Article:
Kapasi, I orcid.org/0000-0001-7965-520X and Grekova, G (2018) What do students think of self-determined learning in entrepreneurship education? Education + Training, 60 (7/8). pp. 841-856. ISSN 0040-0912

https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2017-0028

Emerald Education + Training

What do students think of self-determined learning in entrepreneurship education?

Journal:	*Education + Training*
Manuscript ID	ET-02-2017-0028.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Entrepreneurship education, Self-determined learning, Team Academy, Graduates

What do students think of self-determined learning in entrepreneurship education?

Abstract

Purpose

This research sought to examine the perceptions and perspectives of students with regards to self-determined learning in an entrepreneurship education context and its potential contribution to employability.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This research used a mixed methods approach with a sample of 25 students currently attending a UK Higher Education Institute. The students had access to participation in entrepreneurship education modules but self-determined learning-informed modules or programmes were not currently offered. Students were invited to attend focus groups and as a result of emergent themes, a Business School-wide survey was developed.

Findings

This research makes two tentative contributions to the entrepreneurship education field. First, the findings of this student cohort are similar to those found throughout the UK and the EU with regard to the perception of the value of a degree by students; its contribution to the hidden curriculum; and the importance of practical experience. The research also adds to the field by considering the value of a self-determined learning approach to developing the capabilities and competencies of graduates. This approach to learning in a context of entrepreneurship education was in general well received by potential students, particularly the applied aspect of the programme. However, there is a perception of risk about this approach to learning and students are concerned about the value of a programme like this to employers in general.

Originality/Value

The study contributes to discussions on the value of entrepreneurship education on perceived employability and in particular self-determined learning *through* entrepreneurship activity.

Key words: Entrepreneurship education, Self-determined learning, Team Academy, Graduates

Introduction

Higher education is considered important for economic growth as it can provide key knowledge and skills for current graduates entering a complex work and labour environment (Artess *et al.*, 2017; Henry *et al.*, 2005; QAA, 2012; Hoppe, 2016). Moreover, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under "considerable pressure" to equip graduates for the labour market, part of which will include employability attributes required by a complex and changing work environment (Artess *et al.*, 2017, p.6). However, some research suggests that the usefulness of the knowledge, skills and capabilities developed on degree courses, does not meet the needs of potential employers who are seeking graduates with a "business-ready mind-set" (ABS *et al.*, 2014, p.4; also Jackson, 2010).

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education (EE hereafter) has been found to offer better employability 'prospects' than degree programmes that do not include EE as a component (Rae, 2007; Bell, 2016). A recent study by Artess *et al.* (2017) describes 'entrepreneurialism' as a generic graduate attribute, defining enterprise as related to generating ideas and the skills to make them happen, and entrepreneurship as additional knowledge related to new venture creation. Even so, the pedagogical approaches to EE, although diverse in the UK, are subject to disagreement regarding whether educating *about* or *for* enterprise and entrepreneurship are more beneficial; this is an area of longstanding dispute in this field (e.g. Garavan and O' Cinneide, 1994; Pittaway and Cope, 2007; Piperopoulos and Dimov, 2015). Consequently, several authors writing on EE have called for changes to programme design and delivery (Kirby, 2004; Henry *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, Jones *et al.* (2014) call for EE educators to move away from "accepted educational practice" and "claim the future of their domain" (p.765) by embedding a new approach to enable learner autonomy.

One such alternative, which educates *for* enterprise *through* experiences, is a self-determined learning approach within a context of entrepreneurship. Self-determined learning, or heutagogy (heut – self, gogy – learning) (Hase and Kenyon, 2000) proposes that learning "occurs through personal experience with the learner being central to the process" (Bhoyrub *et al.*, 2010, p.323). Learning informed by heutagogy is thus led by the learner and their journey to move beyond skills and knowledge to the development of capabilities and competencies which can be applied in complex environments (Bhoyrub *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, heutagogy distances itself from pedagogy or andragogy where the 'teacher' informs what is to be learnt, rather the passion and intention for learning resides with the student (Van Gelderen, 2010). As a consequence, Blaschke (2012) proposes that a self-determined learning approach is key to the ability to manage in unknown situations and occupations, either working for themselves or as employees.

Nevertheless, despite findings which indicate that experiential-based learning is valuable for informing entrepreneurial intentions and learning (e.g. Mason and Arshad, 2013; Kubberod and Pettersen, 2017, respectively), there has been recent criticism of the value of experiential learning in comparison to 'traditional' *about* and *for* approaches on post-graduation outcomes (e.g. employability and new venture creation) (Kozlinska, 2012). Thus, while the debate continues around the value of experiential learning for outcomes, we know little about what *potential students* think about a self-determined approach to learning through EE; a source of surprise to Pittaway and Cope (2007).

