Nature of case study as the accelerator for transmission of economic knowledge and entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Economic education is crucial in a modern economy where the knowledge makes for one of many resources. However not only the curriculum matters and the passed contents, but also applied teaching methods. The method related to Case Study may provide a good tool for economy and entrepreneurship teaching, as it focuses not only on the problem, but also on a student and takes into account teamwork. This method facilitates the analysis of enterprising attitude and economic practice, whereas shaping the soft competences stimulates knowledge transmission, facilitates knowledge assimilation and may contribute to development of enterprising attitude.

Keywords: case study, knowledge, transmission of knowledge

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate application of case study method in the process related to knowledge transmission and its possible role in the process of enterprising education. Without doubt knowledge is crucial for any economy and its development. It is also the consequence of changes in modern economies and societies– industrial ones converted into post-industrial, where the service sector along with research is dominant, the organization and mostly innovations that depend on resources of knowledge on one hand and skills related to knowledge transmission in the given economy on the other hand.

Knowledge may be passed and acquired in terms of two kinds of formal and informal education. Formal education is provided by school education, on basis of established rules and curriculum, and obtained qualifications are confirmed with a certificate or diploma. Whereas informal education follows outside the frames of formal education, namely is not based on established rules. The feature of this method is voluntary participation, and the learning follows on several levels and extends beyond the scope of curriculum. This education is more flexible and adaptable to the changes occurring in the world. In both cases education requires favourable conditions for transfer and assimilation of knowledge by recipients. To make assimilation possible, knowledge must not only come from reliable source, but should be of appropriate nature and bring benefits when used (Penc 2011, p. 20). Therefore not only the substantive contents of economic and
entrepreneur education are essential, but the used teaching methods also (Gawel, 2012). Therefore the method related to case study may provide a powerful tool for economic and enterprising education due to its features that will be presented in the further part of the paper.

**KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION IN MODERN ECONOMIES**

Knowledge is the most important intangible resource of modern economy that contributes to generation of other resources and is the key driver of development. Knowledge provides grounds for operations and development of individuals, enterprises and societies, as well as the basis for gaining and maintaining the competitive advantage in the knowledge-oriented modern economy. Successful are those entities that acquire knowledge faster than competition (Maskell & Malmberg, 1999). Knowledge is perceived as the key driver for competitive economy (Huggins, 2008), and its transfer is indispensable for growth of economy whose main goal is effective use and assimilation of knowledge that provides competitive advantage of economy and enterprise. Knowledge is "generated, acquired, transferred and used" (Skrzypek & Grela, 2006, p. 87) by business subjects, as well as individuals and communities of society. For constant socio-economic development the effect of synergy and cooperation in society is necessary (Zakrzewska, 2014). Now the level depends on credibility level, Communications, as well as and social participation and active citizenship, namely social competences referred also as soft competences. These however make for parts of the social capital and knowledge-based economy, what highlights the significance of these competence development, e.g. through use of case study during knowledge transfer.

Higher education and studies make for the part of formal education and the element of knowledge transfer process. Higher education generates new knowledge through research projects, and at the same time a new knowledge is shared thanks to education. Additionally the formal education of high education provides not only for assimilation of new knowledge, but acquisition of competences and skills and development of certain attitudes (Gawel, 2012, p. 29). It is common belief that the university education promotes a pro-innovative approach. The higher education is one of drivers that have significant impact on entrepreneurship and innovativeness of individuals (Koellinger 2008). A person with university degree is more willing with regard to innovation initiation and implementation. An education level may also contribute to the start of own businesses. People with higher level of education are more willing to set up innovative start-ups (Koellinger, 2008), what brings new business solutions and contributes to knowledge assimilation.

The primary function of all schools (not only in the field of economy and management) at any level and nature of higher studies is economic education and shaping the entrepreneurial attitudes of students. A graduate shall feature with open and innovative entrepreneurial attitude that may and should be shaped with different educational programmes, also on academic level (Dąbrowski, 2007, p. 69).

