

Article

Experimental Conclusions of the Online Inter-University Creativity, Responsibility, and Entrepreneurship Course Implementation

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Abstract: The implementation experiences of a new asynchronous online inter-university creativity course-titled “Creativity, responsibility, and entrepreneurship” will be presented through the lens of the course designer. Aside from introducing the identified challenges of how the regular on-site courses can be adjusted to the needs of remote education, with the aim to reach a high completion rate, the main focus remains the introduction of the different level abilities of the students in relation to social responsibility. The unique patterns of positioning the course among its internal and external competitors are created from the combination of theoretical and methodological approaches while also considering the special attitudes of the prospective Eastern European entrepreneur and social responsibility as a distinctive character. Since there was no evidence from the students on how positive social impact as a value in entrepreneurship can be ensured through online courses, the analysis of this potential effect could rely on multiple data sources from a questionnaire, answers to a quiz, and targeted analysis of the final assignments. The aim to improve new iterations call for qualitative data collection. The experimental consequences can guide the prospective course designer through the most important steps of establishing a new online course that leverages the uncommon approach that social responsibility can be an unmissable factor in the competition.



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1. Introduction of the Main Objectives

University Eötvös Loránd Budapest (ELTE) is Hungary’s most prestigious university with the richest traditions and the highest international and national rankings in the country, where tradition and innovation go hand-in-hand. With more than 3000 students, five double degree master’s programs, and an EIT Digital Doctoral Training Center, the ELTE Faculty of Informatics plays a leading role in the research and education of computer science in Hungary.

The ELTE Faculty of Informatics embraced the challenge of providing entrepreneurship courses for non-business students 6 years ago, paving the way to an institutional transition where processes incorporate new innovative ideas to support their utilization.

Since 2017, all undergraduate students in computer science entering the Faculty have been required to take a basic course in innovation and entrepreneurship that is run in both English and Hungarian.

Currently, at the Faculty, courses are available at all levels of education that aim to provide students in computer science with a basic knowledge of innovation, entrepreneurship, and management, which can not only contribute to the realization of their ideas, understanding, and participation more successfully in more creative working environments, but also develop the soft skills that are essential to respond to today’s rapidly changing challenges.

By the time these regular entrepreneurship courses for undergraduate students matured due to continuous improvement, and after many years of education involving hundreds of students, a new project provided a boost to the next step in entrepreneurial education. This was called Innochange, which is funded by the Higher Education Initiative program of EIT Digital and aims to offer Innovation Capacity Building for Higher Education.

The Faculty of Informatics, as a leader of the Innochange consortia, took on the challenge of designing and implementing a new online asynchronous basic entrepreneurship course titled “Creativity, responsibility, and entrepreneurship” for students of different partner universities and other faculties from the ELTE. Although the most important lessons learned from the online and hybrid education phases could be concluded after the pandemic, new challenges have appeared with the creation of the inter-university online course.

The education pillar of the collaborative work in the Innochange project relies on the experience gained in the on-site and entrepreneurship education of computer science students, and on that belief that it can be transformed in a way that can encourage students to join from different partner institutions and faculties and unlock their creativity in an asynchronous online course.

Currently, there is no available experience in the literature on how positive social impact as a value in entrepreneurship is interpreted by students and how it can be effectively transmitted in online courses. The respective observations suggest that it may be easier to influence the students’ perceptions in the on-site courses. Furthermore, there was no feedback at our Faculty on how shifted courses can affect the entrepreneurial mindset. Therefore, there is a need to collect qualitative data using multiple methods to examine the related attitudes as potential evidence and form experimental conclusions.

This article aims to report on the experimental and methodological experiences of a new online creativity course that was designed and carried out as a new element in the entrepreneurial education portfolio of the ELTE Faculty of Informatics and has an unshakeable commitment to dissolving the misconceptions in the intersection of social responsibility and profitability.

The efficiency of the new course will be analyzed through two main dimensions, following the structure of the identified specific challenges in the creation and implementation of the new course, mainly focusing on the social responsibility of tech ventures as a special distinctive character of the new subject.

