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Empowering Teachers through Lifelong Learning: Entrepreneurial Competence and Career Guidance in Albania

Blerina Dhrami

Department of Administrative Sciences,
Universiteti Metropolitan, Tirana, Albania

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Abstract

In contemporary education systems, teachers are increasingly expected to contribute to students' career development through entrepreneurship education and transversal competence formation. This paper examines the role of teacher lifelong learning and entrepreneurial competence in supporting career guidance processes in Albania, a context characterized by labor-market uncertainty and ongoing educational reform.

The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining policy and document analysis with quantitative data collected through an Erasmus+ project involving teachers, students, and business representatives. Descriptive statistical analysis is used to explore teachers' self-perceived entrepreneurial competencies, participation in lifelong learning, and engagement in career-related support for students.

The findings indicate that teachers report relatively high levels of entrepreneurial competence and demonstrate strong commitment to lifelong learning. However, structural gaps persist between policy objectives and educational practice, including limited formal preparation for career guidance, fragmented professional development opportunities, and uneven institutional support. As a result, teachers often perform career guidance functions informally and without systematic coordination.

The paper concludes that teacher development represents a critical but underutilized component of career guidance systems. Strengthening lifelong learning frameworks and embedding entrepreneurial competence within teacher education can significantly enhance career guidance capacity. The Albanian case offers transferable insights for education systems seeking to align entrepreneurship education, teacher development, and career guidance in response to changing labour-market demands.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Entrepreneurial Education, Training, Teacher Development

Introduction

Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes four major studies on the relationship between teacher development, entrepreneurial competence, and lifelong learning, focusing on their implications for career orientation.

Entrepreneurial competence, as defined in the European EntreComp framework (Bacigalupo et al., 2016), encompasses ideas and opportunities, resources, and action-oriented implementation. Teachers are expected to model entrepreneurial behaviour, use innovative pedagogies, and prepare students for uncertain economic futures. Yet research shows that teachers often feel unprepared to teach entrepreneurship due to insufficient training and lack of structured resources (Lackéus, 2020).

Sánchez (2013) demonstrated that entrepreneurship education significantly improves entrepreneurial competencies – creativity, initiative, and self-efficacy – and positively influences students’ entrepreneurial intentions. The results highlight that entrepreneurship education enhances employability and employability skills, going beyond entrepreneurship to include broader life planning. By implementing EE concepts, educators help students recognize their potential, cultivate problem-solving skills, and foster resilience in evolving labor markets. This connects entrepreneurship education to contemporary career guidance objectives, positioning entrepreneurial learning as a lifelong process that promotes continuous self-improvement.

According to Saranza et al. (2022), teachers’ entrepreneurial competence integrates conceptual, human, and technical skills that allow them to create innovative and learner-centered environments. Teachers with high technical and organizational competence implement more engaging and effective professional education strategies, enhancing students’ lifelong learning. Entrepreneurship-competent teachers act as agents of change – they create opportunities for students to apply knowledge creatively, collaborate across disciplines, and connect learning to real-world contexts. This

pedagogical innovation is essential for fostering career orientation, as it prepares students for uncertain and dynamic professional paths.

Huang et al. (2020) identified five key predictors of teachers' entrepreneurial competence: professional training, innovative pedagogy, entrepreneurial practice, institutional culture, and supportive policy frameworks. These elements confirm that teachers' competence is not static, but grows through lifelong learning. Lifelong learning increases teachers' self-confidence, adaptability, and reflective capacity, ensuring that they remain relevant to educational and labor market reforms. Institutional environments that encourage experimentation, feedback, and continuous improvement help teachers evolve as facilitators of entrepreneurial and career competencies.

Peltonen (2015) conceptualizes teacher development as a collaborative process of knowledge construction through reflection, dialogue, and sharing of practices. This social learning model reframes professional growth as collective rather than individual, aligning with the ethos of lifelong learning. Teachers who engage in reflective inquiry and collaboration with colleagues hone their capacity for entrepreneurial teaching—developing flexibility, initiative, and the ability to mentor students in self-directed career planning. This reflective approach reinforces teacher empowerment, linking their personal growth to the broader goal of sustainable educational innovation.

