

# **THE EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR DISCIPLINES WITH A FOCUS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF “MELES FAMILY” PROJECTS**

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**Abstract.** Generations Z and A demonstrate a completely different attitude to the educational process and are already having a significant impact on the applied tools for acquiring knowledge. Teaching a discipline such as entrepreneurship allows consciously develop new teaching models. One such new model is presented in the current development, the start of which is set in 2014 with the first of the “MELES family” projects. By 2024, fourth project is on, the main outcome of which will be a digital library on entrepreneurship, containing educational short videos based on real entrepreneurial stories told by local entrepreneurs. They are made by teachers and students without professional equipment, but aim to inspire and awaken entrepreneurial intentions among young people.

*Keywords:* new educational tools; educational programs; entrepreneurship and small business

**JEL:** L26

## **1. Introduction**

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals’ abilities, perspectives, and aspirations. Among its manifold objectives, education is increasingly acknowledged for its potential in fostering entrepreneurial skills and mindsets. In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and evolving economic landscapes, the significance of entrepreneurship has surged as a driving force behind innovation, economic growth, and job creation (Park, 2024, p. 2).

Entrepreneurship has established itself as a dynamic socio-economic phenomenon with an impact on society and the evolution of humanity. Its dynamism should

be transferred to the educational process in entrepreneurship subjects. Of course, an innovative entrepreneurial education will reflect trends in industry and services. Updated curricula and models would allow structuring an integrated and practice-synchronized training. Such a modern reading of entrepreneurship education will meet the needs of entrepreneurs and their startups.

The success of entrepreneurship in a concrete territory becomes directly dependent on quality of education. Secondary education lays the foundation for the development of innovative and creative thinking based on the search for opportunities and problem solving. Universities are the connecting link between secondary education and successful implementation on the labor market, including independent business. Young people, despite their ideas and non-standard view of challenges, need practical training.

Universities assume a fundamental role in preparing students to be successful in their working lives (Tynjälä et al., 2003). To meet this challenge, the customary teaching and research missions of universities are extended to incorporate a ‘third mission’ of economic development through innovation. Changing economic landscapes have shifted from industrial innovation to entrepreneurial knowledge-based economies (Etzkowitz, 2016), meaning that educational experiences with most effect are those grounded in practice and real-world experiences (Hägg & Gabrielsson, 2019). The belief is that authentic experiences are better positioned to provide a continual flow of high-quality entrepreneurial individuals (Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006; Donaldson & Villagrasa, 2024, p. 420).

This served as an argument for the development of curricula with a new vision in universities. The vision and mission should be built on providing educational services to support the development of a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem. Newly emerging mechanisms are deployed in a wide range of mechanisms from training products, through profiled disciplines to entrepreneurial universities. Guide mechanism is the inclusion of entrepreneurship education programmes that are driven by entrepreneurial learning, pedagogical innovation and the delivery of contemporary relevant content in learner-centred ways (Guerrero & Urbano, 2012; Donaldson & Villagrasa, 2024, p. 420).

The entrepreneurial universities’ missions are focused on fulfilling teaching, research and entrepreneurial activities simultaneously (Etzkowitz, 2004; Guerrero & Urbano, 2012, p. 44) This mission should not be limited to entrepreneurial universities. Any university with entrepreneurship studies in some form can implement mechanisms to support regional growth through it. Such a tool with an emphasis on social development and added value in the economy is the methodology of “MELES family” projects.

The MELES projects are four in total and were implemented in different years. The temporal distance allowed us to trace the evolution of the educational products created through them. The first project started in 2014 named More Entre-

preneurial Life at European Schools (MELES) project. ABC (Academic Business Coach) – MELES 2.0 was launched in 2017. The third MELES BOT project named “BOT-Learning as a modern teaching method of GEN Z” started in 2020. The last one from the “family” is EntreAction project starting in 2022. More than eleven organizations are participating in the development of training methods, mostly universities. The geographical coverage of “MELES family” is mainly in Europe: Poland, Portugal, Finland, Germany, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Luxembourg.