The first dimension (general evaluation and entrepreneurial attitudes) is the exposition of the students’ feedback on the course from the aspect of its contribution to the institutional transformation and further development aspects. The descriptive sub-chapters unfold what the educator can conclude from the different data regarding the acceptance of the course in general, and how the feedback can be processed for further development purposes. Furthermore, it elaborates on how the provided measures and methods could contribute to a higher completion rate in a basically online environment as well as what kind of unique patterns can position a new creativity course in an increasingly more saturated online education environment, and at a Faculty that already offers a wide range of innovation and entrepreneurship courses. The last analyzed factor in this dimension will expand on how the provided methodologies affect the entrepreneurial attitudes of the students.

The second dimension of the analysis (willingness and ability to leverage positive social impact) aims to map the available data sources in the different assignments that can provide experimental conclusions with regard to how the message of the positive social impact can be transmitted in a remote course and leveraged as a potential distinctive characteristic in the final innovative ideas of students. The available data sources were analyzed through the following three pilot research questions:

1. Are students willing to leverage the positive social impact as a determinant factor in the competition?
2. Is critical thinking in relation to social responsibility observable among students?
3. What kind of variables of social impact creation can be identified in the students' individual ideas that can help assess their abilities?

As the entire analysis relies on only one cohort's feedback and results, the answers to the pilot research questions can be considered as the experimental conclusions of the exploratory research.

The results will be introduced through the different sections of the study and categorized along the above dimensions. This first of five sections presents the setup of the article and outlines the main objectives of the study. Section 2 describes the main expertise and the unique educational concept that was built from different bricks gained throughout the years of creating and implementing regular basic entrepreneurship courses. Section 3 covers the introduction of the chosen theoretical pillars and the challenge-based methodological approach of the newly launched online course, while Section 4 highlights the feedback of students based on different sources of assignments, and attempts to outline the impact of additional mindset forming aims in relation to social impact. Section 5 summarizes the most important methodological and theoretical considerations following the logic of the identified challenges, suggests some experimental recommendations for course designers in relation to social impact-based positioning, and embraces the conclusions through the lens of the course designer. This section also shows the completion ratios in the first two rounds and the attractiveness of the new course.

2. Institutional Background and the Evolution of the Entrepreneurship Education for Undergraduate Students

This section guides the reader through the journey into how the unique educational concept was formed from different bricks gained by the course designer throughout the years of creating and implementing regular basic entrepreneurship courses.

2.1. Introduction of the Institutional Transformation and the Methodological Pillars of Entrepreneurship Courses

The methodological experiences of regular entrepreneurship education have nurtured the launch of the online, asynchronous course that was the subject of this study. The integration challenges of these regular subjects into the curricula are presented because of the conceptual considerations that were also cornerstones in the design process of the new creativity course.

The theoretical and methodological pillars of the basic entrepreneurship courses have been combined from different approaches and techniques of business management, creative thinking, and challenge-based learning modules. As Vidal states [1], it demands courage to run such a course in a competitive academic environment where students have most often been rewarded for individual effort; collaboration may not come naturally or easily for everyone. While browsing the literature and more mature practices for applicable methods in this domain, it became more and more obvious that the course content has to be adapted to the expected general entrepreneurial attitudes of the students. The course creation brought similar consequences back then, as Tiberius and Weyland [2] concluded in their very thorough bibliographical analysis, which despite the attributed relevance of entrepreneurship education and its fast growth, its pedagogy is still almost a black box.

From the aspect of the specific entrepreneurship attitudes that can be expected in the case of Hungarian students, the course design process could rely on the research results of Radnóti [3], who highlighted the factors that distinguished the typical Hungarian entrepreneur from those of their Western competitors. As he pointed out, because of historical factors, the Eastern European entrepreneur usually strives to avoid uncertainties and reduce the potential risk, which is the opposite of Hisrich's [4] widely referred to definition of the entrepreneur, who in his interpretation, is always ready to take a risk. When creating

the conceptual framework to suit the different needs and demands of the undergraduate students in computer science, the viewpoint of Daskalou and Komninou [5] was borrowed, which tries to cultivate the entrepreneurial learner as a thinker, a doer, and a player. From the aspect of the content, the concept of the EIT Digital Master's program [6] means unmissable inspiration, which offers students a minor in innovation and entrepreneurship in addition to the technology major, focusing in the basic entrepreneurship course on the introduction of the factors that affect market success. As Horváth described [7], in this education program, state-of-the-art academic knowledge is completed by hands-on modules on innovation and entrepreneurship, and the different modules are developed by an international team of academic staff with joint effort. In spite of the active participation of the course designer in these collaborative development activities, the contents and applied methods had to be adjusted to the above identified needs of the undergraduate target groups.