This research therefore investigates the *perceptions of potential students* on a self-determined learning-informed EE programme. In particular the research considers their views on engaging in self-determined learning within an entrepreneurship context; their opinions about whether they would enter in to such a degree programme; and any potential contribution to employability. The aims of this study inform two research questions (RQ):

RQ1. What do potential students think about self-determined learning in an entrepreneurship context?

RQ2. How valuable is this form of EE for their perceived employability?

This research therefore addresses two important issues in our understanding of EE. The first core contribution of this research is a better-informed understanding about student perceptions of self-determined learning and its perceived potential value to them and their employability. Our second contribution is the inclusion of university-level stakeholders in how they would like to be educated, answering calls from Matlay (2009) to address this area of limited research.

First, the literature on graduate employability, and in particular entrepreneurship education and employability is discussed. This is followed by the heutagogical aspects of self-determined learning with reference to a particular programme in an EE context. Thereafter, the methodology used in this study is described, followed by the findings and discussion. Finally, conclusions and implications are presented.

Literature Review

Graduate Employability

Achieving a degree often acts as a marker of graduate employability (Bell, 2016). Employability is defined by Yorke (2006) as:

> "a set of achievements – skills, understanding, and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations" (p.8).

The value of a degree for employability is a situation facilitated and supported by policy (Belt *et al.*, 2012; Crayford *et al.*, 2012). Further, a degree is considered as 'short-hand' for having the kinds of qualities sought by (large) organisations (Stewart and Knowles, 2000). Azevedo *et al.* (2012) find that both students and employers agree on a 'standard' set of eight generic competencies that are required by the workplace; these include: influencing and persuading, teamwork and relationship building, and self and time management for example. Nevertheless, Nicolescu and Pun (2009) report that although employers welcome the theoretical knowledge, openness and adaptability of students, they have concerns about a lack of practical and team work experience. Further, Jackson and Chapman (2012) find employers are seeking business competencies rather than academic skills such as critical thinking. This discrepancy may arise because different stakeholders have different expectations of HEI outcomes: students emphasise 'objective' skills acquisition, whereas, employers emphasise 'subjective' factors such as personality types (Nicolescu and Pun, 2009). Thus, employability as an outcome of achieving a degree is not a straightforward concept (Dacre Pool and

Sewell, 2007), particularly given that the market place for employment is constantly changing and there is an increasing likelihood of self-employment rather than employment as the path that many graduates will follow (Bell, 2016). Moreover, the recruitment challenges and requirements of graduates may be exacerbated because of the social change that has been occurring, which has resulted in large numbers of individuals with graduate level qualifications. Thus, the importance of 'extras' is now of even greater importance for employability (Velasco, 2012). An oversupply of graduates means a need to 'standout' to employers (Rae, 2007) who value practical experience over degrees.

Accordingly, employability is perceived to be increasingly less about having knowledge sets and more about flexibility and adaptability as a result of the transferability of skills (Nicolescu and Pun, 2009; Azevedo *et al.*, 2012; Velasco, 2012). Transferable skills include "motivation, initiative, creativity, organisational ability, written and oral communication skills, team working, interpersonal skills, problem solving, leadership, numeracy and information technology" (Stewart and Knowles, 2000, p.22). HEIs have an important role in raising awareness amongst students about the expectations of employers, particularly around the importance and articulation of their transferrable skills, and the kinds of opportunities that exist post-graduation (Artess *et al.*, 2017; Stewart and Knowles, 2001). Further, the Pedagogy for Employability Group at HEA also note the importance of work experience to potential employers, reporting that graduates with work experience have higher employability prospects (Pegg *et al.*, 2012). Yet despite students recognising the need to 'standout' and an awareness of the skills required by employers, Pegg *et al.* (2012) find that that not many UK students take up work experience opportunities that are embedded in existing programmes. Therefore, despite opportunities within existing programmes for students to build work experience as part of their degree, it remains underused by UK students in comparison to their EU counterparts.

To summarise, research indicates that graduate qualifications and the link to employability is a highly complex area. Nevertheless, research also suggests that (business) graduates, from an employer perspective, are not leaving higher education with the employability attributes required, although the fast pace of workplace change, amongst other complex factors across the HEI sector, is also likely a contributor. For example, as Bell (2016) finds, there is an increasing likelihood of graduates pursuing self-employment rather than employment with large employers. In contrast to general degree attainment, research has suggested that that graduates who have experienced EE have differing, and improved, employability outcomes (e.g. Rae, 2007; Bell, 2016). It is to examination of EE and employability that we now turn.

