The Quality of Entrepreneurship Education and the Intention to Continue Education: Slovenia and Romania

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Entrepreneurship and management education is important in developing knowledge and skills of entrepreneurs. In this paper, entrepreneurship education satisfaction and quality are compared between two countries: Slovenia and Romania, and the relationship between education quality and education continuation is assessed in both countries. Multi-item measures were used, questionnaire data were obtained in both countries, measurement scales were tested, and differences between the two countries were assessed by comparing means and regression analysis coefficients. We found that education content and process quality and education satisfaction of participants tend to be the strongest predictors of a subsequent decision to continue education in both countries. Room and equipment adequacy may also be important, but our findings showed this result only for Romania. Some other findings and recommendations are also presented.

Key Words: entrepreneurship, education, quality JEL *Classification*: м10, м13

Introduction

The development of knowledge and skills of entrepreneurs can be to a large extent dependent on entrepreneurship and management education. In our time, characterized by the processes of globalization, the rise of information and communication technology, and continuously

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changing business environments, the need for continuing education is becoming even more important than before. Entrepreneurial training significantly and positively impacts participants' perceptions of their abilities to pursue and grow new ventures (Ehrlich et al. 2000). Knowledge and skills acquired in entrepreneurship education can serve as a motivational drive for creation of new ventures (Cho 1998). Education and training can lead to development and improvement in some elements of entrepreneurship (Henry et al. 2003). Educational programs can be important for the development of entrepreneurial talent within the population (Rushing 1990). Education of entrepreneurs is becoming increasingly needed for assuring a higher probability of new venture success (Postigo et al. 2003). When deciding whether or not to continue education, entrepreneurs may make their decisions depending on the basis of their satisfaction or quality perception of past education. For entrepreneurship education success it is crucial to emphasize continuous improvement in education quality (Han and Lee 1998). In this paper, we compare entrepreneurship education satisfaction and quality between two countries: Slovenia and Romania, and assess the relationship between education guality and education continuation in both countries. Entrepreneurship education quality and continuation in countries with a shorter entrepreneurial tradition and lower levels of entrepreneurshiporiented culture, such as Slovenia and Romania, may have a stronger potential new venture creation impact than in countries with longer entrepreneurial traditions, such as the US or Western European countries, as suggested by Lee et al. (2005) in their comparative study of the impact of entrepreneurship education in Korea and the us.

The focus of the paper is, hence, entrepreneurship education, which can be defined as structured, formal conveyance of entrepreneurial knowledge; entrepreneurial knowledge meaning the concepts, skills, and mentality individual business owners use during the course of starting and developing their growth-oriented businesses; and entrepreneurial learning meaning the active and cognitive processes individuals employ as they acquire, retain and use entrepreneurial knowledge (Young 1997). Entrepreneurs, to be able to solve emerging problems and to increase business results of their enterprises, need to learn continuously through self-directed learning as well as through formal education and training. However, in order to make the decision to continue education, entrepreneurs may first rethink their past experiences with entrepreneurship education.

Education Satisfaction, Quality, and Continuation

Overall satisfaction is defined as an emotional reaction to a product or service experience (Spreng et al. 1996), while quality means meeting the customer requirements (Oakland 1993). In the context of services of management or entrepreneurship education participants may evaluate the educational experience (1) in general terms, by their overall satisfaction and in terms of their assessment on how good their overall requirements have been met, and (2) in specific terms, by evaluating different elements of education quality such as the lecturer, the content, the process, and the facility.

In spite of very different traditions and structures of adult and continuing education in the world, it seems to be a common tendency that the relation between adult education and work and the labor market is becoming very important. All countries have very large adult education needs, extending to all fields of adult education – general and vocational, formal and non-formal. Although state and social partners' priority themes include education for the labor market and education related to employment and vocational training, the state should include among its priorities the study of system and policy and of educational needs, and updating of adult education (Jelenc 1996, 447).