We categorize project outcomes as entrepreneurship education methods. Each result represents an autonomous tool for the acquisition and development of entrepreneurial competences. The tools are: E-book; ABC Handbook; BOT platform with digital materials and virtual teacher; video educational content – clips and case studies. Each method provides an opportunity to dynamize the educational process in entrepreneurship. The development through the time shows the upgrading, adaptation and refinement of methods. They, in their unity, form an educational model. In our opinion, the simultaneous and/or sequential use in an educational environment turns the methods into an effective toolkit for acquiring and developing entrepreneurial talents, knowledge, skills and abilities in students. Evidences, in support of our view, are the results gathered via conducted summer schools. Within the projects’ framework, three summer schools were implemented, which verifies the quality and applicability of the created methods, respectively of the entire model. The opinion of participating teachers and students proves their quality.

The purpose of our research is to present the “MELES family” model as an up-to-date educational mechanism with a view to the evolution of educational tools compared to the traditionally used entrepreneurship training methods. Our claim focuses on the model’s effectiveness in entrepreneurship education. The “MELES family” model, thanks to its experiential learning structure, can be adapted to the conceptual factors of an individual region.

## **2. Literature review**

Entrepreneurship training, as well as the entrepreneurial process, stands out with a diversity of educational forms. It is a challenge to summarize what the best teaching methods and approaches are. On the other hand, teachers cannot rely on static and established practices, but rather must enter the role of innovators. The reason lies in the different educational perception and way of learning of the students. The changes are visible in the different generations and the preferences that develop over the years. The educational and scientific space is filled with a large volume of publications, studies and reviews of methods, approaches and methodologies of teaching entrepreneurship. The dynamics of development of the educational environment, changes in the habits of young people and digitalization determine that

each teacher should develop his own conceptual framework, in which one or two leading methods can be distinguished.

Mwasalwiba (2010) analysed 26 different methods from 21 articles and found that lectures, case studies and group discussions are the most important ones. However, Bennett (2006) argues that there is no consensus on the best teaching methods and practices. He lists 24 different approaches to teaching and learning but, interestingly, with no focus on how the course is designed or how fulfilment requirement may impact the applicable teaching methods (Tamás & Danyi, 2022, p. 96). According to the above, in our opinion, the main groups of methods and approaches in entrepreneurship education are:

1. Classical teaching – lectures presented to the audience through dictation and/or speaking.

2. Lectures with presentation – the presentation is included as an interactive tool. The presentation material visualizes the theory, the information on it is presented. Both groups limit active involvement and are distant from practice.

3. Balanced approach – combines theory and practice. The educational programs in entrepreneurship combine theoretical and practical materials with a preponderance of one of the two areas. We find examples in this direction with numerous studies, such as: Entrepreneurial education is closely linked to research on entrepreneurship at Lund University (Bischoff, 2017), underlining the importance of a fresh theoretical background for teaching. Inviting entrepreneurs to participate as teachers is a frequently applied approach of involving real, practical case studies in entrepreneurial education, as mentioned among others by (Zagelmeyer, 2017; Kállay, 2022, p. 66).

4. Learning through case studies – case studies have become a valuable way to acquire and develop competencies, abilities and talents. The variety of case studies' forms provides many opportunities for teachers and students (Stoyanov, 2023).

5. Digitization – with the rapid development of digital industry and Internet, a transfer to education took place. Digital solutions have opened up new opportunities for entrepreneurship educators and students. Learning through digital platforms can help students to develop critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and technical skills to cope with rapidly changing technological advancements (Audrin & Audrin, 2022; Rohm, Stefl, & Ward, 2021). Effective digitally-based teaching practices become a primary necessity to strengthen interest and resilience in entrepreneurship by “catching” student engagement (Hyams-Ssekasi & Yasin, 2022; Aysi, Susilaningsih & Sabandi, 2024, p. 257).