An enhanced education level in the area of economy and entrepreneurship may contribute to higher efficiency and productivity (Smith & Beasley, 2011), and consequently accelerated knowledge transfer and de facto innovation. It is common belief that economic and entrepreneur education may be the key driver stimulating activity and enterprising attitude (Nabi & Linan, 2011). However it will be possible only, if the teaching process will be linked to understanding of reality, namely, that is reference to an approach based on learning and observations in terms of knowledge transfer. Understanding the nature of process, or reality, instead of memorizing is more helpful when shaping the entrepreneurial attitudes and results in evolving of economic knowledge. Note that education focused on understanding of reality may be effective for entrepreneurs (Heinonen, 2007). The enterprising education shall include many aspects, provide a theoretical knowledge and understanding, but also shape skills needed for establishment, running and development of enterprise (Balan & Metcalfe, 2012).

Furthermore, efficiency in economic and enterprising education, and de facto rate of knowledge transmission depends on both passed contents, as well as the method employed for this purpose. The subject literature underlines an approach to teaching focused on problem solving (Tan & Ng, 2006). Transfer of knowledge should make use all possible education aspects: educational
programmes, students’ active participation outside the studies, as well as support from university for students and graduates start-ups (Smith & Beasley, 2011). Additionally, the complex nature related to economic knowledge acquisition and stimulating enterprising attitude requires special engagement of students (Balan & Metcalfe, 2012). The more evolving teaching process, the higher acquisition of enterprising skills by students will be (Gawel, 2012).

CASE STUDY IN ECONOMIC AND ENTERPRISING EDUCATION

The question regarding efficiency of economic and enterprising education is closely linked to the employed teaching methods, as the appropriate teaching methods may provide the key for success. Only the oriented-approach may bring tangible benefits. One teaching method that forces the oriented approach relates to case study. This method may be used for both research, as the test method, as well as for teaching purposes, for knowledge sharing and assimilation. Also cases are possible where case study analyzed for research purposes may be used for teaching purposes. Case study as the teaching method is focused on students, involves them to stimulate teaching and reduces the gap between theory and practice (Gawel, Pietrzykowski, 2014).

This method is based on precise description of business and stimulates analysis conducted by students, as well as consistent assessment of situation (Little & other, 2008). The analysis is focused on factors that have impact on relationship between the analyzed economy and its environment, as well as definition how the given case reflects the events in general (Flyvbjerg, 2011). As underlined by W. Grzegorczyk (2015) „(…) This method relates to empirical, as it provides for analysis and assessment of real events. Case study is used mainly for research of descriptive nature and provides answers to questions related to what, where and how. With reference to exploration problems it provides the answer to the question – why the analyzed event followed. At the same time this method employs varied techniques and tools for data collection and analysis, including observations, survey of local participants, interviews, surveys, organization records, websites and press, available data bases etc. (…)” Moreover the case study on basis of accumulated information enables a deep analysis of the problem with regard to its specific nature, interaction with other elements of organization or its environment (Kostera, 2001).

When using case study students find out more about the real situation in practice (Gawel, 2012, p. 32). This method specifies the given problem or event on basis of real business circumstances. On general the case study provides information on the event, people engaged and circumstances that had impact on the subject event (Roselle, 1996). When used for teaching this method enforces use information regarding quantity and quality, taking decisions on basis of most appropriate actions and recommendations, as well as analysis of these decisions with other students (Cranston, 2008). When being in boots of other people involved in the specific event, students make an analysis from different perspectives and specify the most advantageous decisions in their opinion. So this method provides an accurate reflection of real situation on one hand, and makes for an interesting and ambiguous task on the other hand, but should be created and applied for specific teaching purposes (Latuszek-Jurczak, 2015).