Entrepreneurs acquire knowledge by engaging in formal education and by taking part in courses related to different fields of interest, which are important for managing the business. The success factors include perseverance (building confidence and self-esteem), commitment to the enterprise, and a positive attitude and approach. Developers of qualifications and training programs for post-secondary education and training of entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs should (Labuschagne et al. 2001, 17): (1) identify and integrate the outcomes from existing subjects in the field of economic and management sciences that relate to the success factors of entrepreneurs; and (2) supplement these outcomes with case studies, experiential exercises and practical activities that will enable learners to integrate the knowledge and skills obtained in such training of entrepreneurs, and to apply these skills and knowledge in an entrepreneurial environment. The content-related techniques or methodologies that influence the success of entrepreneurship training are case studies, simulations and business plan executions. Materials such as a study guide, time schedules and facilitator guidelines that could improve the evaluation are used, since they make more information available to

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the evaluator. The evaluator must be knowledgeable about the field and have experience in business and training entrepreneurship (Pretorius 2001, 14).

The majority of researches have explored the contents of education what entrepreneurs need in order to be successful - but training organizations want to know answers to questions about the quality of their training programs as perceived by their clients. If the results of such evaluations are disappointing, the training organization can modify its policy and programs. The main method for collecting the data is a closed questionnaire sent or distributed to the participants of training. Mulder (2001, 323), for example, prepares a questionnaire that consists of eight blocks of questions. Within the group of general questions one is about the general satisfaction with the training project as a whole. Questions about the objectives of the training project include some about the level to which certain objectives are of importance within the project. These objectives-related questions are aimed at: (1) attaining a learning result (knowledge, skills, attitudes); (2) improving a changed work behavior in the work situation; and (3) supporting the change of the organization; (4) other factors are personal factors, training program factors, organizational factors and transfer conditions.

Other scholars have also addressed different dimensions important for the evaluation of education quality. In the study by Hill, Lomas, and MacGregor (2003, 16-18) four themes emerged in relation to what students perceived quality education to be. In the order of importance to the student group, these themes are: (1) quality of the lecturer (delivery in the classroom, feedback to students during the session and in assignments, relationship with students in the classroom); (2) student engagement with learning (the students valued a curriculum that was related to their worlds but broadened their horizons); (3) social/emotional support systems (the students found support from college support systems, their peers and families); and (4) resources of library and 1T. In the study by Louw et al. (2001, 44) the quality of MBA program loaded on five factors: (1) value of the MBA program and the personal expectations of graduates (six items); (2) coursework material (four items); (3) quality of lecturers (three items); (4) learning methods (three items); and (5) interpersonal and leadership skills (two items). In sum, education may be evaluated in terms of satisfaction and perceived quality of the lecturer, education content, environment, materials, methods, learning processes, and results (knowledge acquisition, skill training).

Loyalty means a positive evaluation as well as non-random continuous purchases, usually of product brands (Mowen 1995). Oliva et al. (1992) tried to explain why investments in a service fail. In their study they supported the predictions that the satisfaction-loyalty relationship could be linear and non-linear, depending on the customer involvement. Despite the possibility of non-linearity, in entrepreneurship education research generally positive relationships between education satisfaction and continuation (loyalty) were found (Antončič and Hvalič Erzetič 2001, 2003; Antončič et al. 2003). Besides the above mentioned findings from Slovenia, notable entrepreneurship research works were completed also in Romania, mostly on entrepreneurial education (Scarlat 2001, 2003; Scarlat and Simion 2003).

In this paper we explore similarities and differences between Slovenia and Romania in entrepreneurship education satisfaction/quality and loyalty, as well as in testing the hypothesis of the positive relationship between education satisfaction/quality and education continuation.

Methods

In this section methodology (variables and measurement, sample and data collection, and analysis) is presented.

VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT

Independent variables are satisfaction and perceived quality of education. First, satisfaction level was not assumed to be unidimensional as proposed by Westbrook (1980), who used only one five-point Delighted– Terrible Scale. Antončič and Hvalič Erzetič (2001) discovered that measuring satisfaction with entrepreneurship education on a single six-point scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very unsatisfied' results in a very skewed answer distribution, which may not be usable for analysis with continuous variables. Therefore, satisfaction was measured with eight items on seven-point semantic differential scales answering a question about the respondents' general feeling about the education they engaged in (anchors: very dissatisfied–very satisfied, terrible–delighted, very dissatisfied–not at all dissatisfied, not at all satisfied–very satisfied, unfavorable–favorable, unpleasant–pleasant, I didn't like it at all–I like it very much, frustrated–contented). Items were adapted from Crosby and Stephens (1987), Eroglu and Machleit (1990), and Spreng et al. (1996).

