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A Study of Entrepreneurship Teaching and Learning in Thailand: Applications of Ethnographic Interviews

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to investigate the existing conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand. The informants were 10 experts in the field of entrepreneurship teaching and learning at the higher education level, selected by a homogeneous sampling method. The research instrument was the semi-structured interview on the existing conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand. The obtained data were analyzed by content categories. The findings revealed that the conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand were based on blended learning. Lecturers commonly combined lecture-based methods with practical applications through case studies, field trips and guest lectures by leading business entrepreneurs or the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion. Instructional materials, such as textbooks, documents, and examples of senior business plans were complemented by international literature and research publications. External activities, particularly field trips and guest lectures, were integrated, alongside the use of video clips and online resources. The measurement and evaluation included cognitive domain tests and psychomotor domain assessments through case studies and business plans. Lecturers also used a criterion-referenced grading system for scores from practical activities and examinations.

Keywords: *Conditions of teaching and learning, entrepreneurship, ethnographic interview*

1. Introduction

In general, entrepreneurs have been recognized for their vital role as the primary drivers of production. They gather and manage factors, such as land, natural resources, labor, and capital, leveraging their knowledge and skills to bring products or services to the market. Without entrepreneurs, there would have been no impetus for business activity, and economic systems would have faltered. Moreover, the lack of entrepreneurial expertise could have hindered business success. Tangsongcharoen (2015) reported that globally, 8 out of 10 new entrepreneurs embarked on their ventures faced failure within the initial 18 months of operation.

Thailand has promoted entrepreneurship to drive the economy, reduce unemployment, and increase income channels from abroad. However, the country seemed to lack a clear-cut policy for cultivating new generations of entrepreneurs at the higher education level. This was due to policymakers prioritizing child and family development, improving education quality,

and fostering skills, attitudes, beliefs, and supporting the new generation to participate in politics according to the boundaries of culture (UNCTAD, 2018).

Entrepreneurship education has been present in Thailand since the 1970s and implemented through rapid evolution. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), which surveyed 232 countries over seven years, entrepreneurship education significantly impacted entrepreneurial activity in 54 countries. This led to better entrepreneurial potential (Sun, Lo, Liang, & Wong, 2017), resulting in a more noticeable effect on current entrepreneurship. This fostered interest among the new generation in becoming entrepreneurs from a young age, as they perceived opportunities for success in life. Consequently, agencies aimed to support the development of a new generation of entrepreneurs, such as UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), which prepared a policy manual for new generations of entrepreneurs. Particularly in developing countries, entrepreneurship was in need of governmental support. It was advisable to establish an institute to develop the potential of new generations of entrepreneurs, which would lead to job creation. Expanding the economy with the assistance of new generations became an important principle affecting sustainable development (UNCTAD, 2018).

Currently, entrepreneurship curricula have been offered at both undergraduate and graduate levels, integrating entrepreneurial science content into every educational system to foster an entrepreneurial mindset from a young age (Pilkova, Holienka & Rehak, 2014). Universities in Thailand introduced curricula related to entrepreneurship, allowing higher education students to embrace the entrepreneurial idea. Governmental support for entrepreneurial education highlighted its positive impact on economic development through business start-ups, leading to the creation of more jobs (Fox & Pennington, 2009). In this regard, entrepreneurship could stimulate economic growth and increase national income.

At present, numerous methodological techniques are available in qualitative research, including observing and recording behaviors or interactions that have occurred. However, all models rely on the researchers placing themselves in the position of participant observers, residing with a group of people or a studied community. This process has taken considerable time to gain familiarity and trust, facilitating access to in-depth information (Posita, 2019). Research can be conducted without physically entering the studied community but by being among a group of people or the community itself. Field data are collected swiftly through the application of ethnographic interviews, a qualitative research method used by social scientists. Anthropologists and other researchers have used it to gain insights into individuals or groups within a specific cultural context. The primary objective of the interview is to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' views, experiences, beliefs, and behaviors within a cultural framework. Three main types of interview questions have been adopted in ethnographic research: (1) descriptive questions, allowing the informant to elaborate on events or situations they have experienced in detail; (2) structured questions, prompting the informant to provide examples or explanations of process steps related to occurring events or situations; and (3) opposite questions, helping the informant distinguish the relevant occurrence from other events or situations (Spradley, 2016). To the researchers of the present study, ethnographic interviews represent an interesting and appropriate qualitative methodological technique for research in entrepreneurial teaching and learning conditions.

