

An Insight on Understanding Entrepreneurship Through an Activity Based Learning Approach

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Abstract: The engineering students of today unlike their peers have easy access to abundant subject related information from multiple internet based secondary sources such as articles, journals and so on. This abundance in information availability most often leads to confusion in the young minds and will need assistance from their teachers to act as their mentors to provide direction in order to consume data in an orderly and selective fashion and thus Activity based learning comes to rescue. Activity based learning has been around for quite some time in the education industry now. With technology enhancements made accessible and the digital media explosion causing the Internet to be readily available, the evolution of the activity based learning techniques have started to evolve at a greater pace recently.

Support for entrepreneurship has never been more important than it is now [1]. The recent times in India has also seen a splurge in the number of entrepreneurs starting their own enterprises resulting in a startup growth. Add to this the government initiatives to promote this culture, India is now the world's biggest startup ecosystem. The resultant is that the younger generation is growing curious of the term entrepreneurship and would want to get a taste of it

before their enthusiasm runs down. This paper is a perfect reflection of the current market trends and the mood of the younger generation combined together to facilitate a platform for the students to plan their future appropriately.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Activity based learning, Outcome based learning.

1. Introduction

Outcome Based Education (OBE in short) emphasizes on enhancing the student's skillsets when they complete their educational course rather than focusing on just getting a certificate of course completion. OBE is defined as an approach / methodology to education in which decisions about the curriculum are driven by the desired outcomes that the students should possess as an experience by the end of the course in the form of professional knowledge, skills, abilities, values and attitudes – rather than focusing just on the educational process.

OBE approaches the curriculum decision making based on the competencies students should demonstrate at the end of their educational program, thus the curriculum and teaching decisions are made based on how best to facilitate the desired final outcome [2]. To achieve this objective, Activity Based Learning (ABL in short) is recommended as one of the most effective tool to overcome the challenges encountered in the implementation of OBE in Indian

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engineering education system. ABL is highly student oriented and involves the student to use their cognitive and sensory inputs so as to construct the meaning on their own under the able guidance of the mentor or teacher or with the assistance of their peers.

This paper discusses on how an Activity Based Learning program with predefined objectives was designed and implemented in teaching 'Entrepreneurship & Management' as a subject to Engineering students. This paper carries more emphasis on the current ongoing trend of startup mania being at the highest level ever in independent India thus far. India is currently witnessing the most favorable environment for any individual to take-up the entrepreneurial leap. According to an article on thenextweb.com [3], India is the fastest growing startup ecosystem in the world and is on the way up growing aggressively. The validation of the results/outcome attained after the completion of the activity thus carries more significance in knowing what the younger generation thinks about the same.

This paper is organized as follows; Section II is a discussion about the related works on Activity Based Learning in teaching Entrepreneurship & Management as a course. The process of deriving and designing of the activity is covered in Section III followed by the implementation of the same being captured in Section IV. The Section V covers the discussion part of the findings and the paper is formally concluded with summarizing the outcome in Section VI.

2. Related Works

Boussouara, Mohammed, and David Deakins 1999, [4] defines that Learning involves the acquisition, distribution, storage and interpretation of information gathered through any means credible. Sujatha Wadhwa et al. 2015 [5], suggests ABL as one of the most effective tool to overcome the challenges faced in the implementation of the OBE where the learners are engaged in the process of learning to achieve significant outcomes which facilitates the orientation between the course outcomes and the deliverables.

Arasti et al. 2012 [6], in their research have stressed on the fact that determining the teaching technique on an Activity Based Learning depends on the objectives of the course. The European commission in one of their article defines Entrepreneurship [7] as "A dynamic and social

process where individuals alone or in collaboration, identify opportunities for innovation and act upon these by transforming ideas into practical and targeted activities, whether in a social, cultural or economic context". This was appropriately cited by Panoutsopoulos et al. 2011, in one of their article where they further elaborate on the fact that the students involved in group activities were found better off in decision making [8]. Wahid et al., 2017 [9] suggests that Entrepreneurship education can be incorporated as an education which develops individual characteristics, creation of awareness about the creative, entrepreneurial teaching knowledge and skills to generate business.