Quality of education was measured with a 17-item scale that was developed as an extension of a 3-item service quality scale of Taylor and Baker (1994). Measurement items were added by taking into consideration different elements of the educational service such as overall assessment of quality and fulfillment of expectations, education content, evaluation of the lecturer, appropriateness of materials or handouts and audiovisual aids, adequacy of room and equipment, and usefulness of acquired knowledge.

Dependent variable – education continuation was measured as the respondent's intention to continue his or her education in the future in terms of his or her expressed loyalty to the educational program and provider. Five questions were adapted from Bettencourt (1997), and Zeithaml et al. (1996): (1) saying positive things, (2) recommend to people, who are thinking about education, (3) encourage friends and relatives to engage in this education, (4) consider this education provider as a first choice, and (5) engage more in education from this provider in the next years. A seven-point Likert-type scale was used with anchors from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

Control variables data were collected about the respondent's education type (degree, non-degree), age, gender, length of work experience, education level, and industry of the company.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

Data were collected from Slovenian and Romanian practicing and potential entrepreneurs, as well as non-entrepreneurs, who engage in degree and non-degree management education and training. A structured questionnaire was distributed mainly in class to conveniently selected groups of participants.

Answers were received from 128 respondents from Slovenia and 135 respondents from Romania. Our sample shows that 22.8% respondents in Slovenia and 64.9% in Romania educate themselves through the postgraduate program. In Slovenia 40.2% of respondents educate themselves through the college/university program, in Romania 29.8%. Only 1.6% of respondents in Slovenia and 1.5% in Romania educate themselves through the secondary/high school program. At the non-degree education type 17.3% in Slovenia and 21.4% in Romania usually participate in workshops and seminars that last several weeks, 18.1% in Slovenia and 22.9% in Romania take one-day seminars. Percentages for Romania add up to more than 100% since some participants are enrolled in more than one type of education.

The age of respondents is mostly spread between twenty and fifty years. 58.3% of respondents in Slovenia and 72.3% in Romania are more

than 20 and up to 30 years old, 22.0% in Slovenia and 23.8% in Romania are more than 30 and up to 40 years old, and 12.6% in Slovenia and 3.1% in Romania are more than 40 and up to 50 years old. In Slovenia 4.7% of them are over 50 years old and 2.4% are up to 20 years old. In Romania only 0.8% are up to 20 years old, no one is over 50 years old.

In Slovenia, 56.8% of respondents are female and 43.2% are male. In Romania 45.4% are female and 54.6% are male. 53.5% of respondents in Slovenia and 71.5% in Romania are single. 40.2% of respondents in Slovenia and 27.7% in Romania are married, of whom 6.3% and 0.8% are divorced or widowed. Respondents have various professions but most of them are economists.

The education level of the sample is as follows: in Slovenia 50.8% of respondents have secondary or high school diploma, 31.7% have college or university degree, 15.1% have vocational school. In Romania 70.8% of respondents have college or university degree, 26.9% of respondents have post-graduate degree, and 1.5% of them have secondary or high school diploma.

The length of work experience is spread from zero to thirty years, but most of the respondents have had work experience of five years or less: Slovenia 50.4%, Romania 62.5%; more than five and up to ten years: Slovenia 12.4%, Romania 23.4%; more than ten and up to twenty years: Slovenia 21.5%, Romania 11.7%, and more than twenty and up to thirty years: Slovenia 12.4% and Romania 2.3% of respondents.

The sample consists of 16.9% practicing entrepreneurs in Slovenia and 26.3% in Romania. 18.6% of respondents in Slovenia and 36.1% in Romania will start-up their own business, 48.4% in Slovenia and 33.6% in Romania will maybe establish their own business. 15.4% of respondents in Slovenia and 4.1% in Romania do not intend to establish their own business. Most of practicing entrepreneurs in Slovenia (10.5% of respondents) have had their own business more than five and up to ten years (in Romania 3.3%), most of practicing entrepreneurs in Romania (7.4% of respondents) have had their own business more than two and up to five years (in Slovenia 0.0%), and the same percentage in Romania (7.4%) have had their own business less than one year (in Slovenia 3.2%). Most of the potential (prospective) entrepreneurs (in Slovenia 6.5% and in Romania 9.8% of respondents) will establish their own business in less than one year, 3.2% in Slovenia and 6.6% in Romania will establish their own business in one year, 8.9% in Slovenia and 19.7% in Romania in two to three years.