Based on the ethnographic interview method reported by Spradley (2016), the researchers aimed to use it to investigate the teaching and learning conditions of entrepreneurship curricula offered in Thailand. It was expected that the obtained results could serve as a guideline for developing the social entrepreneurship curriculum at the undergraduate level.

2. Research Objective

The research objective was to investigate the existing conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning at the higher education level in Thailand.

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative research used expert informants and adopted the ethnographic interview method to obtain data on the existing conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning at the higher education level in Thailand.

3.1 Informants

Ten informants were experts in entrepreneurship teaching and learning at the higher education level: five lecturers from government higher education institutions and five lecturers from private higher education institutions, selected by the homogeneous sampling method, regarding their similar backgrounds or experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The selection criteria were: (1) entrepreneurship teaching experience for at least three years, and (2) academic work or experience as a speaker on topics related to entrepreneurship or being a business owner.

3.2 Research Instrument

The researchers applied semi-structured interview questions on entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand. The quality of the research instrument was verified by presenting the interview form to the expert-advisor to check the content validity and consistency of the interview questions. The final version was improved in language clarity to convey intended meanings. Three interview questions dealt with three main issues (1) teaching and learning activities, (2) instructional media, and (3) measurement and evaluation:

- (1) What are the characteristics of teaching and learning management in the classroom for the subjects you teach?
- (2) What are the features of the media used for teaching in your subjects?
- (3) How are measurement and evaluation carried out for your subjects?

4. Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers contacted and coordinated with the expert informants to review the questions in advance and schedule a date and time for the online interview using the Zoom meeting. In addition, the researchers requested permission to record video and audio during the interview.

The researchers used content analysis to analyze the interview data and interpret issues related to the entrepreneurship teaching environment in Thailand.

5. Research Results

The results of the data analysis on the existing conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand were obtained from interviews with ten lecturers in entrepreneurship curricula at higher education institutions. There were three main issues: (1) teaching and learning activities, (2) instructional media, and (3) measurement and evaluation.

5.1 Teaching and Learning Activities

Based on the interviews with ten lecturers in the entrepreneurship field, most lecturers used a blended learning approach. Initially, lectures focused on presenting fundamental concepts and theories. Subsequently, practical application was facilitated through case studies, including field trips, guest lectures, YouTube videos, and document distribution. This allowed students to grasp entrepreneurial challenges. These lecturers often divided students into groups for case studies and analysis sessions. They also tasked groups with developing business plans for a final presentation before closing the course. Thus, entrepreneurship teaching combined lectures and case studies, emphasizing active learning. Two excerpts of interviews with the lecturers exemplify their responses:

- Lecturer of Entrepreneurship Curriculum-1

“All lecturers convened to discuss their problems collectively and strategize solutions. Sometimes, they incorporated video clips from YouTube showcasing social issues, like aiding stray dogs or donating bread to children, for analysis and discussion. Lecturers predominantly emphasized the activity-based approach, occasionally arranging field trips, such as visits to Doi Tung, followed by analysis and group discussions. Groups, typically consisting of five to six students, were assigned weekly case analyses to assess their understanding of the material taught.”

- Lecturer of Entrepreneurship Curriculum-5

“The initial phase was a lecture, focusing on concepts and theories, followed by case studies for student analysis. Subsequently, students worked in groups to brainstorm ideas, utilizing both paper and video case studies, before providing their opinions and compiling group reports. Students then summarized their opinions and presented them to the lecturer. The lecturer offered suggestions, facilitated corrections, and requested revised reports. Group sizes do not exceed five students.”

5.2 Instructional Media

Based on the interviews with lecturers in the entrepreneurship field, most lecturers used various instructional media, including textbooks, teaching materials created by themselves, and publications from both national and international sources. These materials were often presented using the Microsoft PowerPoint program. Additionally, they incorporated study visits to community enterprises, invited successful business entrepreneurs or representatives from the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion, and presented video clips from YouTube, websites, and business magazines. Some lecturers also assigned senior business plans and other resources to help students with assignments

and activities for better understanding. Two excerpts of interviews with lecturers exemplify their responses:

- Lecturer of Entrepreneurship Curriculum-1

“Sometimes, I used textbooks, case studies, or even international research to complement my teaching. I occasionally invited speakers involved in business to present about their experiences or representatives from the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion to provide information.”

