

**ENTERPRISE EDUCATION DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE !**

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**Abstract:**

The purpose of this research was to investigate if there are differences between how entrepreneurs with enterprise education experience and handle business issues, compared to entrepreneurs who have not received enterprise education. It was an investigation into the extent to which enterprise education does make a difference in the way entrepreneurs encounter and handle business issues.

Since the 1980s there has been an unprecedented growth in the number of courses offered by academic institutions, enterprise agencies and consultancy groups worldwide. Needless to say there has been a corresponding increase in the level of research regarding enterprise education. However the vast majority of this research has been focused on evaluating the programmes through appraisal of the programme itself, the modules or subjects offered, the quality of teachers and facilities, the quantifying of how many students go on to start their own business, and assessing changes in attitudes between pre and post enterprise education tuition. However there has been little research into the impact of these courses and programmes, specifically not much research has been performed into whether there are differences between how entrepreneurs with and without enterprise education experience and handle business issues. This is the unique aspect of this current research.

The research involved surveying and interviewing entrepreneurs selected from an original database of over 300, 98 of which fit the initial stage of the research criteria. These entrepreneurs were from the South-East of Ireland and were operating in the manufacturing, services, information technology, engineering, and pharmaceutical business sectors. Out of the 98 entrepreneurs that were sent the full survey form, the response rate was 45%. The final phase of data collection for this research was to select nine of the survey respondents for in depth face-to-face interviews. The interviews consisted of those that had been on a yearlong, full time enterprise education programme, those on a short part-time enterprise education programme, and those that did not receive any enterprise education at all.

The most significant findings from this research were that differences do exist in how entrepreneurs with and without enterprise education experience and handle business issues. Not alone do entrepreneurs with enterprise education experience far fewer business issues than their counterparts who have not received enterprise education they also handle the issues differently. Additionally, the research found that entrepreneurs who had participated on the yearlong business incubation programme encountered far fewer business issues than entrepreneurs who had participated in short-term business start-up courses. The findings highlight that participation in enterprise programmes does play a significant role in the amount of business issues encountered by entrepreneurs. In particular the research highlighted the differences in how these entrepreneurs approach and handle these business issues. The research also indicated that type of enterprise education programme experienced by the entrepreneur also has an impact of how they manage the business issues they encounter.

This current research contributes to the expanding literature on enterprise education in general, but most importantly it adds to the small, but growing body of literature that focuses on the impact of enterprise education as opposed to merely the evaluation of enterprise programmes themselves. This research has implications for policy makers, designers, providers and teachers of enterprise education programmes, and entrepreneurs.

**Introduction:**

This current research centres on the topics of entrepreneurship and enterprise education. In recent times there has been much interest in these topics especially as it became recognised that the presence of entrepreneurship was valuable to the economic development of regional and national economies. This realisation led to a dramatic increase in the popularity and provision of enterprise education. Since the 1980s there has been an unprecedented growth in the number of enterprise courses offered by academic institutions, enterprise agencies and consultancy groups worldwide. Needless to say there has been a corresponding increase in

the level of research regarding enterprise education. However the vast majority of this research has been focused on evaluating the programmes through appraisal of the programme itself, the modules or subjects offered, the quality of teachers and facilities, the quantifying of how many enterprise education students go on to set up their own business, and the assessing of changes in attitudes between pre and post enterprise programme tuition. However there has been very little evidence of research into the actual impact of these courses and programmes, specifically not much research has been performed to discover if entrepreneurs with enterprise education cope differently with business related issues compared to those who do not have enterprise education.

This current research is unique in that it does not evaluate enterprise programmes per se. Instead, it examines to what extent, if any, entrepreneurs with enterprise education experience and handle business issues differently than those entrepreneurs that do not have any enterprise education. The need to conduct such research had been previously identified by a number of researchers including Charney and Libecap (2000), Erkkila (2000) Fleming (2001) and Moran and Cooney (2003).

In order to discover how enterprise education can have an impact on the way entrepreneurs experience and handle business related issues compared to entrepreneurs that have no formal enterprise education what so ever this research focused on (a) identifying the types of business issues faced by entrepreneurs during the start-up, early phases of management and growth of a business, (b) ascertaining if entrepreneurs with and without enterprise education experience the same or different business related issues, (c) establishing how entrepreneurs handle these business related issues, and (d) understanding if the type of enterprise education received impacts on the amount of business issues experienced and how these issues are handled.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The history of entrepreneurship is replete with examples of relatively poorly educated but successful entrepreneurs, this is accompanied by a strong debate in the entrepreneurship academy regarding whether or not students can actually be taught to be entrepreneurs. It is for this reason that many professionals, academics and writers have been involved in an ongoing argument as to whether entrepreneurs are born or made. Some academics such as Schumpeter (1934) believed that successful entrepreneurs share characteristics that are independent of education, training or upbringing. However there is a growing belief that anyone can become an entrepreneur, provided they have access to certain resources, one of the main resources being access to enterprise education. The view that entrepreneurship can be taught is one held by a number of researchers including Timmons (1994), Gibb (1993, 1999, 2000), Kuratko (2003), and Moran and Cooney (2003).

