

*Research Article (July – December 2020)***A Study on Chinese University Students' Entrepreneurship Education from the Perspective of Entrepreneurship Learning**

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education has become an increasingly hot topic in Chinese society. From the perspective of entrepreneurship learning, an important function of entrepreneurship education is to promote university students' entrepreneurship learning, which is one of the cutting-edge research directions in the field of entrepreneurship. Therefore, from the perspective of entrepreneurship learning, aimed at the current situation of Chinese university students' entrepreneurship education, this paper will be developed from the three learning styles of entrepreneurship learning by referring to relevant theories, and make an analysis on how to improve Chinese entrepreneurship education, so as to further drive and promote the sound development of entrepreneurship education in China.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship learning, Entrepreneurship education, University students' entrepreneurship*

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Introduction

Currently, China has taken “widespread entrepreneurship and innovation” as the major national policy in social and economic development at the current stage. Besides, a series of specific measures have been released to support entrepreneurial activities, among which the support for university students’ entrepreneurship is unprecedented. Nine ministries and commissions including Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security jointly issued “Notification on Implementing the Plan to Guide University Students’ Entrepreneurship”, clearly pointing out using 3 years to basically form a mechanism in which the government stimulates entrepreneurship, the society supports entrepreneurship and university students are brave in entrepreneurship, and putting forward the expected target of guiding the entrepreneurship of 800,000 university students. Thus, the entrepreneurship education reform in colleges and universities has become the orientation for the future development of China’s higher education. In “Notification on Completing the Employment and Entrepreneurship of Graduates from General Institutes of Higher Education in 2016” issued by Ministry of Education, it explicitly stipulates that since 2016, all colleges and universities shall offer courses on entrepreneurship and innovation and open required courses and optional courses of entrepreneurship and innovation to all the students, which shall be brought into credit management. In response to the call, Chinese colleges and universities have successively opened entrepreneurship education courses so far. However, according to the current effect, Chinese university students’ entrepreneurship education is still at an initial stage. Hindered by the old-fashioned educational patterns, teachers’ insufficient teaching level and students’ relatively low cognition, there hasn’t been a complete education system of university students’ entrepreneurship. How to get out of these dilemmas and establish a scientific and effective educational pattern of university students’ entrepreneurship is the primary problem now faced by Chinese government. At present, a cutting-edge direction arising in the field of entrepreneurship—the research on entrepreneurship learning, is providing a new perspective to handle this puzzle. As is known, entrepreneurship itself is a continuous learning process, and entrepreneurs’ success in this process depends on not only their natural endowment, but more importantly, the experience and skills through acquired learning. Therefore, entrepreneurship learning is the soul and key to the success of university students’ entrepreneurship. The research purpose of entrepreneurship learning is to analyze the law in the process of entrepreneurship learning from multiple angles. As entrepreneurship education is a special entrepreneurship learning process, its research findings can be applied to entrepreneurship education equally. Hence, this paper tries to discuss

countermeasures and suggestions on Chinese entrepreneurship education from the perspective of entrepreneurship learning.

Literature Review

In 2005, “Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice” was published, which had an in-depth exploration of this research topic. So far, scholars have tried to define the concept of entrepreneurship learning from different perspectives. Corbett (2007) believes entrepreneurship is that entrepreneurs acquire and store knowledge in their entrepreneurial activities, which describes the recognition and development process of opportunities as a continuous learning process. Minniti&Bygrave (2001) put forward the definition of entrepreneurship learning from a dynamic angle of view, that is, individuals’ dynamic process of constantly updating their subjective knowledge base and revising their entrepreneurship decisions based on the previously accumulated experience. Thus, it can be seen that the concept and the connotation of entrepreneurship learning are defined from different perspectives, which, so far, haven’t reached an agreement. The study of entrepreneurship learning is catalyzed under the background of the widely questioned entrepreneurship research from the static perspective—entrepreneurs’ trait theory. In the 1980s, Deakins(1987) first proposed the concept of entrepreneurship learning, and through a series of researches for a long time, plenty of significant research results were achieved. Later, supplemented by many experts and scholars, the connotation of entrepreneurship learning was constantly enriched. Today, entrepreneurship learning has become an important orientation for many scholars in the research field of entrepreneurship. Min-niti(2001) believes the essence of entrepreneurship is a learning process. The earlier research abroad paid attention to individual entrepreneurs’ learning process, and later, entrepreneurship learning was viewed as a process in which how entrepreneurs turned their acquired knowledge or experience into entrepreneurial opportunities or overcoming the new defects. Entrepreneurs’ individual research was accordingly expanded to entrepreneur teams and organizations. Lumpkin and Lichtenstein(2005)investigated difference influences of various learning styles—experiential learning, cognitive learning and practical learning on enterprises’ identification of entrepreneurial opportunities at different stages.

