

RESEARCH
ARTICLE**The Contribution of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System to the Promotion of Entrepreneurial Thinking Among University Students: An Analytical Approach****Samir Benhacine**

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Abstract

This research paper aims to explore the intertwined concepts of quality assurance and entrepreneurial thinking among students, recognizing them as contemporary challenges in higher education.

The study investigates how the quality assurance system contributes to enhancing entrepreneurial thinking among students through various mechanisms.

Findings indicate that the quality assurance system fosters entrepreneurial thinking by integrating it into curricula, supporting student projects, providing practical education opportunities, cultivating an entrepreneurial culture, and fostering collaboration with the socio-economic environment.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions, through their training and scientific research activities, constitute a vital framework that contributes to achieving human development by training and investing in young talents. In this context, the importance of integrating the concepts of quality assurance and entrepreneurial thinking into university training programs and curricula is steadily increasing.

The significance of the quality assurance system lies in enhancing the level of education and ensuring the achievement of the set educational objectives. This system can provide a comprehensive and integrated learning experience, thereby contributing to preparing students to meet the changing demands of the labor market.

In light of current economic developments, entrepreneurial thinking is gaining increasing attention as a central approach to stimulating development and enhancing innovation. It plays a key role in the development of economic systems on the one hand, and on the other hand, this concept is closely linked to higher education policies, given the

sector's efforts to respond to the social and economic challenges influenced by the knowledge explosion and the revolution in modern information and communication technologies.

From these foundations, this research paper aims to explore the ways and dimensions through which the higher education quality assurance system contributes to fostering entrepreneurial thinking among university students. This will be achieved by examining the concepts of this system and its interaction with modern orientations toward entrepreneurship.

The paper seeks to identify the mechanisms that the quality assurance system can employ to enhance entrepreneurial thinking among students, while highlighting the effective integration between the two concepts, and how the system can help create a learning environment that encourages entrepreneurial thinking and the development of student projects.

1. Research Problem

The research problem revolves around answering the following questions:

- What are the concept and objectives of quality assurance systems in higher education?
- What is the concept of entrepreneurial thinking among university students?
- What are the most important pedagogical mechanisms for promoting entrepreneurial thinking among university students?
- What are the dimensions of the contribution of the higher education quality assurance system to the promotion of entrepreneurial thinking among university students?

2. Research Objectives

This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To clarify the concept and objectives of the quality assurance system in higher education as one of the modern orientations of institutions in this sector both locally and internationally.
- To review the dimensions of the concept of entrepreneurial thinking and the most important pedagogical mechanisms for enhancing it among university students, as one of the stakes of the contemporary university on the one hand, and as a gateway to developing economic systems on the other.
- To identify the dimensions of the contribution of the higher education quality assurance system in promoting entrepreneurial thinking among students, as a means of qualifying them to actively participate in achieving sustainable social and economic development.

3. Research Significance

The significance of this research lies in its focus on the concepts of the higher education quality assurance system and entrepreneurial thinking. This may initially serve to draw the attention of academic stakeholders to these two concepts, considering them as serious challenges currently facing the sector's systems. It may also help contribute to establishing a culture of quality in the university environment as a fundamental pillar in building a quality assurance system.

The importance of the research also stems from its focus on identifying and analysing the dimensions of the quality assurance system's contribution to enhancing entrepreneurial thinking among students. This can help underscore the importance of implementing a quality assurance system in university institutions as a gateway to fostering entrepreneurial and creative thinking, which in turn contributes to achieving social and economic development.

4. Research Methodology

Based on the descriptive method, the paper addresses the concept of the higher education quality assurance system and its main objectives. It then reviews the concept of entrepreneurial thinking and the pedagogical mechanisms adopted by universities to promote it among students.

This leads to identifying the dimensions of the quality assurance system's contribution to fostering entrepreneurial thinking among students through an analytical approach. This approach focuses on exploring the mechanisms the system can employ to promote entrepreneurial thinking among students and understanding the integration between these two concepts, as well as how the quality assurance system can help provide an educational environment that encourages entrepreneurial thinking and the development of student projects.

First - The Higher Education Quality Assurance System: Concept and General Objectives

1. Quality Assurance in Higher Education:

Numerous scholarly sources emphasize that reaching a precise and unified definition of quality in higher education is extremely difficult. It is sometimes defined as fitness of purpose, or may refer to excellence or continuous improvement...