There has been a growth in entrepreneurial activity worldwide over the past number of years, which has been met with an increase in the number of enterprise education programmes being made available. This increase in the availability of enterprise education has been noted by a number of researchers, including Klapper (2004) and Charney and Libecap (2000). There is strong evidence of this growth, for example Katz (2003) states that the rise in the number of colleges and universities in the US that offer courses related to entrepreneurship has grown from a handful in the 1970s to sixteen hundred in 2003. While a substantial amount of research into enterprise education exists, the authors of this paper feel that research into the impact of entrepreneurship education is minimal, as evidenced by the fact that many researchers believe that research into the outcomes of enterprise education is needed. For example Fleming (2001) states that few research studies have been conducted into the outcomes or impact of enterprise education. Charney and Libecap (2000) also believe there has been little research carried out regarding the impact of enterprise education. More recently Moran and Cooney (2003) acknowledged that while a number of studies exist, research related to the outcomes of entrepreneurship education is under researched in the entrepreneurship literature.

When exploring the topic of entrepreneurship or the world of enterprise education a good starting point is to consider whether entrepreneurs are born or made. If we believe that entrepreneurs can be developed or entrepreneurship can be taught, then enterprise education is worthwhile and has a positive impact on business development. However if, innate entrepreneurial traits exist and entrepreneurs cannot in fact be made then fewer people may be convinced of the usefulness of enterprise education. Some experts argue that entrepreneurs are born with innate characteristics that drive them to take risks and create new ventures, while others are adamant that with appropriate training and education entrepreneurs are nurtured into accepting calculated risks to form new ventures (O'Connor 2002). Central to the argument is the contrasting views of the two main researchers Kirzner and Schumpeter. Deakins and Freel (2003) note the key differences as Schumpeter considered that entrepreneurs are born and Kirzner believed that entrepreneurs can be made. Deakins and Freel state that for Schumpeter only certain extraordinary people have the ability to be entrepreneurs and they bring about extraordinary events, on the other hand Kirzner believed that anyone has the potential to become an entrepreneur. Schumpeter believed that the entrepreneur changes technological possibilities and changes convention through innovative activity, and moves production constraints. Schumpeter's entrepreneur develops new technology, whereas the Kirznerian entrepreneur operates on opportunities that arise out of new technology (Deakins and Freel, 2003).

Davidson (2001) informed that because highly successful entrepreneurs often appear to be great personalities many people believe that these entrepreneurs are born not made, which can lead to the assumption that entrepreneurship cannot be taught. However while highly successful entrepreneurs are very special people, they are all special in his or her own particular way. In essence a distinct common personality does not exist, because entrepreneurs are as heterogeneous as any other group of people (Davidson 2001). Peterman and Kennedy (2001) found evidence that supports the theory that entrepreneurs are not born and can in fact be made. To prove this, data was collected regarding the perceptions of students of The YAA programme (Young Achievement Australia) an enterprise education programme, in relation to their perceptions regarding desirability and feasibility to start up their own business. Peterman and Kennedy (2001) found that on completing the programme participants reported significantly higher perceptions of both desirability and feasibility to setting up their own business. The degree of change in perception was related to the positiveness of prior experience and to the positiveness of the experience of entrepreneurship education.

Cohen (1980) cites research by Professor of Psychology Alan Jacobowitz, who believed that entrepreneurs are born, not made. Through interviews with over 500 entrepreneurs over a three-year period, Jacobowitz observed that entrepreneurs commonly share certain personality characteristics. These include: restlessness, independence, a tendency to be a loner, and extreme self-confidence. Other researchers such as Timmons (1985) and Kirby (2003) have added innovative, action oriented, high need for personal control and highly autonomous to the list of what they see as uniquely entrepreneurial characteristics. According to Cohen (1980), in addition to identifying personality traits common to entrepreneurs, Jacobowitz devised a chronological schema of entrepreneurial indicators he called the five ages of the entrepreneur. These stages include: early childhood exposure, trouble in school, issues with work, desire to take risk, and bliss in business that entrepreneurial aptitude is static, that is either people are born with the related characteristics, or they are not. Cohen concludes that while Jacobowitz's approach was supported by the majority of theorists at the dawn of entrepreneurial research, but some criticise that it has yet to be empirically proven. However while some researchers do support Jacobowitz's identification of entrepreneurial-type characteristics, most opt for a more dynamic approach to entrepreneurial personality in which personality traits and subsequent behaviour are shaped by a variety of factors.

Overall the world of entrepreneurship is divided as to whether entrepreneurs are born or made. While some people are undoubtedly 'born' or 'natural' entrepreneurs and display entrepreneurial skills and behaviour without any enterprise education or training, there is a school of thought which believes that entrepreneurship is a skill and thus can be learned. Researchers like Schumpeter (1934), (1947) and McClelland (1961) believed that

entrepreneurs were special people with innate characteristics while researchers such as Timmons (1985) wish to dispel what he calls the myth of entrepreneurs being born not made. However recent research such as that carried out by Gorman, Havlon and King (1997) states that most of the empirical studies carried out indicate that entrepreneurship can be taught or at least encouraged thus indicating that interventions such as enterprise education may lead to entrepreneurial activity.

The born or made argument has direct linkages to the world of enterprise education. If we are to side with the view held by Schumpeter and believe that entrepreneurs are born then enterprise education is a waste of time, money and resources. However if we side with researchers who believe that entrepreneurs are not born and can in fact be made then we will view enterprise education to be worthwhile as it leads to the development of entrepreneurs and new enterprises, which contribute positively to society and the economy. Dana (2001) stated that in contrast to Schumpeter's views, Kirzner argued that the entrepreneur might simply identify an opportunity for profit, rather than create one and therefore the Kirznerian entrepreneur could benefit from education in general and enterprise education in particular, without necessarily requiring the skills to be innovative.

