

**ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIETY:  
CHALLENGES, TENDENCIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

Academic papers

**Nr. 1 (8)**

# ENHANCING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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## Summary

The article studies the issue of social entrepreneurs' skills development among students at the classes of English for specific purposes. The main findings regarding the skills necessary for social entrepreneurs have been outlined and united into 5 groups. Next, there have been methods and activities suggested that may be used at the ESP classes and contribute to the development of the above-mentioned skills. Each of the methods has been described and the skills that it develops have been stated. Conclusions have been made regarding the relevance of using ESP classes for developing social entrepreneurship skills.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, English language classes, skills development, learning environment, challenges.

## Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is one of the main concepts of modern life as we face the challenges of the XXI century. The everyday-changing environment and arising challenges require from us looking for new methods and ways of doing new things for our benefit and the benefit of our community – both local and global. In the work published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is called "The future of education and skills. Education 2030", one of the competencies "to transform our society and shape our future" is "Creating new value". It is stated that "people should be able to think creatively, develop new products and services, new jobs, new processes and methods, new ways of thinking and living, new enterprises, new sectors, new business models and new social models" (OECD, p. 5). Understanding this, more and more people are getting involved in the entrepreneurship activity and social entrepreneurship in particular.

Social entrepreneurship is defined as a special form of management that is aimed at running a production function so that to provide added value for all stakeholders. Its main goal is to make a world better for all people. In this regard a social entrepreneur acts not just as a businessman, but as an agent of changes in the society. Social entrepreneurship is a decentralized process, as the entrepreneurs are free to experiment, involve various participants and partners, bringing in innovations and supporting democracy (Sandal, 2010, p.15, p. 40-41). These are some of the reasons why social entrepreneurs are so important nowadays, under the modern conditions of constant changes, the need for innovations and deep social issues.

Scientists agree that becoming an entrepreneur is a complicated task that requires efforts, determination and devotion to the idea. People need to be prepared to the work and develop necessary skills – "becoming an entrepreneur is a process and youth can be shaped to be one in this industry" (Dina etc., 2015, p.118). "...Entrepreneurial competence constitute a system, involving numerous 'aspects', 'topics' and 'dimensions' referred to sets of other skills, abilities and competencies" (Edwards-Schachter etc., 2015, p.6). Therefore, we may state that becoming a successful social entrepreneur, a person requires relevant education, starting from school and continuing at a university. Moreover, we believe this should be based on the multidisciplinary synergy and so included in different subjects and courses.

The aim of this research is to define the personal skills necessary to become a successful social entrepreneur and to outline the possibilities of their development at English language classes at a university.

## Methodology

The research is conducted through the analysis of scientific papers, methodological literature and results of empirical researches on the issue.

## Results and discussion

The level of demands to a social entrepreneur are much higher than the ones to an office worker, due to his role in the social development and social change, therefore we may conclude that the range of necessary skills is much wider as well. Wadid Lamine, Sarfraz Mian and Alain Fayolle, scientists from France and the USA conducted a research in 2014, examining the way in which a chosen entrepreneur dealt with different issues and serious problems, and outlined several social skills that turned out to be vital. Among them

are social adaptability, tenacity and obstinacy, the ability to learn, social intelligence, coordinating the network of actors and negotiation skills (Lamine etc., 2014, p.525-530). What do these skills imply?

The first skill is the social adaptability – “the entrepreneur’s capacity to adapt to the situation and its gradual evolution” (Lamine etc., 2014, p.525). This skill refers to the person’s ability to change his position, opinion, plans or attitude according to a new situation, different people etc. An entrepreneur for whom it is difficult to alter his business facing new conditions is fated to failure. As Prof. Dr. Jan-Urban Sandal states, “the entrepreneur is not a wage earner or employee, and his tasks in the process of entrepreneurship cannot be compared with those of the wage earner. The wage earner, from the message boy to the directors of the boards, deals only with decision making within the static part of the economy, which means that all decisions are taken based on facts that are already known. The entrepreneur, on the other hand, has to make judgments based on circumstances that are new to him and everyone else, because the new combinations of the first and second input factors have never previously been done. He is not into the position of copying anyone or anything; he is forced to walk on paths that actually yet do not exist, and that nobody has ever passed through” (Sandal, 2013, p.237).