Integrating entrepreneurial competency into teacher training and career guidance frameworks increases the relevance and responsiveness of education. Entrepreneurial-minded teachers guide students to develop action ability, adaptability, and risk tolerance—essential skills for navigating complex professional environments. In this model, career guidance becomes an ongoing developmental process, rather than a single counseling event. Teachers empowered by entrepreneurial learning create pathways for students to explore multiple career options and apply creative problem-solving in real-world contexts. Synthesis

The reviewed studies converge on three insights:

1. Entrepreneurial competence is multidimensional, requiring cognitive, practical, and social development.
2. Lifelong learning is the primary mechanism for maintaining and expanding competence.
3. Career guidance outcomes improve when teachers integrate entrepreneurial pedagogy into classroom practice.

Empirical research from Albania underscores the pivotal role of teachers in implementing entrepreneurship education policies. Miço and Cungu (2023) investigate the degree of entrepreneurial competence among pre-university educators in Albania, utilising the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp). Their findings indicate that although

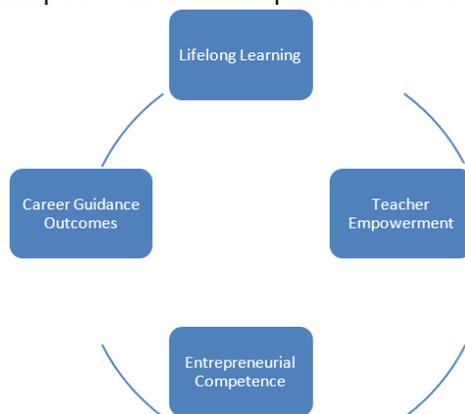
entrepreneurship competency is technically integrated into national curricula and policy papers, educators frequently lack the preparation to deploy it effectively in classroom settings. The study identifies deficiencies in initial teacher education, restricted access to ongoing professional development, and variable pedagogical methods in entrepreneurship education.

Miço and Cungu (2023) define entrepreneurial education not solely as a subject-based endeavour but as a pedagogical process intricately connected to career awareness and future-oriented learning. Educators serve as essential intermediaries between educational policy and students' professional advancement, especially via project-based learning, experiential pedagogy, and partnerships with external entities. The authors observe that, in the absence of structured training and institutional support, educators find it challenging to transition from theoretical instruction to substantive entrepreneurial and career-focused learning experiences.

The reviewed literature converges on three key insights. First, entrepreneurial competence is a multidimensional construct that integrates cognitive, behavioural, and social capacities. Second, lifelong learning constitutes the primary mechanism through which teachers develop and sustain these competences over time. Third, career guidance outcomes improve significantly when entrepreneurial pedagogy is embedded into everyday teaching practice rather than treated as an isolated activity.

International and Albanian evidence consistently demonstrates that teachers act as critical intermediaries between policy intentions and students' career development. However, without structured training, institutional support, and coherent professional development pathways, teachers' potential contribution to entrepreneurship education and career guidance remains only partially realized. These findings justify the analytical focus of this study on teacher lifelong learning as a systemic lever for strengthening career guidance capacity.

Figure 1: Relationship between teacher empowerment and student career success



Source: By the author

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-method research design combining qualitative policy analysis with quantitative secondary data analysis. Policy documents, national strategies, and legislative frameworks related to teacher development, entrepreneurship education, and career guidance were systematically reviewed to establish the institutional context.

Quantitative data were drawn from surveys conducted within an Erasmus+ project, involving teachers, students, and representatives of the business sector. The analysis focuses on teachers' participation in lifelong learning, self-perceived entrepreneurial competences, and engagement in career-related support for students.

Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to examine patterns and trends within the dataset. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the design of the original data collection, the analysis does not aim at causal inference but rather at identifying indicative relationships between teacher development and career guidance practices.

Case Study Approach

Albania was selected as a case study due to its active reform agenda, evolving policies on teacher professional development, and growing engagement in EU-funded training programs. The mixed-method approach allows triangulation of findings, increasing validity through convergence of multiple data sources.

A key limitation of the study concerns the use of secondary survey data collected within an Erasmus+ project. While the dataset is large and diverse, sampling procedures and instrument validation were defined at the project level and not specifically designed for inferential statistical testing. Consequently, the quantitative analysis is intentionally descriptive and exploratory in nature. Despite this limitation, triangulation with policy analysis enhances the robustness of the findings by allowing convergence between institutional frameworks and empirical perceptions.

