$\alpha = 0.689$
1. I tend to avoid talking to strangers.	
2. I prefer a routine way of life to an unpredictable one full of change.	
3. I would not describe myself as a risk-taker.	
4. I do not like taking too many chances to avoid making a mistake.	
5. I am very cautious about how I spend my money.	
AUTONOMY (Thomson, 2006)	$\alpha = 0.723$
1. I feel that my choices are based on my true interests and values.	
2. I feel free to do things my own way.	
3. I feel that my choices express my "true" self.	
GOAL ATTAINMENT (Dellande <i>et al.</i> , 2004)	$\alpha = 0.889$
1. I am attaining my personal goal.	
2. I think that I will achieve my goal.	
3. I am making progress towards my goal.	
4. I am not attaining my goal. (r)	
EMPHATY (Taute <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	$\alpha = 0.710$
1. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.	
2. Other people's misfortunes disturb me a great deal.	
3. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	
4. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them.	
5. I am often quite touched by things I see happen.	
TRUST (Thomson, 2006)	$\alpha = 0.673$
1. How much can you count on yourself?	
2. How much do you trust on yourself?	
3. How dependable are you?	

Source: own elaboration

4.3 Research results

Students who participated in "IMpresa INaula" score higher evaluations in terms of creativity, competence, communication skills, autonomy and self-trust and show a lower risk aversion compared to their pairs of the same course who did not participate in "IMpresa INaula", while in terms of goal attainment and empathy, the difference between the two groups is not significant (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Score evaluations

Scale	Did not participate in the "Impresa INaula" project	Did participate in the "Impresa INaula" project
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
CREATIVITY	3.82 _a (0.62)	4.12 _b (0.56)
COMPETENCE	3.76 _a (0.76)	4.12 _b (0.63)
COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE	3.72 _a (0.67)	4.06 _b (0.69)
RISK AVERSION	3.19 _a (0.78)	2.83 _b (0.61)
AUTONOMY	3.71 _a (0.78)	4.09 _b (0.57)
GOAL ATTAINMENT	3.93 _a (0.75)	4.08 _a (0.66)
EMPATHY	4.12 _a (0.49)	4.22 _a (0.55)
TRUST	3.87 _a (0.70)	4.20 _b (0.64)

Note: Values in the same row and subtable not sharing the same subscript are significantly different at $p < 0.05$ in the two-sided test of equality for column means.

Source: own elaboration

In qualitative terms, considering the answers for the open-ended questions, the propensity of working in a team seems the same between students who participated and did not participate in the project. This result is in line with the findings of the quantitative analysis, which registers similar scores for empathy as a significant component of relational skills. Almost all the students like teamworking, because it allows sharing different perspectives to develop a joint project. One student wrote: "Working in a group makes it possible to mix completely different mindsets and abilities. It can lead to exceptional results, that are unimaginable and unreachable if you work alone. I realised that the heterogeneity (of training and school/ work background) of the group members is essential to have a real comparison and a variety of skills to achieve a common goal, even though it entails a greater effort to row everyone in the same direction". Among disadvantages, respondents pointed out the difficulty in negotiating and finding an agreement and the risk of opportunistic or egoistic behaviours when some members do not work or are too dominant.

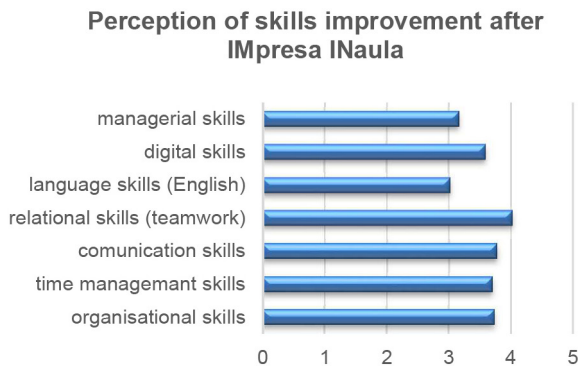
When asked to tell what they have learnt from the project, only two students did not provide an answer. The majority (23 out of 30) mentioned relational skills in their answers. Specifically, two aspects emerged: on the one hand, the possibility to share thoughts with other students, compare different perspectives, synthesise them, and work together to build and define a common project idea; on the other hand, the process entailed by teamworking. In particular, students emphasised how they have learnt to organise their different competences, divide roles, and manage time and deadlines. Two respondents explicitly mentioned how they have improved communication skills, namely public speaking, and three also focused on technical tools they have acquired (i.e. design thinking and business model canvas). Finally, one student pointed out the importance of connecting en-