Secondly, the tenacity and obstinacy – “Some situations not only require adaptation, they may require the entrepreneur to say “no” and resist anti-project behavior” (Lamine etc., 2014, p.528). Working on the business project a person has to contact different people, both the project team and other stakeholders, who may have different views on the same issue and different visions of the future, therefore an entrepreneur has to have a clear idea of the social enterprise he/she wants to manage and be consistent in following the plan and preserving the underlying values and principles, not to get off the track.

Thirdly, the ability to learn. The research conducted by the scientists showed that it is important to be able to receive knowledge through practical experience and professional activity under changing conditions, and use this knowledge to improve the enterprise, even changing the activity itself (Lamine etc., 2014, p.528). This means that a social entrepreneur needs to get used to constant improvement of his knowledge and skills, be able to study through practical experience and be open to new ideas, observing the worldwide trends and changing his/her activity seeing future prospects.

Then, it is important to note social intelligence – “the capacity of the entrepreneur to identify the right actors for the project” (Lamine etc., 2014, p.528). In other words, an entrepreneur has to be able to evaluate the people that he/she may involve, their skills and knowledge, their relevance to the planned enterprise and particular activities on different stages of its operation. This also involves mastering different techniques of communicating with potential employees, such as technical means, oral negotiations, interviewing etc. A social entrepreneur must be an efficient leader, with a clear understanding of people working at the enterprise and the functions they are most suited for.

Another skill outlined is coordinating the network of actors. “The entrepreneur must know how to coordinate the set of partners he deals with on a daily basis” (Lamine etc., 2014, p.529). An enterprise is a live organism consisting of a network of stakeholders, the workers, the partners, potential stakeholders etc., so an entrepreneur needs to be efficient in managing the people, having control of the whole business and activity of separate staff members through concrete communication and control channels, a system of reports etc. There should be a constant update of information on the enterprise activity to know when and what changes should be made, or if the enterprise is capable of performing new tasks the social entrepreneur feels as necessary ones.

Negotiation skills are also extremely important. “The entrepreneur used a variety of negotiation techniques to convince key stakeholders to join the project and to reinforce existing ties (...) Throughout the entrepreneurial process, the entrepreneur used all kinds of negotiation techniques including various tricks, threats, adjustments, opposition, and intermediation, etc., depending upon the situation” (Lamine etc., 2014, p.529). This skill is closely connected with the above mentioned coordination of the network of actors, as in this regard it serves as a tool. Moreover, negotiation skills are necessary for the enterprise development through establishing new personal contacts and preserving the existing social network: “It helps the entrepreneur increase social support by recruiting new network members and reducing the number of opponents” (Lamine etc., 2014, p. 529-530).

Strengthening positive ties: “It is necessary in such a case to capitalize on those people who will support the project, without wasting too much time convincing those who are against it” (Lamine etc., 2014, p.530). It goes without saying that the more people are positively set to work and have nothing against the entrepreneur, the business plan, the strategy etc., the quicker the enterprise will develop according to the entrepreneur’s intentions. Work in a positive social environment brings positive energy to improve one’s performance, gives more satisfaction from the professional activity and attracts new highly qualified specialists, motivated to work for the result and not just for wages.

The results of the research described above, partly correspond with another work, performed by British scientists to assess the entrepreneurial personality (Smith, R., Bell, R., & Watts, H., 2014). The GET test

surveys were distributed to over 600 potential respondents among either social or traditional entrepreneurs. It turned out that social entrepreneurs, in comparison to traditional entrepreneurs received higher scores in three dimensions – creativity, moderate/calculated risk taking and need for autonomy/independence (Smith etc., 2014, p.14). It has been already stated above, that social entrepreneurs are working in new conditions, as individual agents of change and innovators, therefore the need to be creative, independent and risky is obvious.