The respondents come from different industries, most of them (13.7%

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in Slovenia and 12.2% in Romania) operate in consulting and business services; 27.8% of respondents in Romania and 11.8% in Slovenia come from customer services. As seen from this comparison of the two samples, the samples can be comparable to some degree but they do not match perfectly.

ANALYSIS

The means of all items were compared between the two countries by assessing their values and performing t-tests. Multi-item scales of satisfaction, quality and education continuation (loyalty) were checked for their convergent validity by using exploratory factor analysis and the Cronbach Alpha reliability measure. All Cronbach Alphas were very high indicating very good reliablitiy: for satisfaction (8 items) - Slovenia 0.96, Romania 0.95, for continuation (loyalty) (5 items) - Slovenia 0.92, Romania 0.94, and for quality dimensions: content/process (6 items) - Slovenia 0.89, Romania 0.94, knowledge acquisition (3 items) – Slovenia 0.83, Romania 0.80, and room/equipment adequacy (2 items) - correlations: Slovenia 0.78, Romania 0.80. The education quality construct was assessed for dimensionality by using exploratory factor analysis, resulting in three distinct quality dimensions: (1) quality of education content and process, (2) quality and usefulness of acquired knowledge, and (3) quality and adequacy of room and equipment. For satisfaction, the three quality dimensions, and education continuation construct a single item that was computed as the mean of all items. This was done in order to reduce the number of variables for subsequent analysis. The key hypothesis was tested by using regression analyses with two country-based groups of data.

Findings

EDUCATION SATISFACTION, QUALITY, AND LOYALTY LEVELS

Mean values for all education satisfaction, quality, and loyalty items were compared. Most of the item means were found not to be different between Slovenia and Romania. T-test statistical differences (at a 0.05 level) were discovered only for three quality items. The item 'knowledge, which is acquired, will be very useful in my work' was rated higher in Slovenia (4.8) than in Romania (4.2). The mean of the item 'The equipment in the room, in which education was performed, is totally adequate' was found higher in Slovenia (5.0) than in Romania (4.6). The item 'The education

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Slovenia (constant)	0.219	0.434		0.504	0.615		
Satisfaction	0.223	0.095	0.202	2.350	0.020	0.457	2.190
Quality							
 content and process 	0.795	0.113	0.648	7.042	0.000	0.400	2.500
 acquired knowledge 	-0.027	0.069	-0.026	-0.394	0.694	0.761	1.314
 room and equipment 	-0.053	0.053	-0.062	-1.009	0.315	0.900	1.111
Romania (constant)	-0.504	0.389		-1.294	0.198		
Satisfaction	0.386	0.088	0.297	4.408	0.000	0.602	1.660
Quality							
 content and process 	0.418	0.106	0.379	3.956	0.000	0.298	3.351
 acquired knowledge 	0.096	0.068	0.095	1.416	0.159	0.612	1.634
 room and equipment 	0.173	0.065	0.206	2.674	0.009	0.462	2.165

TABLE 1 Regression analysis results

Note: Column headings are as follows: (1) B; (2) standard error [1-2 unstandardized coefficients]; (3) beta [standardized coefficient]; (4) *t*; (5) sig.; (6) tolerance; (7) VIF [6–7 collinearity statistics]. Dependent variable: loyalty.

content was adequate' also received a higher rate in Slovenia (5.3) than in Romania (5.0).

When means were compared between the two country groups at the construct and dimension level no differences were found, except one – the acquired knowledge quality dimension was found higher in Slovenia (5.0) than in Romania (4.7).

THE EDUCATION CONTINUATION PREDICTABILITY

Results of the multiple regression analysis, which tested relationships between education continuation (loyalty) and its predictors (education satisfaction, and three quality dimensions), are shown in table 1. Adjusted R-squares of the multiple regression models were found high in both countries (Slovenia 0.60, Romania 0.65) indicating that almost two thirds of variance in loyalty can be explained by satisfaction, content/process quality, acquired knowledge quality, and room and equipment adequacy. This is in support of the overall hypothesis on the relationship between satisfaction/quality and loyalty.

