

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE IN CROATIAN COMPULSORY EDUCATION – THE TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVE

*Branislava Baranovic, Institute for Social Research – Zagreb,*

*Marina Stibric, Institute for Social Research – Zagreb*

## **Abstract**

The development of the knowledge-based society generates new needs both at the individual and the society level (economic, scientific and technological development, the role of individual as a citizen, etc.). Challenges raised by the new developments have brought to the fore the question of development of key competencies necessary for work and life in the knowledge society as well as adequate curricular changes. They are now widely politically and academically discussed, especially in EU and OECD countries where education for new competencies has gained a strategic importance in the development of economic competitiveness and strengthening of social cohesion.

Identified common objectives of educational systems in the EU include definition of eight *areas* of key competences (The European Key Competences Framework) relevant for work and life in the knowledge-based society, and entrepreneurship competence is one of them. Although The European Key Competences Framework serves as a mere recommendation for educational policy in individual countries, it is of fundamental significance for the development and integration of Europe-wide educational policies. This is of especial importance for Croatia which, as an accession country, perceives membership in the EU as one of its fundamental strategic goals.

This paper is focused on several aspects of introducing the entrepreneurship competence in the Croatian national curriculum for compulsory education. The presentation is based on the findings of empirical research conducted in 2006 in 25 public compulsory education schools located in different regions of Croatia. Within each school, the research was conducted on several sub-samples: pupils in the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, class and subject teachers and head teachers.

Having in mind that a crucial precondition for successful implementation of the entrepreneurial competence in schools is for teachers to possess a good understanding of change and a clear conception of the entrepreneurship competence, this paper will focus on the research findings related to teachers.

A total of 324 teachers participated in the study, 38% of which were class teachers and 62% subject teachers. The applied questionnaire was part of a larger instrument which was designed specifically for the purpose of this research. It consisted of closed questions mainly set on Likert scales and several open-ended questions. Its administration was anonymous.

The aim of the research was to identify teachers’ understanding of entrepreneurship competence, teachers’ opinions on ways entrepreneurship competence might be introduced into Croatian compulsory education, teachers’ estimates of the degree of inclusion of entrepreneurial competence in current teaching programmes and teachers’ perception of barriers to the inclusion of entrepreneurship competence in Croatian elementary schools.

Survey responses indicated that a large proportion of teachers define entrepreneurial competence

in a broader sense - as economic literacy or knowledge and personal characteristics/behaviours that are prerequisites for becoming a successful entrepreneur, which is in line with its definition in the European Key Competences Framework. Half of all teachers think that teaching entrepreneurial competence should embrace both economic literacy and the development of the entrepreneurial characteristics/behaviours of pupils. Three quarters of teachers support its introduction into compulsory education in Croatia. Within that finding most of them would teach it as a cross-curricular theme. Other suggestions for teaching entrepreneurship were as a separate subject, extracurricular activities, or homeroom meetings.

Teachers' responses suggest that they perceive Croatian schools to already possess some experience in teaching entrepreneurial competence. Approximately half of the teachers respond that it is taught in their schools to an average degree. Teachers' responses indicate that entrepreneurial competence is also integrated into new teaching programmes, or national curriculum, with half of all teachers estimating that entrepreneurship is sometimes represented in teaching programmes.

According to teacher responses, approximately two thirds of teachers report being sometimes involved in school activities through which pupils can learn about successful entrepreneurs and different occupations, thus supporting the conclusion that entrepreneurial experiences are not regularly offered in our schools. At the same time, a small percentage of teachers reported that they have never been engaged in the previously mentioned school activities.

The survey data suggest a lack of systematic provision of entrepreneurial content and activities in Croatian schools. When such content is provided, it most typically relates to pupils' future careers or ways of managing personal finances. As such, in order to more fully develop and promote the entrepreneurship competence in Croatian elementary schools, experiences related to enterprises or entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial activities, and knowledge need to be introduced in a more systematic manner, so as to reach every pupil in elementary education.

From the teachers' standpoint, activities aimed at encouraging "the development of pupils' team working skills" and "pupils' independence in their work" were the most often performed teaching activities in the schools. More than two thirds of teachers (approximately 69% in each activity scale) estimated that these teaching activities were mainly or almost always used in their schools while all other activities were considerably less frequently performed.

According to teachers' views, activities through which pupils are taught "how to judge the consequences of their own decisions" and "how to evaluate risk taking opportunities" are positioned in the middle of the rank scale of the estimated activities. Bearing in mind the purpose of this report, it is important to stress that only 16% of teachers stated that pupils in their schools are mainly or almost always taught how to earn money to meet their own needs.

More than 90% of teachers believe that most of the evaluated activities are mainly or very important for the development of entrepreneurial competence in pupils. Even less frequently mentioned activities ("teaching the students how to earn money to meet their own needs" and "encouraging the students to take part in activities fostering cooperation with local communities") are perceived by a large proportion of the teachers as mostly or very important for the entrepreneurial development of pupils.

Teachers identified insufficient financial resources and low social status of the profession as the main obstacles to implementation of entrepreneurship competence in schools, followed by a lack of teaching tools and low teachers' wages. The research findings indicate that certain

prerequisites for the systematic inclusion of entrepreneurship in schools need to be created. These include: more appropriate in-service teacher education, better material conditions for teaching in general and especially the improved financial status of the teaching profession, coupled with their higher status and prestige in society.

Vast majority of respondents reported that teachers in their schools were not appropriately trained for teaching entrepreneurship. Regarding the aspects of training perceived to be most useful for implementing the entrepreneurial competence, teachers most commonly reported a need for training in the mastery of entrepreneurial knowledge, followed by training in teaching in teaching skills and the application of new teaching methods. Teachers reported communication with the local community and the development of teaching materials as the least useful for training endeavours.

A large majority of the surveyed teachers had not attended any kind of professional development relating to the knowledge and skills at the core of the entrepreneurial competence. Moreover, the majority of teachers who had attended professional development efforts directed towards this competence reported feeling that they did not benefit from the training. These data indicate that teacher training for teaching the entrepreneurship competence has not been successfully integrated into initial teacher education nor into any professional development programme.

On the basis of these research findings, it could be recommended that entrepreneurship education in Croatia needs to be more clearly conceptualised and after that introduced and taught in schools in a systematic way. According to teachers' suggestions, entrepreneurship education should have an important position in Croatian elementary schools and should be primarily delivered as a cross-curricular theme or module. Analysis of the experiences of other European countries in this domain, in addition to the school experiences and teachers' suggestions from the current research, will prove useful in developing and implementing such educational programmes for fostering the entrepreneurship competence in Croatian elementary schools.

We also recommend introducing the entrepreneurship competence into pre-service teacher training programmes for class and subject teachers. Specific professional development programmes aimed at developing further skill in teaching the entrepreneurship competence should also be developed. It is necessary to develop programs and to train higher-education teachers and other teacher trainers to implement these curricula in pre-service education as well as in-service teacher training.

*Key words:* key competencies, entrepreneurial competence, Croatian elementary schools, teachers.

**Authors:**

Branislava Baranovic, Ph. D.  
Institute for Social Research – Zagreb  
Centre for Educational Research and Development  
Amruseva 11, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
[cerd@idi.hr](mailto:cerd@idi.hr)

Marina Stibric  
Institute for Social Research – Zagreb  
Centre for Educational Research and Development  
Amruseva 11, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
marina@idi.hr