Almost the same personal traits are outlined in the study on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programmes in Malaysian public university, these are: creativity, risk taking, self-efficacy and the need for achievement (Din etc., 2015, p. 120). The questionnaire was developed and 130 students questioned to examine the development of these personal characteristics. The results were positive, confirming the relevance of the skills chosen for the programme. The scientists stress out that modern higher educational establishments should modify the learning outcomes of their courses to provide students with the knowledge of entrepreneurial skills, so that they could use them in their further activity (Din etc., 2015, p. 122). Though the study was related to entrepreneurs in general, we consider the skills defined relevant for social entrepreneurs as well, as the last are one of the categories of the general class of entrepreneurs.

One more study was carried out in University colleges from Spain and USA in 2010. The countries were chosen due to the evidenced differences in the social and cultural contexts in these countries, the indicators of the entrepreneurship development and creativity. Totally 196 engineering students answered the questionnaire and five variables have been taken into consideration, connected with creativity, entrepreneurship and relevant education. The analysis of the results showed that students share the perception of creativity as extremely important for entrepreneurship, but the contribution of the educational system to creativity has gained fewer points. American students consider they receive more training on creativity in comparison to the Spanish ones, but still the general indicators are low. This means that building creativity competence in universities is still a subject to be worked on (Edwards-Schachter etc., 2015, p. 21-24). It is stated that the notion of creativity, regarded as a transferable competence, includes individual features (creative thinking ability, personal traits of character and styles of thinking), some creative processes (e.g., skills of problem-solving) and the activity on developing creative products under specific conditions (social environment, learning environment etc.). The university programmes should consider all these aspects (Edwards-Schachter etc., 2015, p. 19-20).

Therefore, we may state that the surveys and the statements of separate scientists agree on the necessity for future social entrepreneurs to develop such skills as creativity (the ability to create new products, methods, act in new circumstances etc.), social adaptability, social skills (the ability to manage people, work with them, maintain personal contacts, negotiate etc.), independent decision-making and performance, risk taking. There are certain improvements that should be made at university courses in this regard.

We suggest that one contribution to the solution of this issue could be development of social entrepreneurship skills at English language classes, as they are usually on the crossroads of different subject areas, teaching language as a means of communication and informational exchange. Some of the mentioned skills are already more or less being developed at English language classes, in particular at universities. For example, teachers are often using methods of group work at classes that result not only in the development of English language skills, but also the skills of team work, discussion, decision making and negotiations. As a speaking task students may receive a role-play involving negotiations, debates, finding a compromise or other situations of real-life communication with different stakeholders, potential partners, clients etc. Even simply writing a letter to a university administration, suggesting improvements in the educational process, as learning tasks, requires creativity and independent decision-making. We believe that with the use of new active learning methods this influence towards soft skills development can be increase. Let's look at some of the examples of innovative methodologies of ESP (English for specific purposes – the English language subject taught to university students of various non-linguistic specialties) teaching in more details.

One of the methods that are now becoming more and more popular in ESP is project-based learning. The project activities have a lot of advantages, among which are: professional orientation, focus on the student's needs and interests, teamwork skills development, argumentation and negotiation skills development. Under the project approach students are performing specific roles, which give them the opportunity to take the responsibility and become more prepared for independent decision-making and risk-taking (Bolsunovskaya etc., 2015, p.177). So, project work not only provides students with knowledge, but also develops essential soft skills, necessary for any person and a social entrepreneur in particular. The project work may be of different levels of complexity and so implemented at different stages of a foreign language learning, regardless of the number of students in a class.

Another innovative technique that could be used in combination with the project approach is case-study. The last means that students are given learning material in a case, that they need to solve, based on their knowledge and skills (Bolsunovskaya etc., 2015, p.179). Such task also develops skills of teamwork, negotiation, decision-making, as well as creativity and self-confidence. It is specialty-oriented with a focus

on professional needs, so if to speak of students of economic specialties, a case study in its content may be directly connected with social entrepreneurship activity and give students the opportunity to feel themselves social entrepreneurs.