In the formation of the grading criteria, the design focused on exploiting the potential of the students' still broad knowledge flows, which are—according to Woods [8]—open to the interdisciplinary concept among the freshmen.

From a thematic point of view, the answer became a creative process that, lecture by lecture, presented the stages of the innovative entrepreneur or project leader's journey, tasks, challenges, and potential pitfalls, from idea generation, validation, analysis of the competitive environment, through appropriate communication and team composition, to the introduction of financing and cooperation opportunities for an innovative start-up. The course has also opened a window to new directions that emphasize the responsibility of the future innovative entrepreneur or key intrapreneur, and the social impact of the new product or solution in Cone's interpretation, who considered these factors as unmissable competitive edges [9].

The aim of the entrepreneurship basics courses was to equip students at the very beginning of their studies with the knowledge and methods to better identify the potential of their innovative ideas during their university years, and to later help them to create and maintain value-creating processes in their workplaces or even in their own businesses, based on an innovative approach.

The practical application of the acquired knowledge is based on constantly updated market analyses and presentations of successful and failed innovative ideas. The building blocks of collaboration, co-opetition, and creative learning are the seminars supported by specific methodologies for each topic, where students work in small groups to solve market or unexpected business challenges, develop and refine ideas together, and thus the different teams in the seminar also compete with each other. According to Ilonen [10], while encouraging cooperation and competition at the same time (co-opetition), participants tend to be more open to new challenges and unusual situations. In this creative atmosphere, students imperceptibly acquire collaboration and conflict management skills [11], brainstorming techniques, and develop their presentation skills, which are essential for successful career development, as Sarasvathy observed. The semester-long learning process culminates when students present their innovative ideas in an individual pitch—a fast, to-the-point, but attention-grabbing presentation known among startups.

2.2. Methodological Challenges of Running Regular Synchronous Courses in the Online Space

The experience gained in adapting and delivering the above introduced on-site basic entrepreneurship courses into the online space following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic will be introduced through the factors that played a prominent role in the design of the online asynchronous course.

Compared to the previous semesters of synchronous, face-to-face BSc courses, the experience was that students were less active during the online seminars, especially in terms of spontaneous suggestions, the sharing of opinions, and student-initiated activities. Although they consistently performed all tasks to a high standard, their creativity had less of a multiplicative effect than in the context of face-to-face teaching.

In face-to-face seminars, students instinctively observe the work of other teams, as they would do under real market conditions, compete with each other, and present their solutions followed by constructive criticism from other teams. Experienced instructors may also notice that as the weeks progress, seminar participants react by observing each other's body language, and the occasions when they exchange glances are important for their further ideas.

As a result of the pandemic, in the midst of changing regulations, hybrid and online semesters have been alternated. During these semesters, students did not perform any worse in terms of the objective learning outcomes than in the context of face-to-face (F2F), 'traditional' education, and the development of their individual ideas and the analyses behind them were outstandingly unique; however, in the subjective opinion of the author of this study, something was still missing . . .

Creative harmony, as defined earlier by the author [12], is precisely what feeds the participants coming together in teams, operating with their own team dynamics, and competing with other teams by showcasing their good solutions. Although it is possible to deliver the same indicators from the point of view of results and statistics, there are no methods to effectively measure how much attention is lost because of the many other distractions, activities, or processes that everyone has behind the screen.

Creative harmony is an added value, without which the innovative process is realized at a different level. These courses are also designed to simulate the workplace or business environment and managerial tasks in which effective management relies on the observation and influence of collaborating actors, which, even with the use of the most effective methods to support distance learning, can only be partially achieved through an online interface. A similar observation was introduced by Bawa [13], who emphasized the significance of the potential loss in the absence of any cohesive working structure and continued interactions that have to be crucial parts of online education activities.

In the comparison of Papdopoulou [14] regarding the results of an online and a face-to-face (F2F) entrepreneurship course, the data show that in terms of the marks achieved, the students performed as well with online learning as in the previous years with F2F. Their feedback showed that the students were content with the teaching, with similar scores to previous years. They also emphasized that students still wanted synchronous interaction as it helps with their learning and in meeting their peers. The consequences showed that interacting with another person led to superior learning.