According to Martin & Stella (2007), the term quality is the subject of considerable debate in the field of higher education. It is often used by stakeholders to express their perspectives or define their specific goals. The authors identify two fundamental definitions of quality in higher education:

- **Conformance to standards:** This assumes that it is possible to quantitatively assess many levels within higher education, thereby applying the same standards to all programs or institutions.
- **Fitness for purpose:** In this view, quality is about achieving defined objectives, recognizing that the missions and goals of institutions and programs vary. Evaluation here does not rely on shared, quantifiable characteristics but is instead linked to more specific content analysis.

Moreover, quality assurance in higher education refers to “the strategies, procedures, trends, and activities necessary to ensure and enhance quality” (Woodhouse, 1999, p. 34).

2. The Higher Education Quality Assurance System:

According to Donald Ekong (1998), the quality assurance system is “the means by which a university assures itself and others concerned that the necessary conditions to enable students to achieve the standards previously set by the institution have in fact been established.”

It is also defined as “a globally unified system of internationally agreed-upon quality standards, serving as a global document for ensuring the quality of management. In the context of higher education, this system refers to the quality of the educational process components: students, faculty, programs, and structures” (Yahiaoui et al., 2012).

From these perspectives, the quality assurance system in higher education can be understood as a set of policies and procedures aimed at achieving high standards in university education and scientific research. It also represents the mechanism established by the university to ensure that the conditions and standards necessary for attaining high levels of quality in education and research have been implemented.

3. General Objectives of Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education Institutions

3.1. Quality Monitoring

The mechanism of quality monitoring refers to “a traditional governmental role that involves the responsibility of ensuring that the university institution adheres to the basic quality requirements (i.e., the minimum acceptable level).”

In higher education systems that are predominantly public, the importance of this function tends to diminish, based on the assumption that public university bodies possess a high level of organizational capacity, enabling them to ensure an acceptable level of quality (Martin & Stella, 2007, p. 46).

However, with the increasing expansion of private higher education, it has become imperative for governments to closely monitor quality standards in both public and private institutions, with the aim of protecting local consumers and ensuring that higher education offerings align with local development goals.

The state is therefore obligated to guarantee that university training meets a minimum level of quality requirements for its citizens, in order to address social and economic needs and to ensure that training programs especially those offered by universities not under its direct supervision are aligned with its educational, social, and economic policies and with local development objectives.

3.2. Results Presentation and Transparency

“Quality assurance procedures are primarily based on the presentation of results, which in turn promotes transparency concerning the performance and effectiveness of higher education institutions. Public authorities rely on quality assurance mechanisms in their educational policies and programs to ensure the financial value of this sector” (IIEP, UNESCO, 2011).

To hold the higher education sector accountable and aligned with defined objectives, the public must be informed and aware of the institution’s competence in fulfilling its assigned missions. Among the main objectives of quality assurance is the determination of accountability and the provision of adequate guarantees to various stakeholders regarding the quality level and standard compliance of the institution's activities.

Promoting transparency and accountability is one of the main goals of quality assurance in higher education. The procedures within this mechanism include the evaluation of academic programs or institutions and result in data regarding the extent to which these programs or institutions meet requirements that reflect the needs of various social forces.

This process provides a detailed database on the quality of activities undertaken by universities, enhances public transparency concerning institutional capabilities to fulfill missions and achieve objectives, and fosters confidence among social actors in the value of investing in the sector.

Moreover, informing the public helps raise awareness of the mechanisms and methods used to evaluate or rank institutions or programs based on the quality of the activities they deliver. It also promotes understanding of the criteria and characteristics on which such evaluations are based and allows stakeholders to assess the institution’s standing in comparison to its counterparts globally especially in light of the growing competitiveness in higher education within the knowledge economy.

3.3. Improving Practices

Quality assurance is also used as a tool for improving existing practices within higher education systems. Achieving this goal requires the activation of both individual and collective participation of faculty members.

“Quality assurance naturally leads to improvement through alignment with the stated objectives on the one hand, and through the adoption of best practices accompanying those objectives that institutions seek to achieve on the other. However, the main reason quality assurance is considered an instrument of improvement lies in its role in establishing a formal and systemic mechanism of self-evaluation at the core of the institution” (IIEP, UNESCO, 2011).

The contribution of quality assurance to improvement, through the establishment of self-evaluation mechanisms within institutions, is due to the structure of the quality assurance system itself, which consists of several elements foremost among them being internal (self) evaluation.

Self-evaluation provides a framework that enables the institution to develop and measure the effectiveness of its management systems. It also serves to enhance public trust in the institution’s autonomy.