- Lecturer of Entrepreneurship Curriculum-6

“Sometimes, I used business plans from previous students or various gaming equipment. I didn't often use video clips but preferred sharing my experiences or inviting alumni who have succeeded in their careers as guest speakers. Additionally, I sometimes used PowerPoint presentations.”

5.3 Measurement and Evaluation

According to the interview results, the lecturers used objective and subjective tests, varying formats each semester. The objective test was to measure the cognitive domain; while case studies and business plans were common in measuring the psychomotor domain. Evaluation typically involved a grading ratio, including midterm and final examinations, along with activities like case studies or business plans. The lecturers also considered class participation. The evaluation followed a criterion-based approach. They often created rubrics for grading case studies or business plans. Two excerpts of interviews with the lecturers exemplify their responses:

- Lecturer of Entrepreneurship Curriculum-1

“For me, I break down 100% as follows. The first 10% is how much they engage with me and understand the points I teach. Another 30% is for activities. The remaining 60% is for mid-term and final examinations, split evenly at 30% each. In terms of activities, I assess them based on four aspects: feasibility for business, presentation, innovation, and interestedness, without descending scores in the feasibility section. Presentation ability is scored using a rubric. Each lecturer has different measurements. I vary the types of examinations all the time, including written, multiple choice, or a combination, providing a better understanding of student comprehension. For applications and opinions, a more subjective approach is favored. I evaluate learning results based on criterion-referenced evaluations.”

- Lecturer of Entrepreneurship Curriculum-3

“Primarily, we focus on test scores, both midterm and final examinations. We assign group work to students, and they receive accumulated scores from this section. Typically, the midterm is worth 30 points, the final is worth 30 points, or sometimes the midterm is worth 20 points. Written tests are used in most examinations. In terms of exercise scores, students will be assigned to do group work based on case studies. Lecturers will consider their process, overall performance, and presentation. We have criteria for grading and explain them to students, and students' learning results are mainly based on criterion-referenced evaluations.”

6. Discussion of Results

According to the content analysis, the researchers found two major findings for discussion as follows:

6.1 Teaching and Learning Activities

The results revealed that most lecturers were in favor of a blended learning approach. This method entailed initial concept-based lectures on various entrepreneurial topics, followed by practical application through case studies including field trips, guest lectures by business entrepreneurs, and the use of online resources like YouTube videos, and handouts. These lecturers organized group activities to consolidate acquired knowledge. The obtained findings aligned with research by Sudkaew (2018), which identified two learning formats: (1) Formal learning that involves expert-led lectures and workshops, allowing students to experiment and practice under guidance; and (2) Informal learning that supports real-world experience through internships or projects, facilitating direct learning experiences and skill development. This approach was in accordance with Hart (2018) which focused on practical learning, and Martin et al. (2013) holistic approach to entrepreneurship teaching, which emphasized lectures, guest speakers, and online resources.

6.2 Instructional Media

The informants reported the use of instructional media, including textbooks, documents, and research materials sourced both domestically and internationally. These materials were supplemented by field trips, guest lectures by successful entrepreneurs or representatives from the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion, and the use of online resources, such as YouTube videos, websites, and business magazines. Furthermore, lecturers assigned senior business plans and other teaching materials. These approaches aligned with what was described in the Full Text of the Policy on College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship 2019 (China Mobile Communications Corporation, 2019), which emphasized creating an entrepreneurial atmosphere conducive to successful business startups. Teaching materials encompassed a range of media platforms, from social media like Weibo, WeChat, and QQ to traditional media like newspapers, exhibitions, and posters, aiming to disseminate information on national policies and market trends in real time. The lecturers also invited successful entrepreneurs to share their experiences in support of students' knowledge and motivation. These practices were earlier suggested by Radipere (2012) for entrepreneurial education, which emphasized experiential learning outside the classroom through field trips, internships, community engagement, and business consulting, providing students with practical exposure to entrepreneurship.