An increased focus on the context and learning by doing, implies greater student involvement during the study as per Ilea, Danut, et al. 2017 [10]. An involvement can be of multiple types such as working on a case study as mentioned by Ktoridou et al. 2012 [11], Workshops and Seminars as recommended by Yadollahi et al. 2009 [12], group discussions, interviewing the entrepreneur in-person as suggested by Arasti et al. 2012 [6]. Whatever the means, Ikävalko et al. 2008 [13], mentions that 'Seeing the everydayness of entrepreneurship, means to us that it is constantly present in the actions and talk of each and every entrepreneur'.

In a publication by Dhliwayo et al. 2008 [14], it is cited as 'Research shows that people who believe that they have the ability to start a business are five times more likely than others to actually attempt to start a business'. It was therefore imperative that we focused on enabling the students to help them develop a self-belief in entrepreneurship via an Activity based learning approach.

3. Activity Design

Entrepreneurship as a course subject now is more meaningful than ever before given the current turn of events in the global business arena, it was evident that there was a need for the students to connect with the entrepreneurs in-person if they had to make the best of what they studied in the classrooms. It was therefore decided that the Activity Based Learning methodology be adopted and also use it as an Alternative Assessment Tool so as to ensure the students give their best in making this exercise a success.

The expected outcome or objective of this exercise

was to ensure that the students make themselves familiar with the facts and figures of an entrepreneurial journey by talking to real life entrepreneurs and thereby relating their experience to the actual classroom learnings. Keeping the data capturing as the crux of this exercise, survey technique was considered as the most suitable means of capturing the data in a standardized format.

A questionnaire addressed to the entrepreneurs was designed for this purpose to get basic information about their entrepreneurial journey. Care was taken not to include personal or leading questions about the entrepreneur's IP details. The idea of getting answers for the questionnaire was to conduct an interview with the entrepreneur in the student's own words that would last anywhere between 10 to 15 minutes. Emphasis was given towards understanding the challenges faced by the entrepreneur and how they addressed them, the ease of functioning from the regulatory perspective and what decisions worked and what didn't with learnings and so on.

4. Activity Implementation

After a detailed designing and planning of the activity it was now time to get the ball rolling into the implementation phase.

The Team

Two sections of 60 students each was picked for the activity and 60 teams of 2 students each was formed. Each team had the responsibility of picking an entrepreneur within their knowhow and get an audience for the interview provided the entrepreneur had a registered company and a company website to support the existence. A time limit of 15 days was allotted for getting the activity completed post which a seminar would be held on a redefined day to share the findings.

The Seminar

The seminars were conducted over a week's time where each team was given 5 to 8 minutes to present their findings in front of all the other teams. The other teams would take notes of the findings of the team giving the seminar and then take up a survey on a predefined date to share their learnings from the exercise.

The Survey

The survey was designed to be anonymous without the student needing to mention their identity so as to make them respond freely without the need to be worried about the repercussions their answers would have made on their identity. A total of 10 questions were derived so as to get the gist of the activity as a whole. The questions for the survey were carefully handpicked in order to get the best out of the exercise. Each of the question was designed to obtain an opinion of the student and to understand the overall takeaway from the exercise as an experience.

The Questions

Below is the list of 10 questions, followed by their optional answers and the kind of impact it would make to the exercise.

1. What Personal Characteristics of the entrepreneurs do you admire the most? Pick one.
 - Optimism of how the entrepreneur came thus far
 - Vision of how one could add value in the market
 - Persistence on working towards the goal no matter what the obstacles are.
 - Passionate of doing something different.

An answer to this question would enable us to understand on what the younger generation value the most when it comes to building one's characteristics for setting up a startup and doing it successfully.