By reviewing research, there are generally three categories: from the perspective of entrepreneurship subjects, the first category mainly reflects on how entrepreneurs learn and what they need to learn. From the perspective of entrepreneurship process, the second category holds that entrepreneurship itself is a learning process, learning runs through the whole entrepreneurship process, and entrepreneurship is a constantly learning and reflecting process full of trials and errors. From the perspective of knowledge acquisition, the

third category believes entrepreneurship learning needs to help entrepreneurs acquire relevant knowledge with different methods, thinking about how to make entrepreneurs gain more useful knowledge.

Connotation, Methods and Significance of Entrepreneurship Learning

1. Research perspective and connotation

Entrepreneurship learning theory is the interpretation of entrepreneurship learning behavior based on the entrepreneurship process. In the process of studying entrepreneurship learning, because of scholars' different thinking perspectives and academic backgrounds, their definitions of the connotation of entrepreneurship learning differ a lot. Up till now, there hasn't been a unified definition. In this thesis, according to the viewpoints of some scholars represented by Xie Yaping, this paper divides the research of entrepreneurship learning into three aspects: the perspective of experience, the perspective of cognition and the perspective of ability (practice). The perspective of experience covers a wide range and long period, which is an important factor in entrepreneurship learning. From the perspective of cognition, when entrepreneurs take in external information, due to their different cognition, they differ in their ability of information analysis and judgement. In the entrepreneurship process, entrepreneurs need to abstract knowledge from information so as to establish their own cognitive patterns. From the perspective of ability, also referred to as the perspective of practice, entrepreneurs are able to accumulate experience through continuous practice, which can be combined with their cognition, thus solving the problems arising in entrepreneurship. Additionally, through practice, entrepreneurs will better blend with environment. The perspectives of experience and cognition originate from the learning theories of psychology, which pays attention to the influence of individuals' changing cognitive structures on entrepreneurship learning; the perspective of ability originates from the knowledge management theory, and integrated with the previous research, pays attention to how entrepreneurs acquire entrepreneurship ability through the effective learning of knowledge (especially implicit knowledge).

2. Entrepreneurship learning methods

In the entrepreneurship process, what concerns entrepreneurs most is how to acquire the innovation knowledge. In the domain of psychology, the research process on individuals' learning methods is mainly based on the following two aspects: one is experiential learning, and the other is cognitive learning. In the entrepreneurship learning process, individuals may translate their accumulated experience into knowledge, and this process is called experiential learning. Experiential learning is not simply a process of receiving knowledge, but it is a cycle process of knowledge reception and transformation. In the learning process,

individuals can imitate or refer to others' behavior and experience, which is called cognitive learning. Currently, the above two theories are the theoretical foundations of entrepreneurship learning theories. In the process of experiential learning, experience is not only limited to management experience and direct experience relevant to entrepreneurship, but also involves entrepreneurial and industrial experience. In the process of entrepreneurship learning, entrepreneurs have to learn from both successful experience and entrepreneurial failures, so as to avoid defeats in entrepreneurship. In the process of cognitive learning, entrepreneurs tend to imitate the behaviors of successful entrepreneurs and reconstruct their knowledge structures, which not only involves individuals' comprehensive and predictive abilities, but also relates to their ability of cognition and using information. In the process of entrepreneurship learning, individuals will make a comparative analysis of the acquired knowledge according to their existing knowledge system, and then form a new knowledge system by means of acquiring and receiving new knowledge to renew their ideas. Entrepreneurship environment is constantly changing and developing, and there are always various emergencies. Therefore, simply depending on experiential learning and cognitive learning is not enough to better avoid entrepreneurship risks. Thus, many scholars have put forward the concept of practical learning, that is, in the entrepreneurship process, entrepreneurs have to reconstruct their knowledge system through practical experience. For this reason, this paper will attempt to measure university students' entrepreneurship learning based on the three entrepreneurship learning methods above, that is, cognitive learning, experiential learning and practical learning.