Research Context

In Albania, the pre-university education curriculum framework has undergone several revisions in order to align with European Union guidelines and standards, as sanctioned by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). These continuous reforms demonstrate a clear commitment to fostering a student-centred approach to learning and teaching, as well as to developing a competency-based curriculum. The overarching objective is to establish conditions that enable students to understand democratic values, actively participate in civic life, and develop life skills that contribute to broader sustainable development goals.

The curriculum framework defines a set of key competencies linked to specific learning areas, including: (1) communication and expression competence; (2) thinking competence; (3) learning-to-learn competence; (4) competence for life, entrepreneurship, and the environment; (5) personal competence; (6) civic competence; and (7) digital competence (Papajani, 2021). Within this framework, entrepreneurship is conceptualized as a transversal competence embedded across curriculum subjects, encompassing creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and the capacity to develop and manage projects aimed at achieving learning outcomes.

The lifelong professional development of educational staff is designed to respond to teachers' needs and is regulated through a comprehensive legislative framework. Key documents include Law No. 69/2012 "On Pre-University Education in the Republic of Albania" (as amended), Guideline No. 1/2017 on the functioning of the continuous professional development system, the report *Identification of Training Needs of Teachers and School Leaders 2021–2025*, and the Order establishing the Accreditation Commission for Training Programmes.

Current legislation requires teachers and school principals to complete a minimum of three training days annually. Training provision operates within a demand–supply model, reflecting both educators' professional needs and the offerings of accredited training providers. To enhance transparency and accessibility, a national digital platform (<https://trajnime.arsimi.rash.al>) has been established, listing all accredited training modules, providers, schedules, and enabling teacher registration. The platform also serves as a national database of trained teachers and ensures transparency in training costs, which are capped at a level equivalent to the minimum credit cost of second-cycle higher education studies.

The primary objective of the Albanian education system, particularly with regard to youth education, is to cultivate skills and competencies that facilitate employability and self-employment. Developing entrepreneurial skills among young people enhances their readiness for labour market participation and supports their active engagement in economic life. In this regard, self-employment is increasingly viewed as an effective pathway for expanding job opportunities and promoting both individual and household economic advancement.

Entrepreneurship education, recognized as a core lifelong learning competence within the pre-university curriculum, is primarily implemented at the upper secondary level through the subject of Economics in grade 12, encompassing both general and vocational dimensions. By 2021, the Accreditation Commission for Training Programmes had approved 21 training modules focused on entrepreneurship education. Junior Achievement Albania serves as the leading organisation in this field, providing annual training to

more than 1,000 teachers from general and vocational secondary schools through accredited modules aimed at strengthening entrepreneurship education.

Until 2021, higher education institutions had not accredited training modules specifically focused on entrepreneurship education, with notable developments emerging through Erasmus+ initiatives such as the ENTRAL project. At the policy level, Albania has adopted several national strategies related to entrepreneurship and innovation, including the Business Development and Investment Strategy 2021–2027, the Digital Agenda 2015–2020, the National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2017–2022, the Strategy for Interaction between Entrepreneurship and Public Institutions, and the Action Plan 2017–2021 promoting innovative policymaking through the Triple Helix approach.

Despite these efforts, access to finance remains a significant barrier for entrepreneurs and enterprises, particularly in rural areas. These challenges are not solely supply-driven, as many emerging businesses fail to meet the investment criteria required by financial institutions. Furthermore, Albania has yet to establish a comprehensive legal framework supporting alternative financing mechanisms such as crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending. Although initiatives such as Startup Albania provide grant schemes for startups, monitoring mechanisms and performance-based funding remain limited.

The development of entrepreneurial ecosystems is further constrained by the scarcity of success stories and role models, particularly in rural regions where incubators, youth centres, and community hubs are either limited or underutilised. Exposure to real-world entrepreneurial experience remains rare, as higher education institutions continue to prioritise theoretical instruction with limited integration of business engagement and creative problem-solving. More broadly, the absence of a strong tripartite relationship between government, universities, and industry has hindered the generation of meaningful innovation outcomes, with each actor largely operating in isolation.