4. Components of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education

The Quality Assurance System (QAS) in the higher education sector is composed of the following elements:

- **Organization:** Refers to the arrangement of the internal structure of the system, including the proper distribution of responsibilities and functions.
- **Responsibilities:** Involves the identification and distribution of responsibilities among individuals and departments within the system, contributing to the achievement of quality objectives.
- **Processes:** Refers to the definition and clarification of the steps and operations that must be undertaken to ensure the attainment of objectives and the delivery of high-quality education.
- **Procedures:** Concerned with establishing specific procedures and regulations that define how processes are to be carried out and monitored for compliance in order to ensure quality.
- **Necessary Resources:** Involves the provision of the tools and resources required to efficiently and effectively implement processes, such as technology, infrastructure, and support systems.

These components interact synergistically to ensure the highest levels of quality in higher education and to promote continuous improvement in practices.

Quality assurance systems in the university sector are managed based on the Deming Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) for continuous improvement, which can be illustrated in the following diagram:

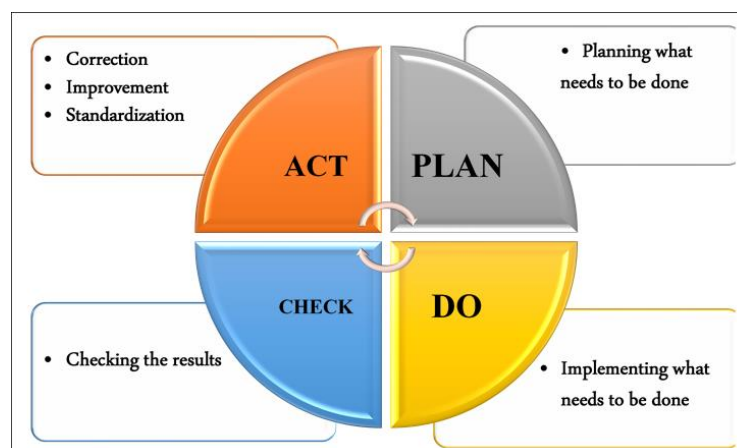


Diagram Illustrating the Components of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System According to the Deming Cycle

(Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the Deming Cycle for Continuous Improvement)

Second – Entrepreneurial Thinking and Higher Education: Concept and Pedagogical Mechanisms for Its Promotion

Entrepreneurial thinking has emerged as a strategic alternative aimed at absorbing unemployment rates in society, especially in light of the recurring economic crises experienced by various countries. This has led to encouraging the adoption of this mindset through the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprise creation and their integration into the economic fabric.

Entrepreneurial thinking is an approach that focuses on stimulating innovation and entrepreneurial spirit among individuals, ultimately leading to the creation and development of successful business ventures. This approach includes the ability of individuals to think outside the box and transform creative ideas into actionable projects with added value.

1. The Concept of Entrepreneurial Thinking

The concept of entrepreneurial thinking is closely related to the term entrepreneurship, which has been defined as “a set of activities and processes that begin with an idea and transform into an opportunity or a tangible project on the ground.” It has also been defined as “a system whose key outcome is the establishment of enterprises, most of which are small or medium-sized businesses” (Baliachi & Mersali, 2021, p. 115).

Dolling (1995) defined entrepreneurship as “the process of creating an innovative economic organization to achieve profit or growth under conditions of risk and uncertainty” (Al-Mubaireek & Al-Shamimri, 2016, p. 10).

Another definition describes it as “a process that can be found in various environments and in different forms, one that introduces changes in the economic system through innovations initiated by individuals, thereby creating a set of economic opportunities. The result of this process is the creation of both economic and social wealth for individuals and society as a whole” (Al-Najjar & Mohammed Al-Ali, 2009, p. 223).

2. Entrepreneurial Education

The promotion of entrepreneurial thinking among youth is achieved through a set of mechanisms, foremost among them being education. Entrepreneurial education aims to enhance and develop entrepreneurial thinking in individuals by providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills to create and manage businesses. It also encourages interaction with real-world contexts and the practical application of these skills and knowledge, while fostering an entrepreneurial spirit.

Politis defines entrepreneurial education as “the fundamental process through which students develop entrepreneurial knowledge that helps them identify and seize opportunities. Entrepreneurial knowledge is a multidimensional concept that includes understanding business creation, entrepreneurial values, motivations, and attitudes, along with practical skills, capabilities, and resources needed to identify and exploit opportunities” (David Hahn et al., 2017, p. 946).

Fayolle defines it as “a process of equipping individuals with the concepts and skills necessary to recognize business opportunities and to instill in them the confidence to seize those opportunities” (Alain Fayolle, 2007, p. 172).

Jamieson describes it as “the transmission of essential knowledge about launching and managing a business venture, aimed at increasing the number of students interested in creating entrepreneurial projects” (Richard Weber, 2012, p. 13).