6. Learning through projects - a methodology that is gaining more and more popularity in recent years. Project-based learning (PBL) improves entrepreneurship education by emphasizing hands-on experiences and real-world applications. PBL entails students engaging in complex, practical projects that give real-life problems and demand the utilization of their knowledge and skills (Azizah et al., 2024, p. 188).

Despite the wide variety of research on entrepreneurship education issues, it can be noted that there are some gaps or not fully systematized areas. There are few studies that study aggregate models containing the listed main educational forms. Scientific researches with an emphasis on one of the groups of methods and approaches predominate. The literature presents the particular case, while the general one remains incompletely studied. Our research aims to analyse a model that is relevant to more of the leading methods and approaches in entrepreneurship education. The constructs we have listed are present to a large extent in the “MELES family” educational model.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology used is a qualitative scientific approach. The methodological framework corresponds to the goal set. Its use allows to specify the usefulness and applicability of model studies. The empirical work of the team concentrates on the subject-object relationship in the studied scientific-educational form. The object of this article is the “MELES family” model in its development timeline<sup>1</sup>. The subject are the created educational tools within the model adopted as an effective mechanism for entrepreneurship education. The qualitative research design was chosen as it offers an opportunity for in-depth exploration and presentation of the subject matter. Qualitative methods allow us to analyse the wide variety of elements of the scientific object in the context of entrepreneurship education. The leading methods we used are: document analysis and survey analysis.

Document analysis was performed on primary data. The project documentation enabled us to construct the conceptual framework of the study. The data used are publicly available on the official pages of the projects.

Surveys are questionnaires filled out by students and teachers during the testing of the methods via “MELES family” model. The testing was carried out during summer schools within the project activities. We use three independent opinion polls, which we analyse separately and draw conclusions based on them. The surveys were about the quality and relation of the content of the educational tools to the entrepreneurship education. The protocol of questions was developed for the needs of the projects, but the content fully responds to the purposes of the study presented.

### **4. Outcomes**

#### **1. Document analysis**

The following is the chronology of the projects’ implementation. It tracks the evolution and development of the model.

First tool. The beginning is set with the first result - E-book. The prevailing theoretical material is systematized, and the description is in easy-to-understand

<sup>1</sup> For more information see: <https://meles-project.eu/index.html> and <https://erasmus-vtu.bg/EntreAction>

language. Schemes, figures, illustrations and photos are used, which dynamize the educational process. Student interest is maintained by including practical examples. The e-book is divided into 5 chapters, directly providing information about the entrepreneurial process. The interesting content and dynamic form are an advantage of the classical teaching method. Another positive side is the systematization of material and its ease of understanding. The volume of the method is 605 pages, with easy access through the project site.

The second tool, ABC Handbook is divided into two strands: Academic Business Coach Handbook and Business Case studies. Access in both directions is easy through the project's website. The ABC Handbook is an e-book. The content adheres to the framework of preceding tool-method. The difference is in the updated and enriched information. Visualization methods are used to increase attention and visualize the educational material. A substantial enrichment is the addition of active links to Internet sources to increase awareness and acquire new knowledge. Business Case Studies build on the model by including case studies for learning. The six case studies are in different areas of entrepreneurial process. They are in a group form of work, which develops teamwork competences. Free access is provided online, which facilitates its application in the learning process.

The third tool, MELESBOT, is a platform in internet environment for training and/or self-study in entrepreneurship. The virtual student navigation mechanism has been introduced. The previous methods are upgraded with digitization and access via internet, the content is updated with the implementation of active internet links to other sources and video content, an option for consultation with a mentor-teacher is applicable. The theoretical information is systematized, and the explanation of the theoretical material is supported by examples from practice. The method meets the requirements of young generation for digitization of educational content and working with internet sources, videos and networking. Evidence of the effectiveness of project result is the "good practice" award.

The fourth EntreAction tool builds on the previous three. Continuity plays an essential role in the creation of it since the emphasis is on the video format of presentation of the material to be learned. A training process is implemented through a video product. The focus from theory turns to practice. Successful entrepreneurs from different European countries present their experience, vision and opinions on the entrepreneurial process, give guidance and advice to the trainees. The tool is enriched by establishing a library of case studies from practice. It combines practical video content and case studies to develop skills, knowledge and competences.