3. Research significance

On one hand, entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities has become an indispensable part in modern applied educational pattern. It is closely related to human development and social progress, and the increasing demand for innovative and entrepreneurial talents due to social and economic development has made entrepreneurship education the key to higher education in the future. Entrepreneurship education not only lays emphasis on the cultivation of professional abilities, but also pays attention to the education on psychology and sociology, making efforts to cultivate all-around talents. In terms of the research on entrepreneurship learning, its research scope has been constantly broadened, changing from the initial fixed perspective to the current diversified perspective. Besides, its research stage has gone through huge changes, and its thinking models and relevant theories are being continuously updated. The achievements in this field are of immeasurable value to entrepreneurship education. On the other hand, the research outcome of entrepreneurship education among Chinese universities also has the problem of

“excessive summaries of experience, but insufficient theoretical upgrades and empirical analysis”. Hence, the achievements in the research field of entrepreneurship learning, advancing from theoretical assumptions of conceptual models to empirical research, can be well used for reference in the study of entrepreneurship education. In this way, it is possible for us to break away from the level of experience, and explore the law of entrepreneurship education.

Analysis of University Students’ Entrepreneurship Education Based on Entrepreneurship Learning

1. Improve university students’ entrepreneurial cognitive learning, and change entrepreneurship education methods

By comprehensively investigating university students’ entrepreneurship learning, entrepreneurship education provided by colleges and universities should be blended with multiple learning methods such as practical teaching and social learning, so as to effectively enrich university students’ entrepreneurship skills. At present, Chinese government and the public attach relatively great importance to university students’ entrepreneurship education, but in practice, policies are mainly confined to students’ in-class entrepreneurship learning. Besides, the access paths of initial entrepreneurship groups to entrepreneurship knowledge should be enriched, and apart from the formal entrepreneurship education offered by schools, university students commonly lay great stress on participating in various social activities during their preparatory phase of entrepreneurship, thus obtaining valuable entrepreneurship experience and key skills through social practice. Therefore, from the perspective of entrepreneurs’ growth, it is obvious that simply emphasizing the entrepreneurship system of colleges and universities already can’t adapt to the current requirements of university students’ entrepreneurship learning, which also goes against intensifying universities’ cultivation of entrepreneurs. As a result, it is very necessary to strengthen the combination of universities’ entrepreneurship education with off-campus practical and social learning, improve the in-class learning method, as well as make use of more abundant and targeted teaching models and educational technology to promote university students’ entrepreneurial performance.

2. Increase education and guidance in entrepreneurial process, and improve university students’ ability of experiential learning

In order to improve university students’ entrepreneurial experiential learning, apart from offering more practice platforms, it is more important to provide more professional advisers. Different from other entrepreneurs, university students’ entrepreneurship is a kind of educational entrepreneurship, as education fills the whole process of university students’ entrepreneurship. Thus, universities’ teacher resources and

talent team structures seem to be of particular importance. Consequently, we should adopt a flexible mechanism to employ more entrepreneurs or senior managers to take full-time or part-time jobs in universities, take social experience and enterprise experience as one of the standards to introduce talents, increase the ratio of practice-based teachers, and encourage teachers to take temporary posts in enterprises for personal training. On the other hand, universities need to hold more corresponding activities, such as lectures and reports given by entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship salons, which has to be normalized and institutionalized in the charge of specially-assigned staff or departments. What's more, more attention should be paid to university students' entrepreneurial process, and professional teachers can be appointed to offer "one-to-one" follow-up guidance. In this way, every enterprise will have appointed campus tutors and off-campus tutors to provide follow-up service, forming the "double tutors" entrepreneurship guidance system. These tutors are mainly in charge of offering careful and patient guidance to university student entrepreneurs, helping them to analyze various problems arising in entrepreneurship and clear up entrepreneurial behaviors or failures, and assisting them to summarize their entrepreneurial experience, so as to draw lessons, find out problems and figure out causes, thus forming their own entrepreneurial experience.