6.3 Measurement and Evaluation

Based on the lecturers' responses, they dominantly adopted both objective and subjective tests to evaluate students' cognitive domain. For evaluating the psychomotor domain, case studies and business plan assignments were commonly used. In terms of measurement, scores were obtained from midterm and final examinations, as well as activities including case studies and business plan assignments. The lecturers also considered class participation scores. Their grading was based on criterion-referenced evaluation, and lecturers often created rubrics for grading case studies or business plans. These practices aligned with Radipere (2012), who noted

similar evaluation methods in South African universities, emphasizing exams, assignments, and business plan development. Pretorius (2001) also preferred evaluating desirable learning outcomes for entrepreneurship, including entrepreneurial success, knowledge, skills, and business planning. Pittaway & Edwards (2012) particularly highlighted the prevalence of business plans and reports as common evaluation methods in entrepreneurship education, followed by such traditional methods as examinations. The summative assessment concluded students' performance, indicating their level of entrepreneurial capabilities.

6.4 Methodology in this Research

This study used ethnographic interviews, a typical qualitative research method in anthropology and other social sciences to collect detailed information about a specific culture or social group. The objective was to comprehend individual perspectives, behaviors, and experiences within a cultural context. The distinctions between traditional interviews and ethnographic interviews are explicated as follows:

Interview Objectives: Traditional interviews, typically structured, gather specific information or opinions on predetermined topics and can be used across various research contexts, such as market research, journalism, or academic studies. In the ethnographic interview section, the goal is to comprehend the cultural context, behaviors, and experiences of a particular group or community, focusing on exploring participants' perspectives within their natural environment.

Interview Settings: Traditional interviews can occur in controlled settings like formal offices, research laboratories, or over the telephone, providing a structured environment separate from informants' daily lives. Conversely, ethnographic interviews are conducted in the participants' natural environments, such as their homes, workplaces, or community spaces, facilitating a holistic understanding of their lives and activities.

Interview Structures: Traditional interviews always follow a standardized structure with predetermined questions and a clear agenda, aiming to efficiently collect specific information. In contrast, ethnographic interviews are more open-ended and flexible, with less structured questions that allow participants to freely express their opinions. The focus is on capturing the depth and nuance of the experience.

Length of Interviews: Traditional interviews usually have a shorter duration, with interactions limited to the scheduled interview time. In contrast, ethnographic interviews can span an extended period, sometimes involving multiple field visits. This longitudinal approach enables researchers to observe changes and variations over time.

Interview Context: Traditional interviews focus on extracting specific information from the interviewee, often without delving into the broader cultural or social context. In contrast, ethnographic interviews emphasize understanding the interviewee within their cultural context, and exploring the meaning behind their behaviors, beliefs, and practices.

Therefore, the study on the conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand utilized ethnographic interview for the researcher to comprehend the teaching and learning environment, including interactions between students and teachers, and the various factors influencing teaching and learning. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the natural teaching and learning environment.

7. Conclusion

As shown in the findings of the study, the conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand were identified by ten experts in the field of entrepreneurship teaching and learning at the higher education level as based on blended learning. Lecturers tended to combine lecture-based methods with case studies, field trips and guest lectures by leading business entrepreneurs or the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion. Instructional materials, such as textbooks, documents, and examples of senior business plans were provided from resources like international literature and research publications. Particularly, external activities integrated field trips, guest lectures, the use of video clips, and online resources. The measurement and evaluation included cognitive domain tests and psychomotor domain assessments through case studies and business plans. Lecturers also used a criterion-referenced grading system for scores from practical activities and examinations. Overall, the researchers were satisfied with the applications of ethnographic interview techniques in securing the needed data on the existing conditions of entrepreneurship teaching and learning in Thailand.

8. Suggestions and Recommendations

8.1 Suggestions

Higher education institutions should strategically plan curriculum administration for entrepreneurship programs, encompassing teaching and learning methodologies, instructional media, and measurement and evaluation strategies. This ensures the fulfillment of curriculum objectives aimed at equipping students with entrepreneurial skills.

8.2. Recommendations for Further Research

There should be further research and development on instructional models to enhance the cultivation of entrepreneurial skills across diverse sectors in Thailand. Other relevant issues of curricula for social entrepreneurship in Thailand as perceived by developers and course instructors could shed more light on what to be done for training potential entrepreneurs. Further development on indicators and competencies for graduates of entrepreneurship programs in Thailand should also deserve researchers' attention.

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Both researchers share their research interest in the areas of educational development in higher education, current issues and innovations in educational entrepreneurship and practices in higher education.

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