Faris (2000) asserts that consideration as to why there has been an increase in the demand for entrepreneurship education should influence how it is prescribed. While researchers argue that it is too soon to empirically test the effectiveness of graduate entrepreneurship education, persuasive arguments for both sides of the born/made argument have been argued. Faris (2000) believed that there is no simple answer to the born or made argument stating that entrepreneurs themselves and the topic of entrepreneurship are more complex than either possibility of the born or made argument. Due to the fact that entrepreneurial behaviour is no different than most human behaviours in that its origins can only be traced to a complex interaction of background, and environmental factors. Gorman, Havlon and King (1997) cited research on enterprise, entrepreneurship and small business management and education, this research reported that most empirical studies indicated that entrepreneurship could be taught or at least encouraged by enterprise education. With respect to entrepreneurship education Singh (1990) argued that enterprise education can be taught and that education is important in the development of entrepreneurs. He concluded a review of the literature on enterprise education by outlining some known experiments in education and reporting that the research concluded that entrepreneurial concepts can be taught, suggesting that entrepreneurship education is beneficial.

This current study's research question aimed to discover how entrepreneurs who have and have not received enterprise education experience and handle business issues. In order to investigate this research question it was necessary to conduct a review of literature regarding business issues and reasons for business issues and failure and the rates of such failure. At all stages of the entrepreneurial process from idea generation to launch and growth, the entrepreneur will be faced with both common issues and issues specifically related to the stage of the entrepreneurial process the entrepreneur finds themselves at. It is essential to study the issues faced during the entrepreneurial process in order to best understand why business failure occurs. Gaskill, Van Auken and Manning (1993) asserted that an understanding of why businesses fail or are successful is crucial to the stability and health of the economy, as analysis enables policymakers and small business advisors to better serve the small business sector.

According to the European Federation of Accountants (2004) start-up businesses are inherently more risky than established businesses and the first three years of the life of a new business are usually particularly difficult, as a high proportion of small businesses fail during this period. The risk stems from the fact that a new business has to prove itself quickly, to customers and suppliers, providers of finance, employees and possibly outside investors too. Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) acknowledged that due to their limited resources, inexperienced management, and lack of financial stability, small businesses suffer a mortality rate significantly higher than that of larger, established businesses. Supporting this view research by Ulster Bank (2004) found that small businesses have a higher chance of failure than large businesses. The Ulster Bank's research identified poor marketing, weak financial

control, lack of strategic planning, inadequate liquidity, and a lack of market awareness as commonly identified internal causes of small business failure.

Many researchers have compiled data on what they believe to be the most prominent business issues, for example research into the reasons for business failure by Fitzpatrick Associates (2001) informed of a distinction between “internal” factors (i.e. those which are unique to the business in question), and “external” factors (i.e. factors within the trading environment in which the firm operates). They concluded that the most commonly found external causes of small business failure include the external price environment and inflation, interest rates, wage costs, declining markets, tax rates, bad debts and late payment and market competition. In regard to internal business issues, the European Federation of Accountants (2004) stated that the most commonly occurring internal factor in business failure is poor management, and also informed that other internal causes of business failure are often inevitably linked to poor management. Likewise Fitzpatrick Associates (2001) commented that the most common causes of internal failure are “bad management”. Stating that a common feature of internal issues is the “one person” issue, whereby most if not all of the senior management responsibility is invested in one person who may not have the appropriate range of skills, or may not have the time to apply them appropriately. This one person, usually the entrepreneur, takes on many of the management functions including those related to, sales, marketing, financial control, resourcing, purchasing and planning.

Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) also believed that internal issues especially those associated with management are most likely to cause business failure. Central to the issues described by Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) are bad management skills which can often be due to a lack of experience on the entrepreneurs’ part. Lack of experience in an entrepreneur can cause a number of issues, it can lead to poor financial control, the failure to plan, uncontrolled growth and other issues. Cornwall (2005) also acknowledged managerial incompetence to be a serious issue for enterprises. Equally Fitzpatrick Associates (2001) informed that poor marketing, weak financial control, lack of strategic planning inadequate liquidity, and a lack of market awareness are commonly identified internal causes of small business failure. Taken further these can be attributed to personal characteristics of one-person managers, such as their attitudes to risk and control, poor judgement, inexperience or narrow focus.

Poor financial control is rated by many researchers as a precursor to business failure. Issues occur with finance in different ways, some entrepreneurs may have trouble securing finance while other entrepreneurs may simply have trouble managing their finances. Leonard (2004) acknowledged that the securing of inadequate capital, the misuse of capital and poor cost control are serious issues for many entrepreneurs. Poor cash flow management is amongst the most common internal causes of business failure, according to the European federation of accountants (2004). The European Federation of Accountants (2004) also stated that among start-up businesses a frequent cause of business failure is a lack of adequate and appropriate market research. Market research is required to help businesses to identify their customers and inform them of the size of the potential customer base, to determine what price customers might be prepared to pay and to suggest how demand for the product or service will change according to the price charged. Research will also inform them about their competitors and their likely reaction.

Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) also viewed poor financial control as one of the main issues encountered by the entrepreneur, stating that sound management is the key to the success of a small business and effective managers should realise that any successful business venture requires proper financial control. Leonard (2004) also stated that entrepreneurs and small businesses can often suffer from issues and issues associated with financing. Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) also informed that the largest investment the small business manager must make is usually inventory, yet inventory control is one of the most neglected managerial responsibilities. While both Cornwall (2005) and Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) viewed failure to plan as a reason for small business failure. Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) stated that too many small business managers neglect the process of strategic planning because they think strategic planning only benefits larger companies. According to Zimmerer and Scarborough it is important to not only create strategic plans but

also perform other types of planning, for example the production of business plans and marketing plans. Cornwall (2005) stated that absence of an adequate viable business plan can lead to issues. These issues can be encountered at the start of the business and when planning is needed for growth or advancement. Cornwall (2005) asserted the need for entrepreneurs to produce a marketing plan, producing a marketing plan is deemed to be essential in deciding marketing strategies, customer base and promotion of the company. Likewise Perry (2004) believed that planning is essential and cited research which identified a link between planning and small business failure, stating that those businesses who had prepared business and strategic plans were less likely to fail.

Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) stated that while many entrepreneurs make it over the "entrepreneurial start-up hump" initial success does not guarantee long-term prosperity, Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) continued that this inability to make the entrepreneurial transition, that is to make the transition from a start up entrepreneur to a business manager can lead to issues. Zimmerer and Scarborough also state that after the initial start-up, growth usually requires a radically different style of management. Growth requires entrepreneurs to delegate authority and to relinquish hands-on control of daily operations something that many entrepreneurs simply cannot accomplish. Likewise Leonard (2004) stated entrepreneurs are often good at starting businesses, but poor at running them and many entrepreneurs believe that they have an obligation to run their businesses and become great managers. Leonard concluded that while many entrepreneurs are successful at starting up a business they are not as skilled at running or managing a business.

The European Federation of Accountants (2004) stated that as most small businesses are established by one entrepreneur or, or a small group of them, who have an idea for creating a specific product or providing a particular service. These entrepreneurs may not have skills and experience in areas such as business planning, financial reporting, marketing, customer relations and financial management. From the literature reviewed it is evident that there are many factors which can lead to business failure, the next section of this chapter examines the actual rates of failure for small businesses.

Suffering from one or many of the issues previously outlined may lead to business failure, a issue which is obvious in the small business and enterprise world. It's widely perceived that throughout the world small businesses have a high rate of failure. Longley (2005) informed that the U.S Small Business Administration noted that fifty percent of small businesses fail in the first year and ninety-five percent fail within the first five years. According to Deakins and Freel (2003) the situation is contrasting in the UK, where official statistics show a failure rate of thirty percent at the end of year one, and over fifty percent by year five.

In Ireland Fitzpatrick Associates (2001) carried out research to investigate the causes of small business failure and the rates of such failure. They examined all available Irish data sources which were relevant to the calculation of business failures and the reasons for these failures. A number of sources were used to reveal a range of small business failure rates between 33% and 41% after five years.

Holland (1998) acknowledged that while there are no magic solutions to avoid business failure some actions may help the entrepreneur avoid making the mistakes which lead to the issues that cause failure. In order to avoid failure Cornwall (2005) advised that the entrepreneur should ensure that the business is being properly managed, as previously stated by Cornwall (2005) and Holland (1998) entrepreneurs should not spread themselves too thinly as managers, and should employ assistance in carrying out managerial functions if necessary. Holland (1998) also suggested that sharing of responsibility should help the entrepreneur avoid the "one person" issue.

Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) stated that too many small business managers neglect the process of strategic planning because they think strategic planning only benefits larger companies. They stated it is important to not only create strategic plans but also perform other types of planning, for example the production of business plans and marketing plans. Cornwall (2005) also stated that lack of an adequate viable business plan can lead to issues. These issues can be encountered at the start of the business and when planning is needed for growth or advancement. Cornwall (2005) stressed the need for entrepreneurs to produce a

marketing plan, stating that production of a marketing plan is deemed to be essential in deciding marketing strategies, customer base and promotion of the company. Holland (1998) also pointed out that entrepreneurs can avoid some of the pitfalls of small business failure by engaging in good marketing practices, these include, the profiling of target customers, the profiling of competitors, and the assessing of changes in customers tastes and preferences. Overall there are a number of actions which an entrepreneur can take to avoid business failure, such as business planning, market research and the delegation of management duties to others.

There are numerous definitions regarding what exactly enterprise education is. Enterprise education can cover a wide range of programmes, courses and initiatives. Therefore it is important to understand what exactly enterprise education is in order to understand the role it plays for the entrepreneur and the possible impact it can have on both the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. Types of enterprise education include enterprise taught as a subject or module in school be it, pre-school, primary, post-primary, third level or in higher or continuing education. Iredale continues that enterprise education can also cover programmes such as start your own business programmes and courses taken with the intention of entering self-employment. However Hytti and O'Gorman (2001) observed that it is difficult to define precisely what enterprise education is, what it aims to do and what may be achieved through it. Iredale (2002) stated that there are a variety of conceptions and approaches to enterprise education but these should not be confused with economics or business education. Enterprise education serves a number of purposes. Firstly and most universally, it can be used to develop enterprising skills, behaviours and attitudes through any curriculum subject at every phase of education to provide a wider preparation for autonomy in life. Secondly it can provide insight into and help people understand about the entrepreneurial and business development processes through business education in secondary schools and in further and higher education allowing young people to work more effectively in a flexible labour market economy or working in a small business. Finally it can develop awareness of, and capability for, setting up a business now or in the future