trepreneurship and humanities: “I learnt that business could be thought of even when working in the cultural heritage sector”.

When asked to share what they have not found in the project, 10 out of 28 respondents did not provide any suggestion or declared themselves completely satisfied about participating in the project. Three students pointed out that the project was too short and that they needed more time, while four respondents highlighted some technical drawbacks, namely, the low support from the professor, the need of a dedicated tutor for each project and more details about the oral presentation, besides the opportunity to fix a ceiling for participants in each group. More than one-third of them (11 students) suggested more considerable attention on economic and technical aspects (e.g. administration and financial return of a project, entrepreneurship and start-ups, business model canvas, etc.). Students proposed to provide these competences not only through practice (i.e. exercise) but also by involving experts in the field and visiting enterprises.

The score students assigned to the perception of skills improvement after participating in “IMpresa INaula” confirmed these results (Fig. 1). In a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*), we got: relational skills (4.03), communication skills (3.78), organisational skills (3.75), time management (3.71), digital skills (3.6), managerial skills (3.17) and English language skills (3.03).

Fig. 1: Perception of skills improvement after “IMpresa INaula”



Source: own elaboration

In conclusion, when discussing the results of the field research, we can confirm a positive correlation between the participation in experiential learning activities and the development of soft skills of students in the field of SSHs. We can also argue that experiential learning equally contributes to the development of all the skills here investigated – i.e. personal, interpersonal and technical skills. Even though the propensity of working in a team registers no significant differences between students who participated and

did not participate in the project, students involved in “IMpresa INaula” had a positive perception of relational skills improvement after the project. Among practical recommendations for implementing entrepreneurship education in universities founded on SSHs, it is worth noting the need to improve students’ business management skills such as planning, decision-making, marketing and accounting.

5. Conclusions

In line with the analysis conducted by Duval-Couetil *et al.* (2016) and Elmuti *et al.* (2012), the “IMpresa INaula” training programme confirms that experiential learning activities can improve openness, confidence, and trust among students. This research advances knowledge in EE, proving the usefulness of involving both students and scholars and developing project ideas related to the aims and content of the courses students are attending. As a consequence, when focusing on practical implications, research results suggest the need to promote a closer integration of learning-by-doing activities in university curricula and programmes in SSHs. This approach allows students to get tailored entrepreneurial skills that can easily be applied to their specific field of study, thus contributing to recast entrepreneurship as a method (Sarasvathy and Venkataraman, 2011).

However, in order to equip students with a broader knowledge and competence in the field of business management, universities are also required to strengthen their relationships with the external context, inviting experts and entrepreneurs to join lectures and share their experience with students. In the case of the University of Macerata, it is important to connect entrepreneurship and humanities, by involving experts in the cultural and creative sectors. In addition, visiting enterprises could expand the students’ perspective and interests. Furthermore, in line with the works of Preece *et al.* (2011), Mora *et al.* (2015), and Goethner and Wyrwich (2019), EE can be regarded as a highly integrative discipline for establishing broader interdisciplinary courses and networks. Besides involving experts and entrepreneurs to build extra academic networks, the analysis confirms that the cross-fertilisation between groups of students should be further fostered. Indeed, multidisciplinary teams facilitate the improvement of relational and organisational skills, as well as promoting creativity, opportunity recognition, and problem-solving skills. The survey could be extended to scholars who participated in the project to measure the impact of co-learning activities on university teaching. Moreover, a longitudinal analysis could evaluate the long-term effects of this kind of activities, especially their impact on students’ entrepreneurial behaviour.

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