

Abstract

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Entrepreneurial propensity of German students in the pre-start-up process (GEST-Study)

Start-ups have a very important economic function, as they exert positive effects on structural change, technology transfer, economic growth and employment through innovations. In this context, an important role belongs to universities. Beyond its training role, academics' research findings are often transferred into promising entrepreneurial innovations. While entrepreneurship research focused mostly on the success of start-ups, the influencing factors in the previous process of the start-up, the pre-start-up process, remain mainly unexplored.

This paper is an exploratory empirical study prepared for Germany, based on the project 'Entrepreneurial Propensity of University Students (GEST-Study)' aiming to analyse target-group-differentiated start-up propensities and entrepreneurship characteristics of students in diverse countries to derive demand-oriented recommended actions for an appropriate concept of entrepreneurship education and support measures. The GEST-Study is conducted by the German Center for Entrepreneurship (ZMG), with the research locations Zweibrücken and Ludwigshafen/Rhine (Germany) as well as Rafaela (Argentina).

In this paper, start-up ambitions and entrepreneurial criteria will be explained; especially for students in Germany within the pre-start-up process. As a consequence of the subject- and process-oriented nature of the analysis, student's requirements can be analysed target-group-differentiated. The GEST-Study interviewed especially students coming from business administration, engineering and computer sciences, as the highest entrepreneurial activity can be observed in the group of graduates from these disciplines. Further, the samples include both undergraduate and graduate students with professional, executive and business experience. The survey is carried out by written questionnaires and was designed with the help of a previously made literature review in order to ensure comparability of the primary data with results coming from other studies on this topic. The research design is based on a reference framework of student and academic start-up propensity that was derived from the literature and highlights the basic influencing factors on the start-up intention potentially developing during the student start-up process.

The findings show a substantial but minor proportion of potential founders among the surveyed students. Especially due to the large portion of surveyed students categorized as "foundation-layman" – which has not dealt with business start-up at all, and thus, are unprejudiced concerning entrepreneurship, whereby they can be regarded as potential entrepreneurs – reflects the requirement to develop process-related and target group-oriented university entrepreneurship education as well as start-up support aiming to provide students at least with basic entrepreneurial skills. Then, they would refrain less frequently, despite existing business ideas, merely due to missing knowledge of an own business start-up. The surveyed students in Germany perceive the national entrepreneurship climate as rather start-up friendly. A relatively high potential of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (inhibited by a degree of start-up anxiousness), and a continuing demand for implementation-oriented start-up support suggest the need for a start-up process-related entrepreneurship support and the establishment of a start-up-specific contact point, so that more university students will be encouraged to market their inventions and create (highly) qualified jobs in the future.