To give students more independence, specialists advise using communicative techniques with minimal teacher-centred guidance. In this case learners are given a specific task that requires cooperation of a group, where each participant has its role and takes responsibility for his part of job and the success of the whole team. Examples of such tasks could be writing reports, making presentations, research projects etc. (Lavrysh, 2016, p.522). Such tasks may open the space for involvement of a wider range of audience and give students practice in mobilizing sources and establishing personal contacts with different stakeholders.

To develop self-assessment and self-cognition students may be given checklists to monitor their academic progress with pre-defined evaluation criteria (Lavrysh, 2016, p.522). Otherwise, students may be given a worksheet with criteria to evaluate their own work in a group, as teacher may not always know how the student worked in a team to give a deserved mark. Self-cognition may also find its way through oral feedback at the end of the class to look back at the work done.

It is also possible to use debates as a pedagogical tool in the ESP context. There has been a research conducted in Philippines with the involvement of debate experts, practicing All-Asians Parliamentary format. The chosen students were taken through different stages of debates: the pre-debate stage when they had to communicate to share their ideas on the issue of future debates, read some materials and write their speech; the actual debate stage – delivering information to a set of judges, considering the audience when explaining the arguments, listening to the opponents (finding weak points in argumentation, thinking of questions) and answering them at the post-debate stage – listening for the feedback from experts, their comments and suggestions for improvement. The research turned out to be a real success (Aclan, 2016, p. 7-12). As we may see this form of work develops not only all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), but also critical thinking, teamwork, negotiation skills, leadership, social intelligence and self-cognition.

There are also different methods that may be transferred from informal trainings to ESP classes that will be beneficial to social entrepreneurs. For example, since 2009 British Council has been implementing “Active Citizens” programme for promoting intercultural dialogue and community development for social changes locally and globally. There are trainings conducted under the programme to bring together people from different backgrounds to share and learn from each other, and to implement changes in their communities (British Council).

There are various techniques used at the trainings to organise the dialogue and informational exchange between participants that may be used at English language classes to make them more dynamic, creative and challenging. As an example we may take the exercise called “Four words”. In training the participants are asked to write four adjectives that, to their mind, characterise an Active Citizen. After this they are asked to work in pairs, share their opinion and leave only four words for the two people. During the next stages the groups are becoming bigger and bigger, but the result of their work stays the same – 4 words-adjectives for an Active Citizen. The activity finishes when all participants of the training agree on the 4 words. In the process they are allowed to use argumentation, persuasion, voting etc. (Toolkit, 2017, p. 97). This activity is easily changed for the ESP purposes when students are given the same task, but regarding the issue studied. This develops their foreign language communication skills, as well as creativity, critical thinking, negotiating skills and social intelligence.

Another good activity from the programme is called “World café”. People are sitting at four tables situated in a distance, like in a café. Each table has its own question. Participants are given stated time to discuss the question and then they need to move to another table, so that all four groups discussed all four questions. There are four people staying at the same table, making some notes, giving summary of discussion with the previous group to the new coming and managing the continuing discussion. Then the results are presented and discussed (Toolkit, 2017, p. 35). This exercise works well to develop speaking and presenting skills, as well as the ability to coordinate people, creative thinking, critical thinking and self-efficacy. It may motivate students to look for new ways of dealing with the old issues, develop new methods or ideas of devices needed, think of the new challenges arising and how to face them in a better way.

The two mentioned techniques have been already practiced at my ESP classes and showed high level of students' involvement and interest in the work. The students' feedbacks proved that such tasks are new for them, causing challenges in interpersonal communication, finding clear arguments, critical analysis of the information heard, independent formation of output etc. Changing learning environment makes them more flexible and with each new task they are quicker to adapt. There are some more methods that may be used for ESP purposes and contribute to social entrepreneur's skills development, described in the Active Citizens facilitator's toolkit available at the programme's website, such as “Two truths and one lie”, “The story of my shoes”, “Listening at three levels” etc.