Entrepreneurship education and employability

Employability and EE are closely linked (Berglund, 2013). Further, the study of EE and its contribution to employability of individuals and the growth of the economy is an important area of study (Kirby, 2004; Matlay, 2009; Pittaway and Cope, 2007). Although there are questions about the purpose of EE, often driven by the impact outcomes that are measured (Samwel Mwasalwiba, 2010; Maritz and Brown, 2012), Rae (2007) states that EE is "generally aimed at enabling the student to think and act in enterprising ways, with self-employment or entrepreneurship generally being possible rather than intended outcome" (p.611).

Currently there is a diverse range of approaches to the delivery of EE across UK countries (Rae *et al.*, 2012). There are also a variety of employability-linked results to participation in EE activity (e.g. Hjelde, 2015; Azam, 2013; Moon *et al.*, 2013). For example, Rae's (2007) study found that employability was enhanced as a result of EE participation. More recently, Bell (2016) found in a study of 113 UK graduates that having a proactive disposition and achievement motivation, two aspects that are thought to be enhanced by participation in EE, improved the level (i.e. managerial or professional) of employment post-graduation. Other aspects of employability are also found to be enhanced; these include, for example, the importance of entrepreneurial orientation mind-set to employers (Hartshorn and Sear, 2005); or options to engage in new venture creation for oneself informed by developing entrepreneurial intentions (Kirkwood *et al.*, 2014; Mason and Arshad, 2013, respectively); levels of desired human capital attainment (Sofoluwe *et al.*, 2013); and building connections between students and potential employers increasing 'work experience' exposure (Hynes *et al.*, 2010).

Notwithstanding the reported value of EE for employability outcomes, voices in the sector acknowledge that expectations of EE to provide employability outcomes are not always realistic or possible (Henry, 2013). Moreover, there remain criticisms of the approach to EE which are largely around the delivery approach taken; that is, the question of whether the activities developed are *for-, about-* or *through*-informed (e.g. Donnellon *et al.*, 2014). As a consequence, Bell (2016) calls for more "innovative, active and experiential teaching methods" (p.14) in EE; echoed by other studies (e.g. Nicolescu and Pun, 2009; Samwel Mwasalwiba, 2010; Rae, 2007). Thus while delivery approaches and activities have developed over the past decade and policy is encouraging the implementation and delivery of more EE to facilitate graduate employability (Crayford *et al.*, 2012), there remains a gap in our understanding of different approaches to *learning* and EE. Consequently, when calls are made for new approaches to teaching and delivery, the 'matching' aspect regarding ways of learning is often missing. It is to consideration of a self-determined learning approach (i.e. heutagogy) in a context of EE that we now turn.

Self-determined learning and Entrepreneurship Education

To date, Hase and Kenyon have been the leading thinkers on heutagogy, that is, self-determined learning (e.g., 2000, 2003, 2007, 2013). It is worth noting that heutagogy is not an alternative to pedagogy or andragogy, rather it is an extension which focuses on "learner-centred learning" (Hase and Kenyon, 2013, p.7). Thus, a key principal of this approach to learning is that learning is driven by the learner regarding what and how to learn rather than imposed by a 'teacher' or curricula (Hase and Kenyon, 2013). Additional, principals include: learning is informed by the student in collaboration with peers and 'teachers' rather than a prescribed curriculum; importance is placed on personal exploration; learning by experience which occurs at the pace of the learner; and the creation of a conducive environment (Van Gelderen, 2010).

While there is limited research on self-determined learning an EE context specifically, the concept in this context is not new (e.g. Bird, 2002); Van Gelderen (2010) and Tosey *et al.* (2013) provide notable contemporary exceptions. Van Gelderen (2010) conceptually explores the importance of autonomy to the pursuit of entrepreneurship and thus presents an argument that autonomy should also underpin EE activities. In this instance, the author cites the importance of self-determined learning as a means to facilitate autonomy

(Van Gelderen, 2010); an important opportunity for development in the EE field as desired by Jones *et al.* (2014). In addition, Tosey *et al.* (2013) identifies the importance of a 'micro-culture' which enables a self-determined learning approach to be established.