However a distinction is made between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship training by Henry, Hill and Leitich (2003), whereby three categories of enterprise education are defined, based primarily on the stage at which the form of enterprise education is provided. Henry et. al, categorised enterprise education as follows; 1).education about enterprise 2).education for enterprise and 3)Training in enterprise. The first category is focused on awareness creation and is academic in nature, the second is aimed at the preparation of aspiring entrepreneurs who want to set up and run their own businesses, while the third category training in enterprise describes training entrepreneurs may receive while running their business (Henry, Hill and Leitich, 2003). Research conducted by Henderson and Robertson (2000) pointed out that there is little uniformity among entrepreneurship courses, but informed that there are several types of entrepreneurship education classified broadly as, (1) Programmes for small businesses or start-ups, (2) Continuing (adult) small business education and (3) Small business education. Garavan and O' Cinneide (1994) have similarly categorised what they believe to be the main types of enterprise education programmes as being, entrepreneurial education, continuing small business education and small business awareness education. While there are many forms of enterprise education, the authors of this paper believe a distinction may be drawn between forms of enterprise education that aim to teach students/participants about entrepreneurship, enterprise and entrepreneurs, and enterprise education which aims to create entrepreneurs.

A number of researchers including Garavan and O' Cinneide (1994), Vesper and Gartner (1996) Henderson and Robertson (2000), and Gibb (2001), have drawn distinctions between forms of enterprise education which are informative and those courses or programmes which aim to create entrepreneurs. For the purpose of this current study the authors define enterprise education, as the extreme which Hytti (2002) describes as education that targets people aiming for self-employment or starting their own business.

## **Methodology:**

The primary research was conducted using a mixed methodology comprising of quantitative and qualitative research methods. From a database of over three hundred businesses in the South-East of Ireland a screening survey was used to select business for this study. Of the 300 plus businesses there were ninety-eight entrepreneurs who met the research criteria. A questionnaire was sent to these ninety-eight entrepreneurs, there were forty-four responses (response rate = 45%). The questionnaire aimed to establish general information about entrepreneurs and their business practices. The second stage of the primary research involved in-depth face-to-face interviews with a sample of the questionnaire respondents. The purpose of the interview was to get a more in-depth understanding of the business issues faced by entrepreneurs and discover how they handle these issues.

A number of research criteria were drawn up to ensure that a suitable research sample and ultimately suitable research subjects were selected for the primary research. The research sample consisted of entrepreneurs from the South East of Ireland only. The selected entrepreneurs set up and managed businesses in the following industry sectors: manufacturing, information technology, services, printing and graphic design, software, engineering, food and drinks, R&D and laboratories, pharmaceutical, chemical, construction and civil engineering. The business had to have been founded between the years 1998-2004. This timeline was selected as the first 3-5 years of a businesses life are seen to be the most critical and the time when an entrepreneur is most likely to face major business issues. It is also the time when entrepreneurs are most likely to face business failure or the threat of failure. Also the timeframe used assures that all respondents experienced similar economic conditions as Ireland's economy is seen to have been prosperous during this timeframe.

The questionnaire also established if the respondents had received enterprise education or not. But in order to ensure that there would be an adequate number of respondents available for the data analysis that had received formal enterprise education, past participants of the South East Enterprise Platform programme (SEEP) were also sent the questionnaire. SEEP is a yearlong full time incubation programme specifically designed to assist entrepreneurs set up their business venture. The questionnaire was administered to 38 past participants, and the response rate was 37%

The main database used to identify the research subjects was the 'South East Business Demographics Profile' database provided a ready available sampling source. This is a database that was compiled by the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Waterford Institute of Technology and profiles enterprises in the South East of Ireland.

The questionnaire asked entrepreneurs about their business practices and the issues they faced when starting up and running their own business. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section required the entrepreneur to provide general information about the enterprise such as date founded, business sector, and number of employees. This section also established if the entrepreneur had received enterprise education and if so what type of enterprise education he/she received.

The second set of questions was in relation to the entrepreneur's role in the enterprise. The entrepreneur was asked what was their main role in the enterprise, and how many functions of the business they managed at the same time, functions such as human resources, marketing, engineering, and so on. In this section the entrepreneur was also asked if running their own business had affected their work life balance positively or negatively.

The third set of questions asked about general management. The entrepreneurs were asked a number of questions regarding planning, questioning whether they had prepared business plans or strategic plans and whether they had conducted market research for their company.

Finally the fourth section asked if the entrepreneurs' businesses had experienced growth since start-up and if there was growth the respondent was asked if they had encountered any issues during this phase. In conclusion the questionnaire asked a number of critical questions, such as if the business had ever come close to failing and if so why?

Entrepreneurs were also asked if they believed they had underestimated the difficulty of starting up a business. Finally questions specific to enterprise education were asked, for example, entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education were asked to rate how it had benefited them in starting their own business while entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education were asked to state if they believed that participation in an enterprise education programme could have benefited them.