It is noteworthy that the presented methods correspond to EntreComp entrepreneurship training framework. We summarize the features of four methods in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Orientation and applicability of methods-tools in the “MELES family” model

Tool	Predominant area	Form	Aplicability
E-book	Theoretical material	Electronic book	High
ABC Handbook	Theoretical material with case studies	Information portal	High
MELESBOT	Digital theoretical material	Internet platform	High
EntreAction	Practical materials	Videos	High
<b>Summary</b>	A set of methods = a hybrid model for entrepreneurship education		Very high for classes and self-training in entrepreneurship

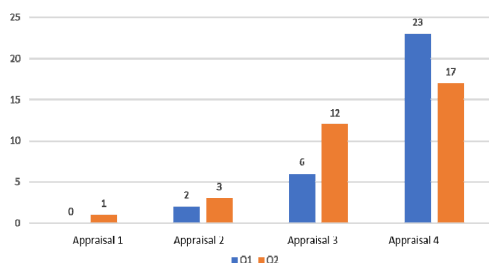
## 2. Survey results

There are three surveys conducted at different periods. The target groups are students and teachers.

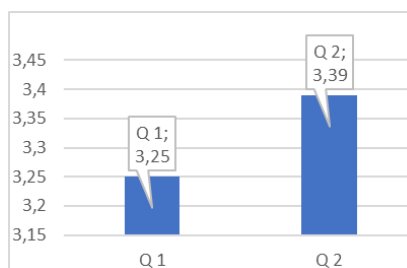
### 2.1. ABC Handbook study conducted in Aveiro, Portugal (2017)

32 students participated, who underwent training in entrepreneurship using the cited tool-method. The second study is among 10 teachers participating in the training.

The students’ questions are summarized in two general groups, where: Q1 is Quality of the course program and Q2 is Effectiveness of students’ activities. Each group consists of 4 independent questions, the diagram shows average arithmetic values of the answers received. The rating is from 1 (weak) to 4 (high).



**Figure 1.** Appraisals by students



**Figure 2.** Appraisals by lecturers

We used Pearson’s correlation for a total of 8 items at  $Q1 = x$ ;  $Q2 = y$ . The reported values are in the range  $0.75 \leq R_{yx} < 0.9$ , with a result of  $0.75 \leq 0.8814 < 0.9$ . Correlation dependence of Quality and Effectiveness from ABC Handbook training is strong according to the participants.



The questions to professors are again summarized in two groups with derived average arithmetic values for them as Q1 is Overall satisfaction with the results achieved and Q2 is Evaluation of the Summer School by the Teachers. Here, too, each group consists of 4 questions comparing overall satisfaction with the results and evaluation of the summer school. The mean values are presented in Figure 2. The rating is from 1 to 4, in a predetermined order. The evaluation of the teachers is high in the range between 3 and 4, on both questions asked. When a Pearson correlation was made, the results showed a weak relationship between overall satisfaction and summer school evaluation.  $R_{yx} = 0.25$ , which is possibly due to not accounting for other variables not included in the analysis.

2.2. MELESBOT study conducted in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria (2022)

25 students participated, who underwent a two-week theoretical-practical training in entrepreneurship where the MELESBOT platform was presented. The second survey is about teachers' opinion - 9 lecturers.

The questions to the students are presented in Table 2. The value of the answers is calculated using an arithmetic mean value. The correlation for  $Q1=x$ ;  $Q2=y$  is in the range  $0.9 \leq R_{yx}=0.952 < 1$ . The influence between platform and learning satisfaction is super high dependence.