One example of this self-determined approach to learning in a context of entrepreneurship that has been adopted in several countries across the world, including the UK, is Team Academy (TA) (Tiimiakatemia, 2017). TA originated in Jyväskylä, Finland over 20 years ago and was developed by Johanes Partanen. Based on the heutagogic learning approach (Hase and Kenyon, 2000), Partanen developed an EE learning approach whereby individuals, working in teams, learn in social settings when they apply theory to practice. Although heutagogy can be applied in a variety of contexts (e.g. nursing or education) in this case students learn entrepreneurship knowledge, skills, competencies and capabilities *thorough* entrepreneurship activity where they are supported by a team coach. Students take full ownership, responsibility and control for their learning and their business activities, as written into the leading thoughts of the TA approach (Tiimiakatemia, 2017). Essentially, on a TA programme students create their own team (profit-oriented) business from which all of their learning emerges. In its Finnish incarnation, the programme reports impressive post-programme outcomes. For example, 47% of graduates in the Jyvaskyla 2012 graduating class have continued to operate their own business (Tiimiakatemia, 2017).

Whilst degree programmes and modules have been developed in several countries informed by the principles of TA, to the best of our knowledge, no research has considered the perceptions of potential students of a self-determined learning programme such as this in an entrepreneurship context and in the UK. This concurs with comments that Matlay (2009) makes regarding limited academic studies that consider the views of the stakeholders affected by university-level education. This study seeks to fill this gap in knowledge by better understanding student perceptions of this self-determined learning EE approach, in particular that offered by 'full emersion' in TA, and any perceived effects on employability.

Methodology

This research engaged with students already attending the business school at an HEI that was, at that time, developing a self-determined learning, TA-inspired suite of modules and a potential full degree programme. Neither the proposed modules nor the programme were in delivery at the time of the research. This research sought specifically to gain access to *the perceptions and expectations of potential students* about the value of such an approach to learning for them and its perceived effect on their potential employability. Little research has been conducted on student perceptions regarding this type of learning. Consequently, due to the limited existing research, the subsequent exploratory nature of the research and seeking to gain access to a breadth of views on the key concepts of learning approach and approach delivery (i.e. in the TA format), a mixed methodology approach was employed (Cresswell, 2003). First a literature and policy review was conducted to identify key themes (e.g. review of QAA standards). Thereafter, rich qualitative data was collected via focus groups and semi-structured interviews to review existing, and establish new, themes regarding the value of degrees, EE, self-determined learning in an EE context (i.e. Team Academy), and employability. Questions included: what are your plans after graduation? What do you think about employers' expectations of

graduates? According to Tymon (2013) it is not only possible, but important to assess student perspectives on employability and the views of employers (see Appendix 1 for further details). Subsequently a small-scale quantitative survey to gain additional data around the themes derived was implemented (see Appendix 1). This study takes a similar approach to Azevedo *et al.* (2012) that examined student and potential employer expectations of employability aspects. All data collected was subject to ethical clearance, and were recorded and transcribed where appropriate. Participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality. Data was subject to thematic analysis based on themes from literature and emergent topics as per Miles *et al.* (2014). Each author coded separately looking for themes, similarities and differences. Thereafter, the authors compared coding and came to a consensus on interpretation.

The sample included current students attending a HEI that had plans to develop self-determined learning informed modules and a programme. Students who had already participated in and completed existing EE modules (approx. total number attending EE modules 600) were invited to participate in small focus groups of no more than four participants. Students were contacted via several methods that included emails to their student accounts, personal contact with lecturers and information about the research displayed on campus. Three focus groups were held, comprising 11 students. Thereafter the survey, informed by the qualitative themes collected, was sent to all Business School students (approx. total 7,000) within the same HEI. The overall sample for this study, including both cohorts, involved a total of 25 self-selecting participants. This is a small response rate in comparison to overall potential sample size. However, this research was conducted during the early summer period likely affecting participation rates. Moreover, different types of research attract differing response rates (Nulty, 2008). The potential respondent self-selection bias is noted in this study, and claims to generalisablity are limited at best. With regards to the student sample, the focus groups comprised of 11 students, both undergraduates (n5) and postgraduates (n6). There was a mix of male (n8) and female (n3) participants. Thereafter, 14 usable responses were collected from the survey. These student participants were again a mix of undergraduates (2) and postgraduates (n12), male (n11) and female (n3). It is notable in this sample that there are greater numbers of self-selecting male respondents; this may reflect existing issues with regards to gender perceptions of EE activity (Gupta *et al.*, 2008). Table 1 sets out research participant details.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1. Sample details

Findings

This research sought to understand the perceptions, perspectives and expectations of students on the value of self-determined learning in a context of entrepreneurship education. Two provisional themes emerged from this research: student perspectives on a self-determined learning approach; and personal development, often orientated towards achieving 'employability'.