The questionnaire was made up of mainly closed ended questions with a number of open ended questions designed to allow the entrepreneur to provide their own opinions on certain business issues. An initial pilot questionnaire was sent to a sample of twenty entrepreneurs by post, having reviewed the responses and amending the questionnaire the remaining questionnaires were administered. Questionnaires were sent by post to those entrepreneurs who had been selected from the 'The South East Business Demographics Profile', followed by telephone interviews in the case of non respondents. In the case of the entrepreneurs who had participated in the SEEPP programme the questionnaires were sent via e-mail. The valid combined response rate to questionnaire was forty percent.

Three distinct groups of entrepreneurs were identified from the questionnaire responses they were (1) entrepreneurs who had not received any type of enterprise education, (2) entrepreneurs who had participated in the SEEPP programme and (3) entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education other than the SEEPP programme (these entrepreneurs had participated in enterprise education programmes which can be collectively termed as short-term business start-up courses).

Once the analysis of the questionnaire had been completed nine respondents were selected for further research in the form of in-depth face-to-face interviews. Three of these entrepreneurs had not received enterprise education, three had participated on the SEEPP programme and three had participated in short term business start-up courses. The purpose of this further research was to gain more in-depth knowledge of how entrepreneurs experienced and handled business issues. The use of the three distinct sets of entrepreneurs allowed for comparative analysis of between the three groups to ascertain if enterprise education and the type of enterprise education have an impact on how entrepreneurs experience and handle business related issues.

### **Data Analysis:**

This research has identified that there are difference between how entrepreneurs with enterprise education experience and handle business issues compared with those that do not have any enterprise education at all. The research also identified that those entrepreneurs that took part on the yearlong enterprise education programme experienced far fewer problems than those with short term business start-up courses and those with no enterprise education at all, and also that they handled these problems differently.

Firstly findings in regard to business planning, strategic planning and market research established that there are stark contrasts between the planning practices of entrepreneurs who have received enterprise education and those who have not. This contrast was most prevalent with regard to the entrepreneurs' preparation of business plans. While 100% of entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education had written business plans for their business, only 35% of those who had not received enterprise education had done the same.

The findings in relation to strategic planning were similar in that more entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education had prepared strategic plans for their business. In this case 67% of entrepreneurs with enterprise education had prepared a strategic plan. Only 26% of those without enterprise education had prepared a strategic plan. Again with regard to the conducting of market research, the primary research found that entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education were more likely to conduct market research both prior to start-up and after start-up when compared to entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education.

Overall in respect to planning there are notable differences between the practices of entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education and those who had not. This concurs with Cornwall (2005) and Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) who asserted the need for businesses to carry out planning, stating that the task of planning is often neglected by entrepreneurs and this neglect can lead to business issues. Cornwall also warned that the absence of a business plan could lead to a number of issues and at worst business failure. Likewise Perry (2004) stated that planning is essential and cited research which identifies a link between planning and the amount of issues a business encounters, stating that entrepreneurs who fail to plan are more likely to encounter business issues and suffer failure.

The research also found that overall the majority of questionnaire respondents were responsible for and managed their businesses' marketing, human resources and accounting functions. In the case of marketing and human resources a higher percentage of entrepreneurs without enterprise education managed these functions. With regard to the accounting function, similar amounts of entrepreneurs with and without enterprise education performed this function. According to The European Federation of Accountants (2004), Fitzpatrick associates (2001), and Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) this is a management issue, prevalent among entrepreneurs, known as the 'one person issue'. These researchers asserted that this issue occurs when the entrepreneur takes on the management of too many business functions. This over-stretching of the entrepreneur's skills and abilities can lead to a number of business issues such as inadequate planning, poor financial control and other issues. While both entrepreneurs who had and had not received enterprise education managed a considerable amount of their businesses' management functions, those who had not received enterprise education managed the more of the two groups and so may be more susceptible to suffering from the 'one person' issue and as a result be more likely to experience business issues. Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) previously stated that the 'one person' issue can lead to other major issues such as inadequate planning. This statement suggests that the reason why entrepreneurs without enterprise education conducted far less planning may be due to they being over stretched as managers, managing too many of the enterprises' functions.

The research also gathered information regarding the entrepreneurs' work/life balance. These findings showed that a higher proportion of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education reported that starting their own business had a negative impact on their work/life balance. This corresponds with the finding that entrepreneurs without enterprise education managed more business functions than entrepreneurs who had not received such education, thus suggesting that this group's management of more management functions may have impacted negatively on their work/life balance.

A number of other findings that also deserves discussion are that more entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education had achieved business growth; this group of entrepreneurs was also less likely to have trouble understanding business law when compared to their counterparts who had received enterprise education.

The key findings from the this section of he research are summarised in Table 1

<b>Business Practice</b>	<b>Entrepreneurs with Enterprise Education</b>	<b>Entrepreneurs without Enterprise Education</b>
Prepared Business Plans	100%	35%
Prepared Strategic Plans	67%	26%
Conducted Market Research prior to start-up	70%	38%
Conducted Market Research post start-up	57%	39%
Managed the HR function	69%	86%
Managed the marketing function	60%	76%
Managed the accounting function	52%	45%

Table 1 Key findings in relation to the main business practice factors (Source: current research)

The second aspect of the research findings focused on how the entrepreneurs experienced and handled business related issues. The research found that there were differences between the issues experienced by the entrepreneurs. Furthermore the research identified that entrepreneurs who received enterprise education through full-time business incubation programmes such as the SEEPP programme experienced fewer issues than those who had participated in short-term start-your-own business courses. For the most part these findings were supplemented by the face-to-face interviews.