In the case of the basic entrepreneurship courses that were forced to the online space, all of the interactive team assignments were adapted to the conditions of the changed environment. As described earlier, although the performance of the students did not decline during the online and hybrid periods, when it came to the need for the creation of a basically online and asynchronous entrepreneurship course, the course design was focused very much on the possible methodologies that could lead to fruitful networking through interactions and enable missed creative harmony.

3. Positioning Challenges in the Creation of the New Online Entrepreneurship Course in the Light of the Past Experiences

This section aims to report on the chosen theoretical pillars, pedagogical resources, and methodological approach that enabled a higher completion rate of students in the case of the newly established inter-university online course in the Innochange project. The unique patterns are presented from the aspect of how they can contribute to the positioning of the new subject in not only a saturated online education environment, but also at a Faculty where a wide portfolio of entrepreneurship courses is already available.

In the case of the ELTE Faculty of Informatics, this opportunity means the next step in their institutional transition by utilizing the experiences of the existing courses and their online implementation experiences as well as by sharing the contents and methods with partner universities who are at an earlier phase of implementing new innovative processes.

The aim was to find the optimal combination not only from the content aspect, but also regarding the unique positioning challenge whilst searching for methodologies that increase the completion rate. The experiences gained from the classes that were moved to the online space but run synchronously suggest that the basically asynchronous format has to be supported by a live module to enable networking and the creation of creative harmony.

The answers to the below outlined challenges are introduced based on the identified related necessary activities:

- The adaptation of the methods and contents to the needs of the asynchronous format (1);
- The need to create a special module that enables co-operation, teamwork, and networking in general, and contributes to a better learning experience (2);
- The creation of an evaluation framework that provides continuous feedback to the students that is similar to the live and synchronous courses (3);
- The sharing of methods, with a learning by doing approach, to train the teachers at the partner universities and support their preparation to launch their own local courses (4);
- The identification of factors that can position and distinguish the new course from its external and internal competitors (5); and
- By connecting all of the above activities, reach a high completion rate (6).

The first challenge was determined by the main aim of the education activity in the Innochange project: the creation of a new course that could be implemented in an online, asynchronous way and can unlock the creativity of the students. A further goal was to provide a basic set of chapters that are necessary to understand the basic logic of launching and running a new innovative business as well as individual assignments that enabled the evaluation of the acquired knowledge, but more importantly, to motivate students to improve their own innovative ideas.

Along the undertaken tasks in the project, there was also the assembly of a new curriculum with a flexible structure that could be easily updated as the business environment changed, and would be applicable to the partner institutes to run their local courses, which called for the utilization of further literature and practice sources. In the creation of the structure of this new elective course to remote learning, the experiences of the “going blended” process of the EIT Digital master’s program were also integrated, as, according to Pisoni [15], the combination of online and in-class modules contributes to better learning outcomes.

Course materials were developed and shaped to reflect the methods necessary to understand the novelty and significance of the area and, at the same time, to respond to the challenge that attention is so much more difficult to hold in the online space. To trigger an appropriate level of activity from the participants, a combination of thematic elements described with various methods and different task solving frameworks was provided, similar to the education concept of Nunes, who emphasized the importance of the parallel development of practical and theoretical skills in entrepreneurship [16].

When adapting the lectures to the online setting, it was extremely important to take into consideration the shortened attention span, defined by Subramanian [17], and design flexible lectures that inspire creativity and plant the seeds for cooperative work in the live sessions.

The curriculum consists of a combination of pre-recorded, short lectures, interesting online videos (from professionals or founders of innovative ventures), and cases that introduce different phenomena in the ecosystem. The assessment was mainly based on related, individual online assignments that could be completed in the students' own pace. According to Saraswathy [11], in all of the courses that aim to teach an entrepreneurial approach, one consistent key message is that most of the breakthrough business ideas are based on the novel or exceptional handling of a problem. Therefore, the course was built on modules that guide the students through the most important steps of launching a new innovative business, from the identification of a problem up to turning it into an opportunity. It covers topics from the basic entrepreneurial theories through finance, team building, and marketing up to the social responsibility of new innovative products and processes, while introducing the most important steps of idea validation and the importance of the analysis of the business environment. These topics have already been tested in different local undergraduate and EIT Digital Master School entrepreneurial courses, but the modules were created in a form that better fit the online asynchronous format.