A significant policy development occurred on 26 December 2024, when the Council of Ministers approved Decision No. 824 establishing the National Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) 2025–2030 and its accompanying action plan. The strategy aims to enhance regional competitiveness and unlock growth potential through an inherently entrepreneurial discovery process that requires broad stakeholder engagement. Human capital development has been identified as a central pillar of the S3, with priorities including the advancement of education, curriculum modernisation through digitalisation, labour market readiness, youth empowerment, and talent retention.

Quantitative Data

Under the framework of Entral Erasmus+ Project, whose objective was increasing the entrepreneurial awareness in Albanian Education Institutions (HEIs and schools) to support graduates' skills to match with the requirements of the working life and the modern society, an online survey was administered to three distinct stakeholder groups in March and April 2021. The survey collected data on the perspectives of pre-university teachers, academic staff, students and company representatives regarding entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, existing barriers and demands in entrepreneurship education, among other topics. A total of 906 students, 530 teachers and researchers and 289 business representatives responded. The analysis of the questionnaires identifies the main trends, challenges, issues and expectations of the three target groups, which are then elaborated through final recommendations for improvements related to internal university policies and mindsets, as well as external university market stakeholders and educational institutions. The responses from educators and researchers show a prevailing belief that the institution supports entrepreneurship education and related initiatives.

Teachers and researchers report relatively high mean scores across the three core entrepreneurial dimensions. They claim skills in recognizing entrepreneurial perspectives (7.9) and evaluating (8.0) different alternatives, but their evaluation of **university support for entrepreneurship** (M = 7.6) shows a moderate—not high—level of satisfaction. This indicates that while teachers perceive themselves as capable, institutional structures may not sufficiently reinforce entrepreneurial teaching. The moderate value may reflect inconsistencies in resources, training, or strategic prioritization across universities.

Furthermore, over two-thirds (70.5%) of educators and academics believe that they can help their students in their professional paths, suggesting that nearly one-third remain uncertain. This highlights a **competence gap in career guidance**, supporting existing literature that teachers often undertake guidance responsibilities without formal preparation.

Table 1: Mean Scores for Teachers & Researchers (n = 530)

Indicator	Mean Score (1–10)	Source
University supports entrepreneurship education	7.6	Survey results
Ability to see entrepreneurial opportunities	7.9	Self-evaluation
Ability to evaluate entrepreneurial options	8.0	Self-evaluation
Ability to seize opportunities & initiate actions	7.9	Self-evaluation
Interest in using entrepreneurial teaching methods	8.6	Survey results
Ability to support students' career path	7.0 (approx.) based on 70.5% agreement	Interpreted from distribution

Students

Student comments are mixed due to insufficient knowledge. Students do not seem to understand the functioning of the economy and its effect on the economic policies of central and local governments. The main constraint on students' entrepreneurial engagement is access to financial resources. Furthermore, there is an information asymmetry regarding the identification of the resources needed to start an entrepreneurial venture. Many students are uninformed about financial assistance offered by banks, investors, or other financial entities. Students perceive teachers and lecturers as moderately skilled in entrepreneurial endeavors and believe that these educators can increase their support for entrepreneurial endeavors.

A significant proportion of students believe that they are skilled in exploiting opportunities, especially in **evaluating opportunities** (M = 8.0) and **seizing them** (M = 8.1), exceeding their mean score on **seeing opportunities**, suggesting that once presented with opportunities, students feel more confident in assessing and acting on them.

Table 2: Student Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship (n = 906)

Indicator	Mean Score (1–10)	Source
University support for entrepreneurship	7.6	Survey results
Ability to see entrepreneurial opportunities	7.6	Self-evaluation
Ability to evaluate entrepreneurial options	8.0	Self-evaluation
Ability to seize opportunities & initiate actions	8.1	Self-evaluation
Intention to start a business after graduation	(52.3% Yes)	Frequency data
Entrepreneurial experience during studies	21.9% involved	Frequency data
Desire to be in contact with entrepreneurs	78.8% Yes	Frequency data

However, other indicators reveal a mismatch between confidence and real practice:

- **Only 21.9% of students report entrepreneurial experience**, despite high self-perceived abilities.
- **52.3% intend to start a business**, but a significant 37% are undecided or negative.
- **78.8% wish they had contact with entrepreneurs**, signaling a **desire for experiential learning that is currently unmet**.