From these foundations, entrepreneurial education can be understood as a pedagogical approach that aims to foster self-esteem and confidence by nurturing individual talents and creativity. At the same time, it seeks to build values and skills that enable learners to expand their horizons and adopt necessary approaches through the development of personal and behavioral capacities, and career planning attitudes. All of this falls within the general framework of entrepreneurial thinking, which requires a set of cognitive skills such as analytical thinking, risk management, negotiation abilities, and a strong understanding of markets and customers.

3. Entrepreneurial Thinking and Higher Education

In light of the social and economic effects of globalization and the emergence of the knowledge economy, entrepreneurial thinking has gained increasing attention within higher education institutions. This stems from the pivotal role such thinking can play in adequately preparing youth through university training programs that now include topics related to entrepreneurship, creative thinking, and student-driven business initiatives.

This makes the university a suitable framework for promoting entrepreneurial thinking, given its intellectual and human resources, as well as its training objectives in relation to the surrounding economic and social environment.

The university plays a fundamental role in economic development as a powerful engine for innovation especially considering current trends in higher education systems that aim to reconcile their traditional missions (education and scientific research) with the new responsibilities imposed by economic transformations.

3.1. Pedagogical Mechanisms for Promoting Entrepreneurial Thinking Among University Students

In the context of university education, entrepreneurial thinking is encouraged through dedicated educational programs that allow students to engage with this mindset via diverse resources such as workshops and lectures. These programs promote the application of creative ideas in student projects, and foster entrepreneurial spirit through coursework on business and entrepreneurship management, as well as the development of innovation and entrepreneurial thinking skills.

Such efforts provide students with valuable opportunities to grasp business and innovation concepts and acquire the skills necessary to build and manage their own projects in the future. This positions higher education as a key driver in stimulating entrepreneurial thinking and preparing students to meet the challenges of the labor market effectively. The pedagogical mechanisms involved can be summarized as follows (Richard Weber, 2012, p.13):

✓ **Enhancing Both Theoretical and Practical Aspects:**

Scholars such as Robinson & Haynes stress the importance of not limiting students to theoretical instruction on entrepreneurship. Rather, theories and models should be tested in practice through case studies of entrepreneurial institutions and projects. This allows students to analyze real-world cases, evaluate them, and develop problem-solving skills leading to practical recommendations and solutions for existing entrepreneurial ventures.

✓ **Multimodal Learning Approaches:**

Technology and its educational applications are among the most modern and effective tools in entrepreneurial education. In addition to offering advantages for both professors and students and facilitating access to up-to-date information, technology also enhances interaction among student groups and between students and faculty while fostering engagement with the business world and various entrepreneurs. This extends the scope of entrepreneurial education beyond the university into the economic sector.

✓ **Use of Deductive and Inductive Learning:**

Experts in education emphasize the importance of reinforcing both deductive and inductive approaches. The former involves students applying entrepreneurial knowledge and experiences developed by others, while the latter involves students identifying entrepreneurial topics in diverse contexts, setting goals, developing action plans, and evaluating the outcomes of their decisions rather than simply imitating others' experiences.

✓ **Turning Innovations into Entrepreneurial Opportunities:**

This occurs through what has been learned, where university-based structures play a role in incubating and applying entrepreneurial ideas, helping them materialize into real projects. These structures may also act as intermediaries between idea-holders and external entities such as banks or local employment agencies.

Business incubators are a prime example of how entrepreneurial ideas and innovations can be transformed into actual ventures not only for current students but also for graduates, by providing post-graduation entrepreneurial training.

Third - The Contribution of the Quality Assurance System to the Promotion of Entrepreneurial Thinking

Quality assurance systems in higher education seek to enhance the quality of academic programs and foster the development of students' entrepreneurial skills and mindset. This is achieved through quality assurance procedures and practices that rely on clearly defined objectives and qualitative training standards, as well as mechanisms for continuous evaluation and improvement of educational processes.

Moreover, the quality assurance approach aims to align higher education outcomes with labor market demands, thereby addressing the issue of graduate employability and fostering coherence between educational outputs and the needs of social and economic development. In this context, several key dimensions can be identified in the contribution of the quality assurance system to the promotion of entrepreneurial thinking among students, including:

1. Integrating Entrepreneurial Thinking into Curricula and Training Programs

Quality assurance systems can support the integration of entrepreneurial thinking into university curricula and training offerings by:

- ✓ Ensuring the inclusion of dedicated educational components on entrepreneurship within academic programs.
- ✓ Developing curricula that encourage creative thinking, innovation, and problem-solving through entrepreneurial approaches.
- ✓ Engaging students in innovation-based, practical projects that simulate real-world experiences and help develop entrepreneurial skills.