## Conclusions

We all understand that nobody is born as an entrepreneur. There is a set of skills that should be developed to succeed in the area, especially if we are talking about social entrepreneurship – a challenging path towards social development and changes through innovative activity and production. To such skills we may include: social intelligence, social adaptability, self-efficacy, creativity, problem-solving, risk-taking, independent decision-making, negotiating etc. The ESP class at a university may become a favourable environment to bring up these skills among young population, preparing them for the future activity. Teaching English involves teaching speaking, listening, reading and writing, but when it comes to ESP, there is a practical profession-oriented focus added, which results in teaching a foreign language as a means for achieving real-life tasks and overcoming challenges. This is why there are various skills developed in addition to the linguistic ones. There are methods developed that help students to reveal their creative potential, study negotiation techniques, practice people management and coordination, give them space for autonomous decision-making and team work. There are also methods of informal education that may be partly transformed and used in ESP classes to widen the spectrum of tasks and make classes more interactive. It is understood, that their usage should be taken with caution and only when it is relevant to the main educational goals. At the same time, in the era of constantly changing environment, new evolving professions and requirements, a university must become a centre that not only gives knowledge, but also actively develops soft skills to provide its graduates with higher flexibility and adaptability to the new challenges, educates personalities capable of independent entrepreneurial activity for the benefit of the society.

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## Anotacija

### UNIVERSITETŲ STUDENTŲ SOCIALINIO VERSLUMO ĮGŪDŽIŲ STIPRINIMAS ANGLŲ KALBOS PASKAITOSE

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas skirtingų specialybių studentų socialinio verslumo įgūdžių ugdymas anglų kalbos paskaitose universitetuose. Kadangi vis daugiau žmonių įsitraukia į verslumo veiklą, ypač į socialinį verslumą, todėl šiandien kyla klausimas, kokie reikalingi įgūdžiai sėkmingai veiklai šioje srityje, jų vystymo metodai bei būdai.

Metodologinį straipsnio pagrindą sudaro nagrinėjamų 2014 ir 2015 m. empirinių tyrimų mokslinių darbų, kuriuos atliko užsienio mokslininkai įvairiose pasaulio šalyse, pavyzdžiui, Didžiojoje Britanijoje ir Malaizijoje, rezultatai. Svarbiausi socialinio verslumo įgūdžiai yra šie: atkaklumas ir griežtumas, gebėjimas mokytis, derybiniai įgūdžiai, vidutinis / pamatuotas rizikos priėmimas, pasiekimų poreikis ir kt. Atlikus šį tyrimą, įgūdžiai buvo sugrupuoti į penkias grupes, tokias kaip: kūrybiškumas (gebėjimas kurti naujus produktus, metodus, veikti naujomis aplinkybėmis ir kt.), socialinis prisitaikymas, socialiniai įgūdžiai (gebėjimas valdyti žmones, dirbti su jais, palaikyti asmeninius kontaktus, derėtis ir pan.), savarankiškas sprendimų priėmimas ir veikimas, rizikos prisiėmimas.

Be to, atlikti metodai ir veiksmai parodė, kad minėti įgūdžiai gali būti ugdomi ESP klasėse. Visų pirma buvo atkreiptas dėmesys į: projektinį mokymąsi, atvejų analizę, užduotis su minimaliu dėstytojo vadovavimu (pvz., pristatymų, ataskaitų rengimas ir kt.), nepriklausomą savęs vertinimą, diskusijas ir atskirus neformaliojo švietimo metodus, kurie su minimaliais pakeitimais autoriaus buvo praktikuojami ESP klasėse. Kiekvienas iš šių metodų buvo aprašytas, o jais vystomi gebėjimai buvo nustatyti.

Atlikus tyrimą buvo padaryta išvada, kad ESP klasės yra svarbios ugdant socialinio verslumo įgūdžius ir jose sukuriamos mokymosi sąlygos yra palankios ugdyti šiuos įgūdžius. Galima teigti, kad skirtingų specialybių studentų socialinio verslumo įgūdžių ugdymas gali padėti jiems būsimoje savarankiškoje profesinėje veikloje susiduriant su nuolatiniais ekonomikos iššūkiiais darbo rinkos pokyčių kontekste.

**Esminiai žodžiai:** socialinis verslumas, verslumo įgūdžiai, anglų kalbos kursai, įgūdžių ugdymas, mokymosi aplinka, iššūkiiai.

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