However, in the Slovenian sample coefficients of only half of regression elements were found significant (satisfaction: standardized coefficient 0.20, and content/process quality: st. coef. 0.65). In the Romanian sample coefficients of satisfaction (st. coef. 0.30), content/process quality (0.38), and room/equipment adequacy (0.21) were significant, whereas the acquired knowledge quality coefficient was low (0.07) and non-significant. These results are also in some support of the overall hypothesis on the satisfaction/quality-loyalty relationship, with a difference between the two countries in the impact of room/equipment quality on loyalty, which was found in Romania, but not in Slovenia. In both countries, content/process quality, as the most important, and satisfaction were found the strongest predictors of education continuation (loyalty).

When unstandardized coefficients were compared between the two samples, we discovered that relative impacts of three predictors differ between the two countries (more than two standard error difference). Content and process quality seems to have a stronger impact on loyalty in Slovenia (unstandardized coefficient 0.80) than in Romania (unst. coef. 0.42), whereas the impact of satisfaction and room/equipment quality can be considered stronger in Romania than in Slovenia (unst. coef.: satisfaction – Romania 0.39, Slovenia 0.22; room/equipment – Romania 0.17, Slovenia –0.05).

OTHER FINDINGS

Other findings based on our data are summarized as follows (see also table 2):

- Underlying reasons for engagement in education. The first reason, why entrepreneurs decide for education, is that they want to obtain a higher degree: 54.7% in Slovenia, whereas 50.8% of the Romanian sample want to gain knowledge in a new area. The acquisition of knowledge in a new area is the second reason for Slovenian respondents (46.1%); the second reason for entrepreneurs in Romania (41.7%) is that they want to learn how to do business in a fast growing firm. This is the third reason in Slovenia (23.4%). The third reason in Romania is that entrepreneurs want to obtain a higher degree (40.2%). This difference may be somewhat sample specific lower education levels of the Slovenian sample in comparison to the Romanian one.
- *Main areas of education.* Slovenian sample: 57.8% of entrepreneurs educate themselves in the entrepreneurship area of education, 19.5% in marketing and sales and 18.8% in finance; in Romania: 32.6% in computing, 25.8% in marketing and sales, and 19.7% in management.

	Slovenia	Romania
Education satisfaction		
very satisfied	10.9%	10.1%
satisfied	67.2%	67.4%
a little satisfied	18%	15.5%
a little unsatisfied	3.1%	3.9%
unsatisfied	0.8%	3.1%
Education continuation		
yes	59.4%	61.4%
probably yes	33.6%	25.8%
maybe	7.0%	10.6%
probably no	0.0%	1.5%
no	0.0%	0.8%
Education type		
degree	68.5%	96.2%
non-degree	35.4%	44.3%
Reasons for education		
get higher degree	54.7%	40.2%
renew knowledge	6.3%	28.0%
get knowledge in new area	46.1%	50.8%
learn about fast growing firm	23.4%	41.7%
be informed about news in the world	7.0%	22.0%
Reasons for education continuation		
get higher degree	44.6%	44.3%
renew knowledge	22.3%	36.1%
get knowledge in new area	55.4%	49.2%
learn about fast growing firm	30.6%	41.8%
be informed about news in the world	35.5%	23.8%

TABLE 2 Other results

Continued on the next page

- Opinion about the necessity of education. 61.9% of respondents in Slovenia and 56.5% of respondents in Romania think that entrepreneurs must educate themselves more than once a year, whereas 38.1% of respondents in Slovenia and 40.5% of respondents in Romania think that they must educate themselves at least once a year.
- Overall satisfaction with education. 10.9% of respondents in Slovenia and 10.1% in Romania are very satisfied with education, 67.2% of respondents in Slovenia and 67.4% in Romania are satisfied with education, 18.0% in Slovenia and 15.5% in Romania are a little satisfied with education, 3.1% in Slovenia and 3.9% in Romania are a

	Slovenia	Romania
Area of education		
marketing and sales	19.5%	25.8%
finance	18.8%	13.6%
entrepreneurship	57.8%	2.3%
management	5.5%	19.7%
computing	11.7%	32.6%
Area of education – future		
marketing and sales	33.6%	38.6%
finance	31.9%	21.3%
entrepreneurship	43.7%	13.4%
management	19.3%	29.1%
computing	26.1%	26.8%
Education – necessity		
more than once a year	61.9%	56.5%
at least once a year	38.1%	40.5%
not necessary	0.0%	3.1%

TABLE 2(continued)

little unsatisfied, and only 0.8% of respondents in Slovenia are unsatisfied with education whereas in Romania this percentage is 3.1%.