Self-determined learning approach

When presented with information about the proposed TA-inspired module/programme, this sample of students were able to indentify several of the key components of a self-determined learning approach. Learning by doing and applying knowledge in practice were identified as principals of this learning approach. The first key feature, learning by doing, was perceived to make learning more effective and memorable, as F2 says:

> "I definitely think that it is going to be more effective learning. People will learn more by doing than by learning from modules; because you are feeling responsible for your own development. You will learn a lot more because you have hands-on experience" (F2)

The learning by doing aspect was of particular relevance to the importance of understanding how theory applied to practice and how this approach to learning would allow the students to build relevant connections. As F6 explains:

> "Having work experience allows [you] to see a connection between what the lecture says and what you would like to know and do. You can see the connection between the theory and the actual experience. Hearing only a theory does not help to gain understanding of a subject" (F6)

Consequently, learning by doing was perceived to offer an additional value to the students in contrast to the existing learning experiences they were receiving. Furthermore, the importance of building connections between theory and practice by 'doing' was viewed as a means to allow the individual to evaluate and reflect on learning. The inclusion of practice and experience-based activity was thought to enable immediate and useful feedback on the learning process. In addition, this approach would also allow that learning to inform whether skills and competencies were being developed and then deployed appropriately. For example, F2 comments: "With this approach, you can work on the project, solve the problem and see the real results".

Another key principal of the self-determined learning approach on a TA-inspired programme is the importance of taking responsibility, ownership and control of one's own learning. According to heutagogic practice (e.g. Hase and Kenyon, 2000), this is central to this approach to learning – it is by driving one's own learning that increased motivation to learn and to continue to learn arises. However, in this sample, there were mixed views on this aspect. For example, some of the sample cohort already recognised the importance of taking ownership of learning. As S19 describes: "People learn more when they want to. They need to be self-disciplined in order to achieve higher rates of learning". To contrast this view, some of the sample also expressed concerns about taking full ownership and responsibility. This included two facets. First, there was concern around the risk to the individual as a self-sufficient learner. F4 explains:

> "Whilst I do believe control of your own learning is a good idea, the idea of full control and responsibility really daunts me, as it leaves me completely vulnerable to failure" (F4)

Thus, we can identify this type of learning as perceived as 'risky'. This is likely in light of the competitive landscape for post-graduation employment and the pressures that many of these students felt were present

with regards to being about to compete in that landscape. The second aspect, was about the ideological value of self-determined learning, given that perceptions arose from this student cohort about the subsequent value of attending (and paying to attend) a HEI if learning was to be perceived as only driven by the individual. S12 comments: "there should always be support else why would a student even join a Uni[?]". This raises serious consideration with regards to how self-determined learning is positioned in the mind of the student and its 'marketplace' value for students. Furthermore, this issue of the 'value' of attending an HEI also emerged with regards to 'traditional' knowledge acquisition. Students expressed how they often did not want to distance themselves from the knowledge they would gain through 'traditional' learning approaches. For example, S21 comments:

> "[I] feel you need to have a balance in terms of how you are taught as only being taught one specific style could hamper your overall learning experience"

Finally, and in addition to risk around learning necessary knowledge content and the role of an HEI in providing that, the students also observed that participation in a specific EE context programme such as TA involves additional forms of risk. This included risks associated with student learning style, financial resources or a move away from the 'traditional' and 'recognised' approach to gaining a degree. As these respondents convey (S18, F4), the difference between what was offered via this self-determined learning approach and what they were used to/would expect in the HEI context was likely to require serious consideration.

> "I think it depends on the person…some are more likely to learn more in this environment, whereas, other individuals probably are not that effective" (S18)

> "The risk factor would be a big factor that puts me off, because as a student, finances are limited. […] I would be more likely to do it outside of my degree" (F4)

Overall, this sample of students considered the self-determined learning approach to have valuable principals: notably the option to learn by doing and apply theory to practice with the option of immediate feedback and reflection opportunities. However, there were concerns about its risks and distance from a 'traditional' learning approach. This was largely evident in the undergraduate cohort of the sample. Undergraduate students identified that they would like to achieve their degree goals and then pursue this kind of learning; for example, F4 comments:

> "I would be more likely to do it outside of my degree as a substitute for a postgrad or something" (F4)

Consequently, the ability to learn through self-determined learning in an entrepreneurship context, as outlined by a TA-inspired programme, included some appealing aspects, aspects that this student cohort thought valuable. However, the institutional approach to delivery, e.g. offering the programme at undergraduate level rather than postgraduate level, or as a full programme rather than discrete modules, gave rise to some uncertainty in this sample. In spite of these types of consideration, the learning approach presented was in part well received. This was in particular relation to the option for personal development that informs the next theme emerging from this study.