This pattern suggests students possess theoretical or self-perceived entrepreneurial readiness but lack opportunities for applied learning, mentorship, and practical exposure.

Businesses

There is a mismatch between the competencies acquired by students during their university education and the requirements of businesses. Universities (students and academic staff) and businesses should engage in collaborative research efforts that provide mutual advantages, offering various

training programs to help enterprises. Respondents gave the lowest average rating, 6.4, to university students’ ability to seize opportunities and take the initiative.

Table 3: Business Representatives’ Evaluation of Students’ Entrepreneurial Competence (n = 289)

Indicator	Mean Score (1–10)	Source
Students identifying business opportunities	6.8	Business evaluation
Students evaluating business options	6.7	Business evaluation
Students seizing opportunities & initiating actions	6.4	Business evaluation
Companies cooperating with universities	31.1%	Frequency data
Companies not cooperating	58.5%–65% (depending on dataset)	Frequency data

The finding is reinforced by the fact that:

- **Only 31.1% of businesses cooperate with universities,**
- Despite a high institutional focus on employability and entrepreneurial competence.

Low collaboration rates reduce opportunities for students to gain authentic entrepreneurial or industry-related experience, reinforcing the competence gap and widening the mismatch between academic preparation and labor-market expectations.

Table 4: Teachers, Students, and Business Representatives: Summary of Means

Group	Opportunities	Evaluation	Initiative	University Support	Notes
Teachers	7.9	8.0	7.9	7.6	High self-confidence, low institutional mechanisms
Students	7.6	8.0	8.1	7.6	High self-ratings, low real experience
Businesses	6.8	6.7	6.4	–	Lower perception of students’ abilities

Results

Teacher Participation in Lifelong Learning

Erasmus+ project data indicate a strong interest among teachers in international training opportunities. A significant proportion participated in at least one structured CPD activity during the project period. Teachers reported that such programs strengthened their methodological skills, increased their exposure to innovative practices, and expanded their professional networks. However, participation varies by region and school type, suggesting structural inequalities in access to lifelong learning.

Entrepreneurial Competence Levels

Teachers reported moderate confidence in applying entrepreneurial pedagogy. Many felt prepared to introduce basic entrepreneurial concepts but expressed limited familiarity with experiential learning methods, opportunity

recognition frameworks, or value-creation processes. These gaps align with national findings that entrepreneurial education remains weakly embedded in teacher qualification programs.

Career Guidance Engagement

Quantitative results show that a large number of teachers are involved in career guidance despite limited training. They provide information on educational pathways, support activities, and assist in student orientation. However, few teachers reported having received formal preparation in career counselling techniques, labour-market analysis, or guidance methodologies.

Discussion

The results highlight a clear implementation gap between policy objectives and educational practice in Albania. Although national strategies recognise the importance of entrepreneurial competence and lifelong learning, teachers' engagement in career guidance largely depends on individual initiative rather than systematic support.

From a critical perspective, this reliance on individual effort risks reinforcing inequality between institutions and student groups. Teachers are expected to assume expanded roles without corresponding training, coordination mechanisms, or workload recognition. As a result, career guidance remains fragmented and unevenly distributed.

These findings align with international literature emphasizing the need to reconceptualise career guidance as a shared institutional responsibility rather than an informal extension of teaching duties. Strengthening teacher lifelong learning frameworks emerges as a necessary but insufficient condition unless accompanied by coherent governance and support structures.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study demonstrates that teacher lifelong learning and entrepreneurial competence constitute critical yet underutilized resources for strengthening career guidance in Albania. While teachers exhibit strong motivation and self-confidence, the absence of structured training pathways, institutional coordination, and policy coherence limits the effectiveness of their contribution.

The findings suggest that enhancing career guidance requires a systemic approach that integrates teacher development, entrepreneurship education, and labour-market intelligence. Embedding career guidance more explicitly within teacher education and professional development frameworks could significantly improve students' preparedness for increasingly complex career trajectories.

The Albanian case offers transferable insights for education systems facing similar challenges, highlighting the importance of aligning policy ambitions with institutional capacity and professional practice.

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