2. Which of the following interpersonal skills of yours do you think improved post the activity? Select all those applicable.
 - Communication Skills
 - Listening Skills
 - Leadership and Motivation
 - Ethics.

The above question simply implicates itself in knowing what did the student learn better or improve as far as their skillsets are concerned.

3. This activity helped me to understand how an entrepreneur thinks whilst making critical business decisions.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

This is one of the primary objective of the Activity Based Learning Program and therefore necessary to know if it was really successful.

4. Which of the below topics could you relate most from the theory you studied in class to what you could see in the entrepreneur? Select One.

- Having a business plan is critical.
- New Entry Strategy should be strong.
- A good Marketing Plan is a must.
- Innovation is an ongoing process.

This question is purely framed to know as to how well a student is able to relate the findings of the exercise to the classroom learnings.

5. This activity helped me understand the startup ecosystem in India.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

This is one of the primary objective of the Activity Based Learning Program and therefore necessary to know if it was really successful.

6. This activity helped me get better clarity on how one should plan to become an entrepreneur.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

This is one of the primary objective of the Activity Based Learning Program and therefore necessary to know if it was really successful. The answer to the above question becomes very critical to analyze if the activity is helping shape the future leaders as planned.

7. Which of the following do you think was given more emphasis by the entrepreneurs met as a part of this activity? Select One.

- Planning and organizing
- Leadership Skills
- Organisation Structure
- Market research

This question is framed to identify the judgmental/analytical skills of the student in terms of understanding the entrepreneurs thought process.

8. VC Funding plays a crucial role in the success of a startup more than the product or services itself.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

This is one of the primary objective of the Activity Based Learning Program and therefore necessary to know if it was really successful. The answer to the above question becomes very critical for the student to validate the critical notion going on in the market with a swing of startups not being successful in-spite of getting VC backup.

9. I could get more clarity about the government startup initiative 'Startup India' as a result of this activity.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

This is one of the primary objective of the Activity Based Learning Program and therefore necessary to know if it was really successful.

10. Do you think you are motivated to become an entrepreneur yourself after the activity?

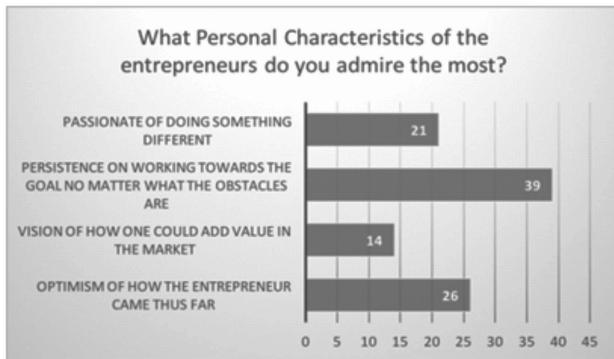
- Yes
- No
- May be
- Can't Say

This is the most important objective of the Activity Based Learning Program and therefore necessary to know if it was really successful.

V. The Findings

A total of 100 responses were considered out of the total 120 after a few eliminations due to some of them containing incomplete responses and also for the ease of the overall computation purposes.

1. It was great to see that the majority of the students agreed that the Persistence of an entrepreneur to work towards the goal no matter what the obstacles as the most admired characteristic followed by optimism and passion.
2. A majority of the students believe that their communications skills got improved after this activity followed closely by Leadership and motivation and then listening skills and then Ethics.