Personal development

As previously discussed in consideration of the perceived specific qualities of a self-determined learning approach, there was great importance placed on the option to engage in practical application for personal development. Notably, this was expressed because the students described practical delivery of theoretical learning as currently missing in their educational experience to date, and also something they recognised would improve employer perceptions of them. For example, experience could "set [a graduate] apart in the world of work against other candidates" (F4); it could improve credibility (F2) and also be more valuable to potential employers (S17).

> "It [participation on a TA-inspired programme] is an experience as well. If you want to be hired somewhere else, you can always say that you worked as part of a business team. It is about credibility; showing that you can apply knowledge in a workplace" (F2)

> "Gaining work experience is much more valuable than a degree, bestowing you with some invisible accreditation, ever will be" (S17)

However, whilst the students recognised that practical knowledge and application was important, especially to potential employability, these students wanted the 'full package', that is to both gain knowledge *and* practical experience. It was implied that they need to be equipped for the world of work and that gaining a degree was effective 'training' to that end.

This is interesting, as it appears that this sample positioned their experience on existing EE modules in opposition to the approach described in the new potential self-determined learning programme. For instance, student perceptions of the value of EE module/programme participation (in general) were mixed. F4, for example, identifies that EE activity is specific to a particular area and thus requires less "interpretation" for how to apply learning in the 'field'. In addition, S25 says "I don't know that studying entrepreneurship can help with employability unless you're applying for jobs at start ups". This suggests that entrepreneurship skills and capabilities are perceived as limited to certain business operation sizes within the economy; findings supported by the research of Stewart and Knowles (2000). In contrast, some students report that they perceive involvement in EE modules as beneficial to their general employability and personal development, particularly because entrepreneurship studies develop an attractive skill set for employers (e.g. S13), and for the individual students on a personal level (S14, S18, S19). For example, S23 comments "[entrepreneurship studies] help to develop my knowledge and find relevant knowledge required for me". However, despite gaining knowledge, students are acutely aware that they desire (and perceive that they require) "more hands-on experience" (F2). As S21 says:

> "[The modules] definitely develop our knowledge, and we can definitely put that into our jobs, but I think we need more hands-on experience"

Finally, it was evident that many of the students, especially undergraduates, were often unclear about what they wanted to get out of attending university; they were seeking to learn who they are. For example, F1

says: “I do not know what I am going to do with my life. I do not have any plans.” Consequently, the ability of the undergraduate students to develop a clear picture of the expectations and requirements of obtaining a degree within a particular discipline were limited. This is because many are unclear about the area they intend to work in once they have gained their degree (e.g. specific employment positions). As F2 makes clear:

> “I do not feel confident at all. Because I do not really know what kind of work I want to do, I do not know what skills to acquire and what is going to be useful to me”

Nevertheless, both undergraduates and postgraduates perceived that there is value for them in pursuing a degree in general, such as meeting their learning needs, building skills, and furthering their employability options, specifically they view a degree as a job-acquisition requirement. F1 comments: “I think once you have the [degree] you can do so much more. Once you graduate, you can pick what you like”.

Finally, this sample identified that getting a job after graduation was challenging and that “unless you can stand out for yourself, it is going to be a hard game [to get a job]” (F7). Several previous studies (e.g. Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Jackson and Chapman, 2012) have discussed the importance of employability criteria. In the survey component of this research, it appears that the students can identify employability criteria as per the QAA (2012) guidelines; a similar finding to Tymon (2013). Moreover, many of the students were specifically able to identify aspects of the ‘hidden’ curriculum (Nicolescu and Pun, 2009); that is the importance placed on aspects such as “personal motivation and showing initiative” (F7) and the ability to “fit in well with their culture” (F6). However, when asked to consider whether they exhibited explicit employability criteria, such as proactiveness and motivation, they did not report that they exhibited many of these criteria. Therefore, a gap exists between what these students recognise as important employability criteria and their perception of the experiences they are having while pursuing a degree and how those experiences facilitate their ability to develop those criteria.

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that students value gaining a degree to enhance their employability; it is a clear first step towards getting a job. In terms of learning, the students recognise that the majority of their learning is theoretical as per the findings of Nicolescu and Pun (2009). They are also able to identify many of the transferrable skills associated with employability such as initiative, motivation and enthusiasm also found in academic studies (Azevedo *et al.*, 2012). In addition, it is clear that students place importance on practical and applied experience which is found to be important to employers (Nicolescu and Pun, 2009). Many authors who conduct research in the EE field recognise that experience is key to learning in the context of entrepreneurship (e.g. Bell, 2016; Johannisson, 2016; Rae, 2007). However, in the case of this student sample, it was evident that opportunities for such activity did not often form part of existing EE module approaches or were not taken up by students in this particular HEI. This may fit with the findings of Pegg *et al.* (2012) who identified that even in the case where work-based learning or equivalent activities were offered, they were not often used by UK students.