Previous research about business issues informs that entrepreneurs encounter numerous issues from business start-up, through growth to eventual cessation of the enterprise. These issues have been categorised by many sources including, The Ulster Bank (2004); Leonard (2004); Reiss (2000); and Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) who identified various issues including poor marketing, weak financial control, lack of strategic planning, inadequate liquidity, and a lack of market awareness as being detrimental to the success of a business. Table 2 presents the major issues faced by the entrepreneurs in this research.

<b>Business Issues Encountered</b>	<b>NE1<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>NE2</b>	<b>NE3</b>	<b>SE1<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>SE2</b>	<b>SE3</b>	<b>ST1<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>ST2</b>	<b>ST3</b>
Planning	NA <sup>4</sup>	X <sup>5</sup>	X				X		
Market Research			X						
Financing	X	X	X	NA				X	NA
Business Law	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Growth	X	NA	NA			X	X	X	NA

Table 2 Major business related issues encountered by entrepreneurs (Source: current research)

This current study found that those entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education experienced fewer business issues, with those who had participated in the SEEPP programme experiencing the least amount of business issues. This research found that in relation to business planning, strategic planning and market research entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education had experienced more issues in doing so than those entrepreneurs who had participated in enterprise education. In addition the research found that entrepreneurs who had participated in the SEEPP programme had experienced fewer issues in regard to these practices than the entrepreneurs who had received other types of enterprise education. The issues encountered by the entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education included the actual preparation of business and strategic plans and the reception these plans received. Entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education commented how participation in these programmes had aided them in preparing these plans and conducting market research, this may in part contribute to the lower percentage of issues encountered by these entrepreneurs.

The questionnaire also highlighted that higher percentages of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education managed more business functions than those who had not, and the interview found that these same entrepreneurs experienced the most issues associated with these functions. In relation to the management of these functions, entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education were most likely to suffer issues, while entrepreneurs who had participated in the SEEPP programme were least likely to encounter such issues. As already stated entrepreneurs who manage a larger amount of business functions are more likely to suffer the affects of the 'one person' issue and thus experience more business issues. As entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education had managed a greater number of business functions the higher amount of issues they encountered may be a result of the 'one person' issue and the over stretching of the entrepreneurs skills and abilities.

<sup>1</sup> NE these are the entrepreneurs that had not received any enterprise education

<sup>2</sup> SE are entrepreneurs that were on the South East Enterprise Platform Programme (SEEPP)

<sup>3</sup> ST are the entrepreneurs that attended short term start your own business courses

<sup>4</sup> N/A means that this particular issues is not relevant to this entrepreneur, for example some entrepreneurs stated that their business did not grow, therefore they did not experience issues with this factor

<sup>5</sup> X means that this entrepreneur encountered difficulties with the factor

Again with regard to the securing of finance entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education experienced fewer issues than those entrepreneurs who had not, and notably none of the participants of the SEEPP programme reported to have experienced such issues. On the other hand all three entrepreneurs interviewed who had not received enterprise education had experienced such issues.

The role business plans play in the securing of finance may have impacted on the issues experienced by entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education. As business plans often play a central role in the application for finance, the fact that far fewer entrepreneurs who hadn't received enterprise education did not prepare business plans may have contributed to the issues they encountered in securing finance.

An interesting finding it that a higher percentage of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education had experienced difficulty securing finance; it also found that fewer of the entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education had experienced negative cash-flow. The group of entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education fared worst in terms of cash-flow, with only 57% of these entrepreneurs were experiencing positive cash-flow in comparison to 76% of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education. The European Federation of Accountants (2004) and Leonard (2004) both acknowledged that poor financial control can lead to major issues for entrepreneurs, poor financial control includes, the securing of inadequate capital, the mismanagement of capital and negative cash flow.

It is interesting to note that the finding in regard to cash-flow is in contrast to all this study's other primary research findings as this is the only instance where entrepreneurs without enterprise education encountered less of an issue than entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education

With regard to business growth the majority of the entrepreneurs experiencing issues had not received enterprise education, and as with the securing of finance no entrepreneur who had participated in the SEEPP programme had experienced growth issues.

In relation to the understanding of company and employment law there was a stark contrast between the difficulties encountered by entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education and those who had not, with almost double the amount of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education experiencing issues in these aspects compared to those that had received enterprise education. The research again found that those entrepreneurs who had participated in the SEEPP programme were the least likely so suffer from such issues.

A number of businesses of respondent entrepreneurs had come close to failing for various reasons. Notably the largest proportion of entrepreneurs whose businesses had come close to failing were those who had not received enterprise education. This finding is not surprising as this same group of entrepreneurs had experienced the largest amount of business issues. On the other hand the fewer businesses of entrepreneurs who had participated in enterprise education had come close to failing again this finding is not surprising as this group of entrepreneurs experienced fewer business issues. The majority of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education claimed that their businesses had come close to failing due to marketing issues, this finding may be related to the fact that this group of entrepreneurs had conducted the least amount of market research and business planning, and in most cases took on the role of managers of the marketing function themselves.