2. Supporting Student Projects

- ✓ Providing institutional support and funding for student initiatives, as quality assurance systems offer mechanisms to promote and implement student entrepreneurial projects as a core focus of the university.
- ✓ Establishing centers or institutions that promote entrepreneurial thinking and offer the necessary infrastructure. Quality assurance systems include procedures to create supportive entities for innovative projects while ensuring sufficient resources for their implementation.

3. Providing Practical Learning Opportunities

- ✓ Offering internship programs in professional environments aligned with students' projects and interests, as practical experience is considered a key indicator of training quality by quality assurance systems (i.e., linking theoretical knowledge with practical skills).
- ✓ Enhancing interaction with the industrial sector to update academic content and increase graduate employability. Involving the economic environment in curriculum design is a core goal of quality assurance systems, which emphasize collaboration with stakeholders and beneficiaries of higher education outputs.

4. Quality Evaluation and Monitoring

- ✓ Adopting comprehensive evaluation methods to assess how well academic programs meet labor market needs and student expectations. Quality assurance mechanisms emphasize continuous and holistic evaluation and monitoring of the quality of university education in relation to labor market demands, and the development of clear standards to align educational outcomes with economic sector requirements.
- ✓ Tracking the impact of academic programs on students' skills and entrepreneurial mindset development. Continuous monitoring is a core mechanism in quality assurance systems to detect possible deficiencies in the training process, thereby ensuring the pedagogical vigilance needed for any improvement strategy.
- ✓ Enhancing academic content, teaching methods, and assessment practices based on evaluation results, which quality assurance systems consider foundational to the success of any quality assurance initiative.

5. Promoting Entrepreneurial Culture

- ✓ Higher education quality assurance systems include approaches aimed at raising awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship among students and faculty, preparing them to respond to constant changes in knowledge fields on one hand, and to meet labor market needs on the other.

6. Collaboration with the Industrial Sector

- ✓ Strengthening cooperation between universities and economic institutions to identify labor market needs this is considered a key indicator in quality assurance systems and a realistic benchmark for assessing the quality of higher education.
- ✓ Offering internship opportunities in economic and professional institutions and organizing field visits for students. Exposure to the professional world is a requirement in implementing quality assurance mechanisms

in universities due to the multiple benefits gained from student immersion in real work environments, which contributes to shaping a realistic and rational vision of their future career paths.

Through these dimensions, the main roles played by the quality assurance system in enhancing students' entrepreneurial thinking can be outlined. The mechanisms upon which this system relies aimed at improving the quality of university education and aligning it continuously with labor market demands enable academic training to focus on developing and strengthening students' entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented thinking skills.

Conclusion: (Research Proposals)

Through this study, the relationship between the higher education quality assurance system and the promotion of entrepreneurial thinking among university students has been explored. This was achieved by shedding light on the concept of quality assurance and how this system contributes to improving academic and institutional performance within universities. Subsequently, the concept of entrepreneurial thinking was examined, along with its crucial role in developing students' skills and preparing them to face economic and social challenges.

The findings revealed that the higher education quality assurance system can serve as a pivotal factor in fostering entrepreneurial thinking among students. This occurs through integrating entrepreneurship into curricula, supporting student projects, providing practical learning opportunities, evaluating quality, promoting entrepreneurial culture, and enhancing collaboration with the industrial sector.

Below are several proposals that may contribute to activating the role of the quality assurance system in promoting entrepreneurial thinking among students:

✓ **Developing Training Programs for Faculty Members:**

Organize intensive training programs for faculty to deepen their understanding of the importance of entrepreneurial thinking and how it can be integrated into academic curricula.

✓ **Expanding Institutional Support Programs:**

Expand programs that offer institutional support to students seeking to implement entrepreneurial projects, including the provision of additional funding and the organization of regular events to exchange ideas and experiences.

✓ **Strengthening Collaboration with the Economic Sector and Labor Market:**

Enhance cooperation between universities and the economic sector by offering students opportunities to participate in projects and internships that reflect actual labor market needs.

✓ **Implementing Quality Assurance Systems in Universities:**

Enforce the application of quality assurance systems in higher education institutions according to the necessary conditions and standards, in light of the system's potential to improve the quality and outcomes of university education. This contributes to strengthening entrepreneurial thinking among students as a response to one of the key challenges facing modern universities: aligning educational outputs with labor market demands and achieving social and economic development.

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