With regards to perceptions of a 'full emersion' self-determined learning programme in an EE context, as applied in TA, there were expressions of interest from the students in pursuing *the practical application of theory*, in light of the limitations of existing modules previously set out. In addition, students also discussed their perceptions of the value of high levels of control, ownership and responsibility that is integral to a TA-informed programme. There were mixed views, however, about their individual suitability for this approach due in large part to the perception of risk, both financial and 'learning', that may be involved in this. For example, financial risk and associated concerns are clear. In a TA-inspired programme, many students run real businesses for which they have real responsibility and from which real financial consequences can result (e.g. loss of income, bankruptcy). Additionally, it is worth noting the reticence of potential students on a TA programme to compromise their marker of learning: the degree certificate. As TA does not operate like a 'traditional' degree there were concerns raised about their learning potential on the programme and a lack of interest to 'let go' of the established norm of a well-established degree title, for example, BA (Hons) Business Studies. It may be that students are concerned about jeopardising their chances with potential employer because TA is not a well-known degree approach and a 'traditional' degree is seen as an 'entry-level requirement' to a position in the workforce. It may also be associated with the existing approach to EE within HEIs. As per Johannisson (2016) who identifies the strong influence of managerialism on those who participate in EE and the consequences of such, whereby the two ideologies – managerialism and entrepreneuring – clash and cannot be resolved within the mind of the student. This may be a contributing factor to the reticence of these students and may be indicative of findings in other studies that examine the link between exposure to EE and subsequent business creation activity (Kozlinska, 2012).

Overall, when contrasting 'traditional' *about* and *for* pedagogies of EE with experiential learning on self-determined learning-informed programme there is general support by this student sample for the practical outcomes of such an experiential degree programme. However, it is worth noting that a proportion of the potential students were not keen to 'jump ship' wholesale to embrace this approach as they perceived leaving behind a 'traditional' degree to be risky. This might suggest that students are aware of (large) employer considerations as this reflects previous research on differences between SME and large employers (Stewart and Knowles, 2000). This may be linked to the fact that the pedagogy employed in existing modules and programmes are "embedded in a wider context of the institution and government policy on entrepreneurship education" (Pittaway and Cope, 2007, p.485). Or as per Johannisson (2016), to the largely managerialist approach to business and EE which is currently delivered in business schools. As many of the students in this sample were enrolled on general business programmes with EE optional modules, this may fit with their existing learning 'norm'.

Thus, business schools, and entrepreneurship programmes in particular, which are seeking to move towards more innovative approaches, of which TA may be one, may require to review how such an approach is complemented (or not) within a degree programme.

Conclusion and contribution

Gaining a degree continues to have value in the marketplace. Students recognise that gaining a degree is a standard 'entry requirement' and that (large) employers seek this as an indication that a certain level of education has been obtained. However, student perceptions of the value of what occurs during participation in a degree programme are more varied. For example, the students that participated in this study report that they lack opportunities to practically apply the knowledge and theory that they are exposed to during their studies. Nevertheless, whilst students may recognise and acknowledge the practical application limitations of their degrees, Pegg *et al.* (2012) report a lack of uptake of extracurricular opportunities by UK students. With regards to self-determined learning in an entrepreneurship context, which prioritises practical application of theory as its underpinning learning philosophy, again student responses were mixed. In general these potential students thought the programme would and could offer a valuable opportunity to undertake practical learning and to build experience and confidence amongst other qualities. However, some of the students were concerned about the marketable value of such a degree and moving away from the 'traditional' expectations of (large) employers.

This research has several implications for practice. First, this research finds that students have, in general, a positive opinion of the value of self-determined learning-informed learning, in particular for practical application of theory and building skills. Second, it is evident that the (employability) value of experiential EE learning needs to be clearly articulated to students. In addition, there is a requirement to communicate both the benefits and challenges of pursuing a learning approach such as the one employed in a TA-inspired course; for example with reference to the level of responsibility and the practical experience gained whilst managing perceptions of (personal) risk. This could also be linked to general EE courses being engaged with assessing student perceptions and expectations of their course before and after delivery. Third, the findings might indicate that students are concerned about proceeding with an approach, which is to a certain extent, remains untested/unconventional (in a UK educational setting). Thus, as per Tosey *et al.* (2013), the approach taken to implementing a TA-style programme within a UK context may require some cultural and context-specific refinement. Finally, this research contributes to conversations in the literature about the development of standards and expectations within the academy for EE; it may also influence policy on EE at Governmental level (e.g. QAA standards).