**Table 2.** Students' opinion on training with MELESBOT

Group of questions on	Item	Performance indicator mean (1-5 Likert scale) (n=25)	Status
Q1 Satisfaction with the program aspects	Content of training sessions	3,44	Neutral to positive
	Lectures, group work	3,44	Neutral to positive
	Overall satisfaction	3,56	Neutral to positive
Q2 Opinions about the platform	How do you evaluate the degree of usefulness of the materials presented by the BOT?	3,24	Neutral to positive
	How do you evaluate the overall degree of usefulness of the BOT?	3,04	Neutral to positive
	How do you evaluate How do you evaluate the BOT language used in its individual parts?	3,68	Neutral to positive



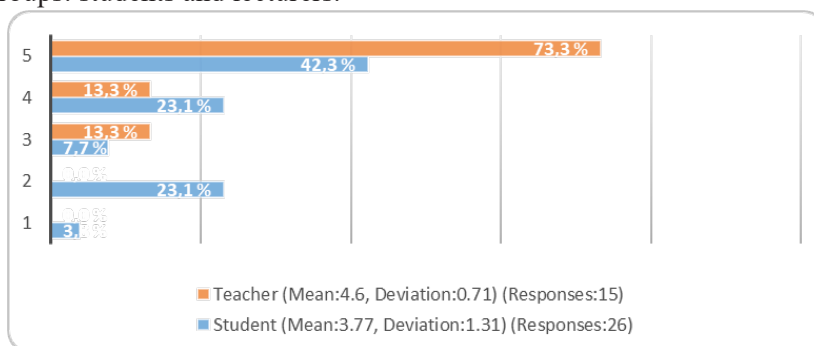
Table 3 presents the lecturers' opinion. The correlation for  $Q1=x$ ;  $Q2=y$  is negative  $-0.303$ . The influence between the platform and the educational process is not detected according to the lecturers. An explanation of the dependence lies in the personal importance attached to training, not the platform.

**Table 3.** Lecturers' opinion on training with MELESBOT

Group of questions on	Item	Performance indicator mean (1 – 5 Likert scale) (n=25)	Status
Q1 Evaluation of summer school learning	Coaching activities	4.11	High
	Students' projects	4.33	High
	Training workshops	3.89	Neutral to positive
	Panel with entrepreneurs	4.44	High
Q2 Opinions about the platform	Usefulness for introducing new topics	2.89	Low to neutral
	Usefulness for guiding students' projects	2.79	Low to neutral
	Examples provided	3,44	Neutral to positive
	Overall organization	3,33	Neutral to positive

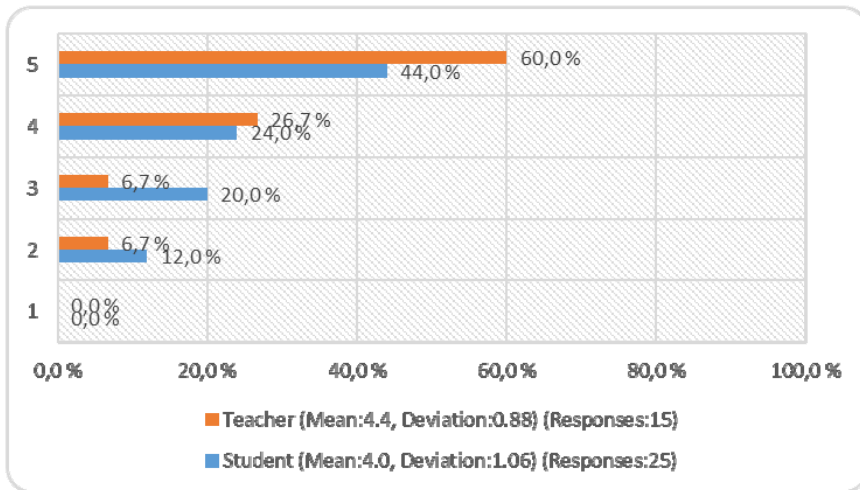
### 2.3. EntreAction study conducted in Canakkale, Turkey (2024)

28 students are participating, who have received training in entrepreneurship in the summer school. The teaching methods used are video clips. In them, successful entrepreneurs are filmed, presenting different situations throughout of the entrepreneurial process. The teachers participating in the study are 15. The study combined all their opinions, unlike the previous ones, which are divided into two groups: students and lecturers.