Leonard (2001) stated that many entrepreneurs underestimate the difficulties associated with starting their own business. This current research found that entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education were most likely to underestimate this difficulty. Perhaps the entrepreneurs conveyed that they had underestimated this difficulty because they had experienced a greater number business issues than entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education, or perhaps the enterprise education received by the other group of entrepreneurs prepared them better for the difficulties they would encounter thus allowing them to estimate the actual difficulty of starting their own business.

It is interesting to note that overall the entrepreneurs most likely to experience business issues were those who conducted the least amount of business and strategic planning and market research, given that many researchers have alluded to the issues associated with failure to plan, the entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education may have experienced a higher proportion of business issues because of their planning practices. Alternatively this group of entrepreneurs may have experienced more business issues due to their over reliance on the entrepreneurs to carry out the management of most business functions thus spreading them selves too thinly and neglecting practices such as planning.

The authors of this paper noted from the interviews that with regard to the handling of business issues entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education were for the most part, more pro-active in their approach to such issues than their counterparts who had not received enterprise education. In particular entrepreneurs who had participated in the SEEPP programme reacted positively to the issues they did encounter. This group of entrepreneurs also seemed to have had a greater understanding of the business functions and business issues.

This current research also explored entrepreneurs' views on enterprise education. The SEEPP programme received higher ratings from its participants than other enterprise education programmes. Entrepreneurs were asked to rate the enterprise education they had received in relation to how it had aided them in the handling the business issues they had encountered. The majority of SEEPP participants rated this programme as excellent, with the lowest rating received being 'good'. This finding corresponds with this study's previous findings, as a number of SEEPP participants had previously stated how participation in the programme had aided them in handling particular business issues. Notably this group of entrepreneurs had also encountered the least amount of business issues.

On the other hand the ratings of entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education through the short-term start-your-own business programmes were less favourable. Only 14% of these participants rated this type of enterprise education as excellent in comparison to 71% of SEEPP participants, with over forty percent of participants of the short-term programmes rating it as poor. This finding corresponds with the fact that entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education through short-term courses were more likely to encounter business issues than entrepreneurs who had participated on the SEEPP programme. However entrepreneurs who had received enterprise education through short-term courses were still less likely to face business issues than those entrepreneurs who had received no enterprise education.

The majority of entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education believed that participation in enterprise education could have aided them in the running of their business and the handling of business issues.

### **Summary of findings:**

Overall this research found that there are a number of differences between the business practices of entrepreneurs who have and have not received enterprise education. Those who had received enterprise education carried out a considerably larger amount of business planning, strategic planning and market research than those without enterprise education. Also entrepreneurs with enterprise education were less likely to take on the management of many business functions at the same time, than those without enterprise education. Both of these findings related to business practices are note worthy as many researchers including Cornwall (2005) and Zimmerer and Scarborough asserted that failure to plan and the over stretching of an entrepreneurs abilities through the management of too many business functions can lead to serious business issues.

The findings of this research concur with the assertions of Cornwall (2005) and Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) in that the entrepreneurs who had not received enterprise education had experienced far more business issues than the entrepreneurs who had received enterprise

education. Entrepreneurs without enterprise education suffered far more business issues including those associated with financing, growth, the understanding of business law maybe because they were less likely to conduct business, strategy, or marketing planning; and also because they were least likely to delegate responsibility for management functions.

The research also established that the type of enterprise education received resulted in differences between how entrepreneurs experienced and handled business issues. Most notably entrepreneurs who had participated in the yearlong business incubation programme, SEEPP, had experienced fewer issues than entrepreneurs who had participated in short-term start-your-own business courses. The differences between these two groups of entrepreneurs were most evident with regard to issues associated with business planning, financing and the understanding of business law. While entrepreneurs who had participated in short-term start-your-own business programmes encountered more business issues it should be noted that these entrepreneurs still experienced less business issues than entrepreneurs who had not received any enterprise education.

With regard to enterprise education entrepreneurs who had received the two different types gave differing ratings to how they believed these programmes had aided them in handling the business issues they encountered. The SEEPP programme received much higher ratings than the short-term courses. The majority of these entrepreneurs rated the SEEPP programme as excellent in aiding them in handling business issues while over forty percent of those who had participated in short-term courses rated them as poor. Interestingly the participants of the SEEPP programme were those who experienced the least business issues and so participation in the programme may not have only aided them in handling the business issues they had encountered but also helped them avoid a number of business issues.

#### **Recommendations for future research:**

There are a number of limitations attached to the current research. Firstly the research sample consisted of entrepreneurs from the South-East of Ireland only. A study which used a national sample would have been more comprehensive and would have provided for entrepreneurs from a number of enterprise education programmes outside the South-East to have been included in the research sample. Another limitation is that this current research does not control for industry sector. A further limitation relates to the research not controlling for the past industry/business experiences or level of education of the entrepreneurs surveyed and interviewed.

The limitations of this study highlight a number of opportunities for future research. A similar study could be conducted on a national level, such a study would allow for comparisons to be made between entrepreneurs who have not received enterprise education and those who have received such education from a wider variety of sources throughout Ireland. This research would be beneficial in determining the impact of a number of enterprise education programmes with regard to how they influence on an entrepreneurs experience and handling of business issues. Another proposal for future research is to conduct a similar study which would control for variables in industry sectors, and the work experiences and education levels of entrepreneurs.

The findings of this current research have implications for enterprise policy, organisations involved in the design and delivery of enterprise education programmes, teachers of entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurs.

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