It is common belief that the case study has got the following features (Jaques, 2008): provides possibility of business organization performance analysis, stimulates defining of potential solutions, indicates right and wrong, useful and non-useful business conduct, stimulates discussion about alternative options, provides conditions for application of theoretic knowledge in practice. Case study is focused on student, as it stimulates students’ afterthoughts regarding what they have learned (Gregory & Jones 2009). Teaching with this method is based more on practice than theory, as it analyses the real business event. Case study is oriented on team-work, as students work in small groups when solving the problem (Prince, 2004), and then share their conclusions and ideas what contributes to knowledge transition and teaching process. Discussion provides for exchange of knowledge and observations, what results in development of learning process. Case study is work team oriented and provides interaction within a group (Gawel, 2012). This way it stimulates students thinking to find out better ideas and conclusions, high quality strategy, benefits from interactions between groups (Peterson, Quarstein 2001). The most important effect of case study for
the teaching process comparing to other methods relates to the shaping of enterprising attitude and willingness to teach through the whole life, whereas passive methods focused on the subject of teaching, provide for knowledge absorption (O Cinneide, 2006). Case study analyzes real circumstances of enterprises what enables learning in pragmatic manner. This makes for use of real life experience at classes (O Cinneide 2006). When used for problem solving and during discussing possible strategies, case study may foster creativity of students (Heinonen & Poikkijoki, 2006). This method may also be used for enterprising education, as it is in line with approach based on problem solving and knowledge absorption by way of "learning" (Tan & Ng, 2006). It shall ensure more dynamic development of students’ business competences comparing to traditional methods based on knowledge transfer (Gawel, Pietrzykowski 2014). The purpose of case study in teaching process is not only solving of problems or identification of causal connections, but also understanding the view of the world demonstrated by learners (Thacher, 2006).

Although case study offers many advantages, still some restrictions are evident. The restrictions refer both to educators and students. The restrictions from the side of educators relate to preparation and running of classes based on case study method (Gawel, 2012, p. 39). The most common problem relates to selection of case study and preparation of scenario. For preparation of case study, cooperation is necessary with the enterprise whose performance is going to be analyzed. However co-operation between businesses and universities encounters problems very often. The most crucial step for commencement of works over preparation of method comprising the subject of this paper is establishing of co-operation between businesses and the university. As the case study relates to the method that requires active participation and students’ engagement, the educator is required to moderate the discussion in manner consistent with teaching goals.

Application of case study method may also result in some restrictions on side of students. Usually students of economics and those related to enterprising are mostly interested in enhancement of business competences, those required for development of negotiation and leadership skills (Gawel, 2012, p. 32). Because of its nature, case study analyzes the specific business situation and decisions to be faced by the enterprise. The desired development of negotiation and leadership skills is possible, if classes include also additional group discussions, playing of enterprise particular people roles, or the whole negotiating process. This means that students who intend to develop negotiation and leadership skills may not be interested in active participation during classes that use this method, as for them it will be of little use (Gawel, 2012, p. 40). The subject literature underlines also that a descriptive text regarding case study may be too long for the recipient to make use of all its benefits (Dańda & Lubecka, 2010).

Other disadvantage of case study as education method relates to out-of-date information and scenarios inconsistent with real life. Therefore case study may be a useful tool for a few years only (up to two or three years) before it requires updating by its author or person using the given case for teaching purposes (Dańda & Lubecka, 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis in this paper indicated that the case study method may be a valuable and innovative tool in economic and enterprising education, mainly due to the fact that application thereof enhances efficiency of education because it engages actively participants, and is based on practice what provides for the formal education where knowledge absorption follows by "learning by practice".

Although case study requires more work-effort from educators at the phase of preparation, as well as from students during conducted analyses, this method provides for knowledge transfer, enhancement of skills and shaping of enterprising approach. Moreover team work and exchange of ideas stimulated with this method may solve some problems related to trust, communication, participation and active engagement, namely the soft competences that enable knowledge transfer and at the same time may have positive impact on growth of modern economy.
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