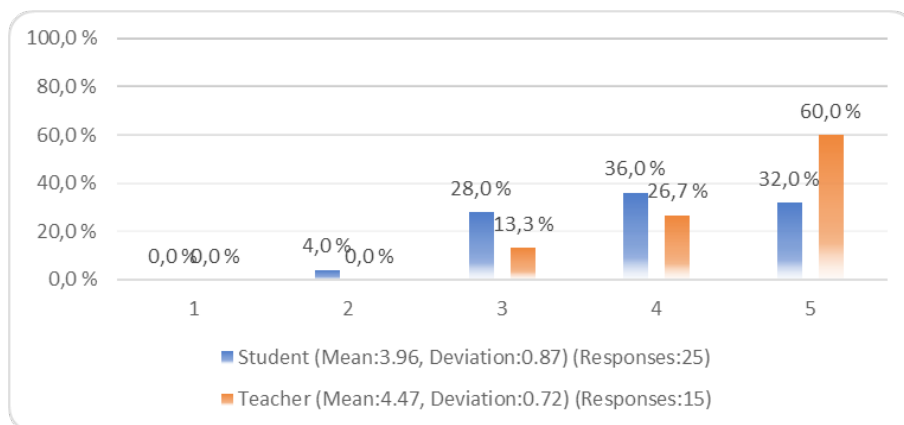
**Figure 3.** Clarity regarding the overall aim of the summer school (1 = disagree, 5 = agree)

For lecturers, the summer school goals were clear, which is confirmed by the data obtained. Among the students, 65.4% may claim that they are aware of the training goals. The data was obtained after the training, which proves the success rate in terms of understanding the overall aim of the training. Answers with 1 and 2 on the Likert scale are of concern. The percentage of those who did not fully understand their participation was high, as well as those who understood only a fraction of the overall aim.



**Figure 4.** The summer school provided me with a good practical learning (1 = disagree, 5 = agree)

The data shows a good practical education that was received by the students. The percentage of positive categorizations among lecturers is higher. Disagreement rates are low, which indicates the success of the method in entrepreneurship education.



**Figure 5.** Improvement of competence in the field of entrepreneurship by this tool (1 = disagree, 5 = agree)

The general opinion about acquired entrepreneurial competences during the summer school is positive. 68% of students believe that they have developed their entrepreneurial competencies. The data shows the effectiveness of learning through video content with a practical focus.

## 5. Discussion

Entrepreneurship education is constantly renewing its teaching methods and mechanisms. The vision for learning should go beyond the classical frameworks and static models represented by traditional learning. The engagement of the trainees, not only during the lessons, further optimizes the process and increases the quality of the obtained competencies. Extracurricular entrepreneurship activities that help promote learning within relevant communities of practice afford a strong complement to the traditional orthodoxy of knowledge acquisition within the formal curriculum (Hammoda, 2023; Pittaway et al., 2015). Learners are viewed as actively participating in continuously evolving highly authentic socialization experiences of relationships that are temporarily informed (Pittaway et al., 2023; Donaldson & Villagrasa, 2024, p. 428).

We have an effective development of entrepreneurial knowledge, skill and upgrading of abilities when methods and tools of a diverse nature are combined. We find such a multi-complex approach in the “MELES family” model. Its evolution over the years and through individual projects sets an interactive and dynamic framework of educational constructs of different origins. Each teacher can find that method-tool that appeals to its audience. A guarantee for the quality and success rate of the model are the opinions of students and lecturers who have conducted or participated in training through it.

Erasmus+ cooperation, like any significant activity, requires continuous monitoring, measurement, and evaluation of results (Mihaylova, Papazov & Ruiz, 2024, p. 56). This refers to the effect on users and target groups, which we expressed through our research. In our opinion, the model can be an invaluable aid in structuring a basic entrepreneurship course. At the same time, it is possible to apply it to already developed courses to support lecturer and student. The reason for this statement of ours is the dynamic and static of its ancients, combining in one educational organism. We find a synthesis between theory and practice so that the interest of different target groups is maintained.

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