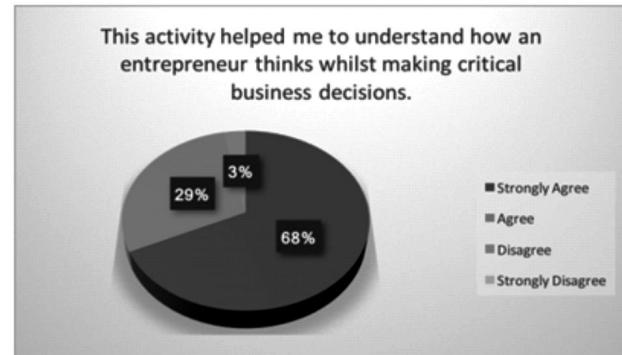


3. It was overwhelming to see that the majority of the students strongly agreed that this activity has indeed helped them in understanding how an entrepreneur thinks while making business critical decisions. The biggest takeaway is that there was

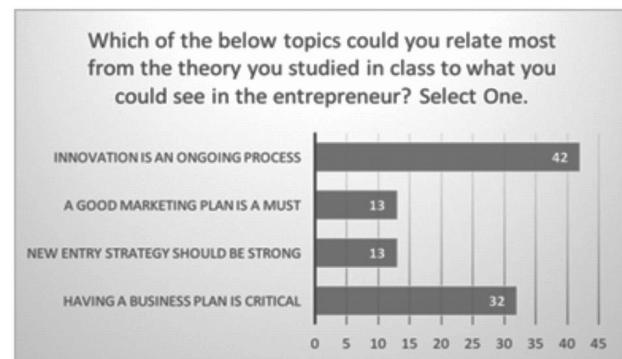


none who strongly disagreed.

4. It was great to know that a majority of the students believed that emphasis has to be on Innovation as an ongoing process if an entrepreneur has to succeed.



5. It was an overwhelming response where the majority of the students strongly agreed that this activity helped them in understanding the startup ecosystem in India better.

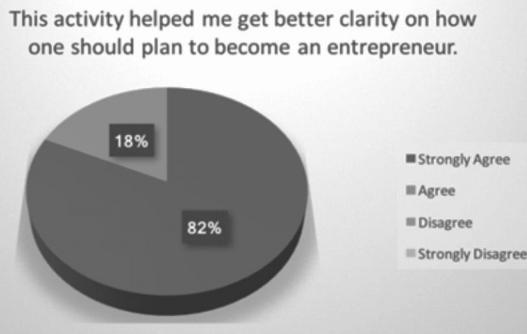


6. This is an amazing response where a clear majority was seen strongly agreeing to the fact that they now have better clarity on how one should plan to become an entrepreneur. It is worth noting that there was none who even disagreed let alone



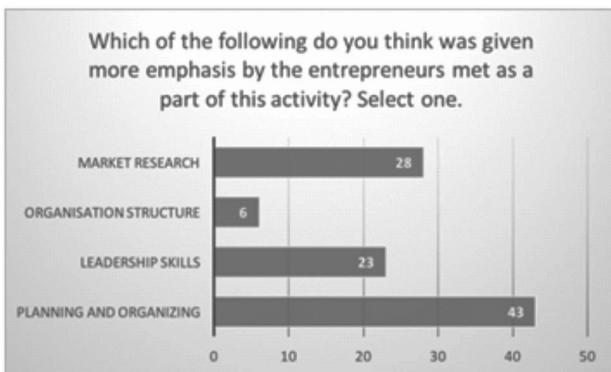
strongly disagreeing.

7. Planning and organizing was voted the most emphasized activity by entrepreneurs followed ahead of market research and leadership skills. It was however strange to see that very few believed

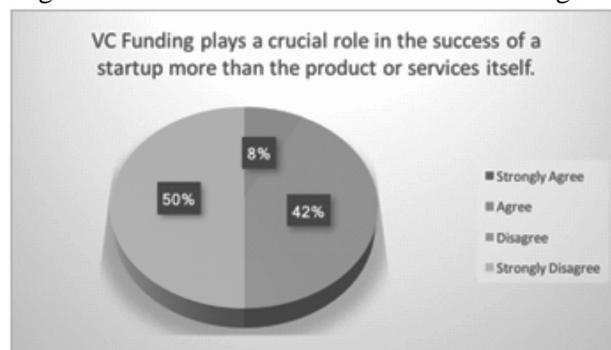


in organisation structure as one of the emphasized activity.