- Overall education continuation. 59.4% of entrepreneurs in Slovenia and 61.4% of respondents in Romania say that they will definitely continue with education, 33.6% in Slovenia and 25.8% in Romania say that they will probably continue with education and 7.0% of them in Slovenia and 10.6% in Romania will maybe continue with education. In Romania 1.5% say that they will probably not continue with education.
- *Reasons for education continuation.* The first reason for education continuation is getting knowledge in a new area (55.4% of entrepreneurs in Slovenia and 49.2% in Romania think so). 44.6% of respondents in Slovenia and 44.3% in Romania will continue with education to get a higher degree, 35.5% in Slovenia will continue because they wish to be informed about news in the world and 41.8% of respondents in Romania want to learn how to do business in a fast growing firm.
- *Main areas of future education.* Slovenia: 43.7% of entrepreneurs will educate themselves in an entrepreneurship area, 33.6% in marketing and sales, and 31.9% in finance. Romania: 38.6% of entrepreneurs

will educate themselves in marketing and sales, 36.2% in an entrepreneurship area, and 29.1% in management.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper we provided evidence for the existence of positive relationships between education satisfaction elements and education continuation by conducting a cross-cultural study in two countries (Romania and Slovenia). We found that education content and process quality, and education satisfaction of participants tend to be the strongest predictors of the subsequent decision to continue education in both countries. Room and equipment adequacy may also be important, but our findings showed this result only for Romania. Surprisingly, we did not find support for the impact of acquired knowledge quality on education continuation. Since the calculated correlations between acquired knowledge quality and continuation were significant and not very low, both in Slovenia (0.34) and in Romania (0.55), the lower regression coefficients than expected may be due to the fact that satisfaction and quality dimensions were correlated, even though we did not encounter bigger problems of multicollinearity in regression analyses.

An interesting finding of our research is that content and process quality tends to have a stronger impact on education continuation in Slovenia than in Romania, whereas the impact of satisfaction and room/equipment quality may play in Romania a stronger role in the decision to continue education than in Slovenia. This finding leads to an important conclusion for education providers in management and entrepreneurship education. In order to maximize the retention of participants and probably improve also business results, education providers in Slovenia need to pay good attention to content/process issues such as excellence, fulfillment of expectations of participants, well prepared materials, and the selection of the lecturer, who needs to satisfy participants in general, as well as convey the subject matter in an interesting and clear way. Romanian education providers may like to consider taking a somewhat different approach, that is, they need to try to satisfy the participants in general, as well as to provide an adequate education environment in terms of the room in which education is performed and equipment that is used.

In this study we also provide some evidence on the cross-cultural validity and comparability of the measures of education satisfaction, quality, and continuation, while pointing out some differences between management and education participants in the two countries. In Romania the key reason for participants to engage in education is a will to acquire new knowledge, while in Slovenia it tends to be a decision to obtain a higher degree. In the decision to continue education, participants from both countries give the leading role to new knowledge acquisition, and also consider continuing education a necessity, which we generally consider a positive sign for both countries. An interesting difference emerged in the consideration of a future area of education. In Slovenia, the entrepreneurship area may be the most prominent (followed by marketing and sales, and finance), whereas in Romania marketing and sales may be the leading area, followed by computing and general management.

The study has some limitations. The samples used were not random and not ideally matched across the two countries. Measures were based on perceptions and intentions and not on actual behavior of participants, which would require a longitudinal study design.

The study was conducted in management and entrepreneurship education in two countries; future research may further validate the results of this study in other countries and contexts. Despite the limitations, we provided some interesting conclusions, which are important in understanding the relationship between education satisfaction and quality as predictors of education continuation, as well as in managing education contents and processes.

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