Limitations and Further Research

As with all studies there are several limitations to the research findings presented here. First, the sample of students in this study came only from one UK HEI. Notwithstanding the sample size limitation, this provided a unique opportunity to gain access to a sample group who were poised with the potential to engage in a self-determined learning-informed programme and to gain access to their perceptions and opinions. Further, this provides an opportunity for future research in collaboration with other institutions that may be considering changes to their EE delivery options. Second, as this was cross-sectional research is it hard to draw conclusions about any potential boost, or not, to levels of employability in the students who may opt for such a programme. Consequently, it would be useful in future research to conduct longitudinal follow up studies of

students before entering and post-completion of such a self-determined learning-inspired module/programme. Finally, while this study used a mixed methods approach, it was with a small sample and therefore, generalizability is limited. Future studies could engage with larger sample sizes, quantitative data collection and analysis methods, and collect date from potential employers regarding their perceptions of such an approach to learning in graduates.

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Appendix 1

Focus group questions

1. Demographic information: age, gender, course, country of origin, levels of work experience, current job status
2. Why do you study?
3. What are your plans after graduation?
4. What will help you to succeed with your future career?
5. What do you think about employers' expectations from graduates?
6. What are the benefits of studying business management and entrepreneurship programmes
7. Do you feel ready and confident to fulfil your plans after graduation?

8. What can you do now to prepare yourself to deal with future uncertainties?
9. How attractive to you is it to take full ownership, responsibility and control of your learning?
10. What would be the most effective learning environment for you?
11. If the Team Academy programme was available at [Scottish HEI] would you apply to the programme?

Survey questions

1. Demographic information: age, gender, course, country of origin, levels of work experience, current job status
2. Why did you decide to get a university degree?
3. How and why did you choose your current programme?
4. What are your professional plans after graduation?
5. What level of contribution to your future plans do you expect from your degree?
6. Do you believe that studying business management or entrepreneurship at university could help you to gain advantage in terms of your employability?
7. What essential knowledge, skills and capabilities will help to improve your employability?
8. When employers say that they expect graduates to have a 'business-ready' or 'entrepreneurial' mind-set, what do you think they mean by this?
9. Would you agree that demonstrating certain traits can improve graduates' employability?
10. As a result of attending your current degree programme, do you believe that you have attained relevant knowledge and understanding of organisations, the business environment in which the operate and their management?
11. Please evaluate your knowledge of the following topics (includes: markets, marketing and sales, customers, finance – as per QAA guidance)
12. In addition to acquiring academic knowledge at university, do you feel you have developed an ability to apply knowledge in practice?
13. Please evaluate the skills you have developed as a result of attending your degree programme
14. Do you feel ready and confident to fulfil your plans after graduation?
15. How would you evaluate the overall effectiveness of your educational programme in terms of it meeting your expectations?
16. What is your perception of the long-term value of your higher education?
17. Do you think that you university education programme helps you to develop a life-long learning ability?
18. How attractive is it to take full ownership, responsibility and control of your learning?
19. Would you agree with the following statements about the efficacy of the learning environment in Team Academy (e.g. collaborative, flexible, it is okay to fail)
20. Do you think that the Team Academy approach would result in better employability skills development?
21. If a programme similar to Team Academy was available at [Scottish HEI] would you undertake the programme?

Student (Focus or Survey)	Gender	Classification level	Nationality
F1	Female	Undergraduate	EU
F2	Female	Undergraduate	EU
F3	Male	Undergraduate	EU
F4	Female	Undergraduate	EU
F5	Male	Postgraduate	International
F6	Male	Undergraduate	EU
F7	Male	Postgraduate	International
F8	Male	Postgraduate	International
F9	Male	Postgraduate	EU
F10	Male	Postgraduate	International
F11	Male	Postgraduate	International
S12	Male	Postgraduate	International
S13	Male	Postgraduate	EU
S14	Female	Undergraduate	EU
S15	Female	Postgraduate	International
S16	Male	Undergraduate	International
S17	Female	Postgraduate	International
S18	Male	Postgraduate	EU
S19	Male	Postgraduate	International
S20	Male	Postgraduate	International
S21	Male	Postgraduate	EU
S22	Male	Postgraduate	International
S23	Male	Postgraduate	International
S24	Male	Postgraduate	EU
S25	Male	Postgraduate	International

Table 1. Sample details