8. Half of the student population strongly disagreed to note that the VCs mattered the most than the products or services and another 42% agreeing.

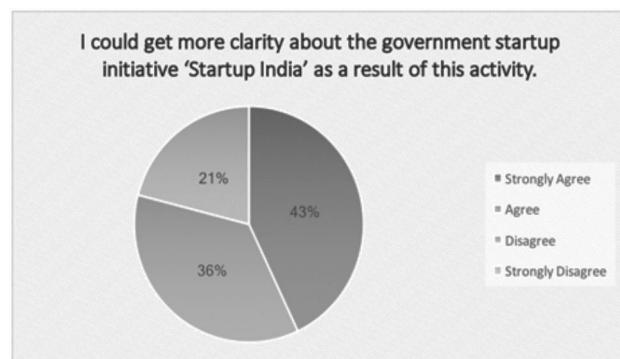


9. It was a good sight to see that majority of the students believed that they got a better understanding about 'Startup India' the government initiative. A few of them disagreed



and none to strongly disagree.

10 The students 83% of them strongly agreed that the activity motivated them to become an entrepreneur



one day. A few said may be and a few saying can't say at this point of time and there were none who said No.

5. Conclusion



It was a great experience to finally see the results of the ABL activity especially after months of efforts being put into teaching entrepreneurship as a course subject to the engineering students. Based on the results, it was clearly indicative that the students had acquired experience based knowledge after their interaction with the entrepreneurs. It was indeed heartening to see that the basics were still being considered basics in the real-world entrepreneurship journey.

As a conclusion, below is an insight of the collective response we secured from the students as an outcome of the activity.

- a. The persistence of the entrepreneur to keep doing no matter what the odds would have always been considered as the thing that keeps a startup going but to see it being proved is really a great thing.
- b. Innovation has always been the core of all the successful businesses in recent times. This activity has once again emphasized the fact that it has not changed as yet.
- c. Planning and organizing is one of the primary skill that one should master if one has to be a successful entrepreneur. The results of the ABL activity have clearly indicated that the fact still remains the same in the real world.
- e. One of the key objectives of teaching the students on entrepreneurship was to make them familiarize on the startup ecosystem in India, especially with the current scenario where the Indian Government is promoting more entrepreneurs to join the foray by campaigns such as 'Startup India'. The majority of students have clearly indicated that they are now in better understanding of the government initiatives.
- f. The most important and the key takeaway for all the students studying entrepreneurship as a course subject as a part of their engineering education was to bring in a sense of belonging and to promote the path of entrepreneurship as a choice. The results of the ABL activity gave an overwhelming response that 83% of the overall students strongly believed that they felt motivated to become entrepreneurs as a result of the activity.

Student Takeaway

- a. Communication skills are always considered to be the most important skill that one should possess in if one had to strive in the industry. Some of the ABL activities such as seminars and group discussions are primarily organized with the intent of improving the communication skills of the students and to keep them ready for the real world. It was great to know that majority of the students feel that their communication skills improved as a result of the activity.
- b. Teaching entrepreneurship as a subject is intended towards educating the students to start thinking like an entrepreneur and to know how one should plan to get there. It is a great sense of accomplishment that we feel knowing that the students feel that they feel the same.
- c. One of the core objectives of the ABL activity alongside teaching entrepreneurship is to make the students familiar of the startup ecosystem. The results of the survey have clearly indicated that the objective was achieved.
- d. It has always been debated atleast in recent times that most of the entrepreneurs of today are behind the VC funding and is one of the primary reason for taking the entrepreneurial route in the first place. The results of the ABL activity has clearly rejected that the thought of starting the entrepreneurial journey only for the VC funding is wrong. This is a major takeaway for the students and we are glad to know that our younger generation are on the right track.

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