3. Attach importance to entrepreneurship education of innovation parks, science parks and maker space, and expand university students' learning system of entrepreneurial practice

Attention should be paid to intensifying university students' practice-based entrepreneurship learning, expanding universities' practical entrepreneurship system, promote students' entrepreneurship ability and strengthening its sustainable effect on subsequent entrepreneurial activities. In this research, it is proposed that university student entrepreneurs don't have abundant industrial experience and social experience at the very beginning, probably leading to the circumstances of "inflated" capacity. As a result, it is likely to cause university students' overconfidence in entrepreneurial practice, which may consequently their entrepreneurial risks. Therefore, in terms of entrepreneurship learning, continuing to improve university student entrepreneurs' practical experience is of great benefit to reasonably promoting their entrepreneurial ability. As for universities and local governments, a relatively effective policy measure is to attach importance to the entrepreneurship education and learning in various universities' entrepreneurship incubation bases, maker space and science parks, enhance the reconstruction of entrepreneurship education system, increase the ratio of practical entrepreneurial experience, and intensify university students' practical entrepreneurship learning, thus helping them to overcome the defect of limited social experience. For this purpose, it is necessary for universities and

local government to reform the existing education system on a large scale and a deeper level, and transform the traditional educational patterns and teaching methods.

4. Construct Chinese ecological environment of entrepreneurship education, and build an atmosphere in favor of university students' entrepreneurial practice

With the constant change of external environment, entrepreneurs need to continuously learn about entrepreneurship, so as to enhance their judgment of entrepreneurial opportunities and increasingly accumulate entrepreneurial experience. Therefore, the changing external environment will stimulate the desire and demand for entrepreneurship knowledge among university students who have entrepreneurship dreams. At the same time, environment will indirectly influence the entrepreneurial performance by affecting individuals' entrepreneurship learning effect. According to relevant research results found by Northeast Normal University, from 2015 to 2016, Chinese university students were not quite satisfied with a series of entrepreneurship supportive policies and preferential policies released by the government. According to the research of GEM (2016), the entrepreneurial ecosystem in China is not good enough, and especially compared with developed countries like America, China is far behind. Compared with America, China obtains relatively higher scores in government's policy support and entrepreneurship planning provided for university students. However, when it comes to entrepreneurial financing, entrepreneurship education and the commercialization of research findings, China's scores are far below America's. Hence, it is still urgent for China to promote the software service of entrepreneurial ecological environment. Consequently, how to create a favorable social environment for the entrepreneurship of university students has become a focused topic. It is believed that a favorable ecological environment for entrepreneurship education requires the cooperation of multiple parties. That is, the government is supposed to cooperate with universities, and meanwhile, more enterprises should be called on to be involved, so as to jointly form a triple linkage mechanism and create a more thorough ecological environment for entrepreneurship education. Only in this way can we further improve and optimize the entrepreneurial situation for Chinese universities students, and improve their success rate in entrepreneurship.

Research Conclusion

The third part of this paper puts forward a countermeasure analysis of Chinese entrepreneurship education methods from the perspective of entrepreneurship learning. Through the analysis, the following research results are obtained. Firstly, in order to improve university students' cognitive learning ability in entrepreneurship, universities are required to increase more extracurricular practical teaching and socialized

practical activities in regard to entrepreneurship education, consequently urging universities to reform their entrepreneurship education methods based on students' active demand. Secondly, to improve university students' experiential learning ability in entrepreneurship, apart from providing students with more practice platforms, it is important to arrange more professional advisers to offer guidance; meanwhile, to help university students analyze various problems arising in the entrepreneurial process, it is necessary to assist them in making summaries on their entrepreneurship experience by analyzing their entrepreneurial behaviors or failures, so that they can draw lessons as well as find out problems and causes, thus making it more urgent for us to offer careful and patient guidance in students' entrepreneurial process. Thirdly, to strengthen university students' practical learning ability in entrepreneurship, and help them overcome the defect of insufficient social experience, an effective measure is to attach importance to the entrepreneurship education and learning of universities' incubation bases, maker space and science parks, improve the reconstruction of entrepreneurship education system, increase the proportion of practical entrepreneurship experience, and intensify university students' practical entrepreneurship learning. Fourthly, concerning how to provide a favorable environment for practical learning in entrepreneurship, through the analysis, we believe that we can construct an ecological environment for Chinese entrepreneurship education from three aspects including government, enterprises and universities, so as to form a sustainable ecological environment that is in great harmony with the current social and economic development as well as political culture.

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