As shown in the previous section by the results from Bawa [13] and Papadopoulou [14], resonating with the experience of the author regarding the missed creative harmony, creating an opportunity for the participants of the online and asynchronous course became the second challenge that called for a special live session for an improvement in collaborative skills. The course methodology included a teamwork challenge, which aimed to connect the different students from different partner institutions in order to exchange thoughts about their own product concepts and develop their team ideas with a strong focusing on its positive social impact. The methodology enabled the participation of more than hundred students in the live session in small distributed teams.

The unusual approach with organizing live sessions in the framework of an online course aimed to increase the engagement of the participants by enabling networking opportunities for students from different institutions and faculties. In the formation of the live event concept, the conclusions of Keren [18] and Daskalou [5] were embedded, who independently from each other, highlighted the contribution of synchronous events or classes in the higher completion rate. Papadopoulou's [13] observations on the additional value of social network creation were important because of the unique positioning aim, while the outcomes of Lee's comparative analysis [19] regarding the significant contribution of the face-to-face modules to the improving drop-out rate prove the necessity of the extra element in the setup of the new course.

The activities of the third and fourth challenges are interrelated. In the Innochange project, the ELTE Faculty of Informatics undertook not only the launching of the online course, but also building a teacher's community that connects the I&E (Innovation and Entrepreneurship) teachers from all universities and stimulates the exchange of methodologies and experiences; moreover, it trains teachers from all partner universities who are open to running similar I&E courses in the future or contribute to them.

The course was developed in a way that enables the partner institutions—after the completion of the teacher training—to launch their own course by using the methodology, some of the theoretical modules, or parts or the entire set of assignments. The training of the teachers also had a 'learning by doing' component, since by assessing and grading the assignments together with the course designer, they could also practice the facilitation of the teamwork during the live events. The members of the I&E teacher community kept continuous track of their students' progress and took part in the assessment and grading process of the assignments. Students received continuous feedback regarding their advancement by the assessment of their assignments and the teacher community strived to answer all of their questions within a short time. In the elaboration of the assignments, the potentially changing attitudes of the students along the course were taken into consideration. The frequent feedback in relation to the individual assignments assured them that their needs were handled, and the teachers sent them tailored messages.

The fifth challenge initiated the elaboration of a more complex approach. According to the previously introduced interpretation of the author, the new course had to be positioned and distinguished among its internal and external competitors, and distinctive characteristics had to be identified and adjusted to the goals and content of the education activity. The first distinctive character was that the course strongly focused on sustainable and responsible tech solutions and their social impact, with a dedicated module and related team and individual assignments. Since the ability and willingness to leverage the positive social impact as a potential competitive factor was one of the most highlighted missions of the course, the efficiency of the related message transmission was also separately analyzed through relevant pilot research questions.

As a further distinction, the course content was adjusted to those of the previously discussed specific attitudes of the Eastern European entrepreneur; furthermore, it emphasized the unlocking of creativity instead of only forcing a risk-taking attitude. As the 12 different modules can be completed through different assignments and all of these are different puzzles to the creation of their individual idea, the bond to the already completed part of the own work will engage the students in its continuation. The flexible format is a competitive edge among students who have not completed a mandatory basic entrepreneurship course, or due to different reasons, could not complete it at the Faculty of Informatics, and attracts students from other faculties of the ELTE, since due to the online asynchronous format, they can follow it without clashing courses in their timetables. The specific addition of the live event can act as an important distinctive feature among the clearly online or MOOC-format courses. In order to emphasize the importance of the social responsibility of tech ventures, the related topic was chosen to be introduced during the live session, and the distributed teams were expected to elaborate on solutions that leveraged the social impact factor as a competitive advantage. In the scheduling of the live event, the observations of Toledo [20] were studied, who identified typical drop-out phases along the course, and stressed that before the last quarter of the course, there was an increasing threat of this phenomenon.

By leveraging the outcomes of the above described activities, the sixth challenge of providing a framework to maintain a higher completion rate might also be considered as covered, and the achievements of the systematic activities based on the identified challenges are presented in the next sections.

4. Qualitative Analysis of the Achievements along the Specific Challenges of Course Creation and Implementation

Since the launch of the Creativity, responsibility, and entrepreneurship course in September, 2021, two cohorts have completed the subject, and the autumn semester cohort of 2022 is expected to complete it at the end of January 2023.

One of the most important positioning challenges of the new online course creation was to embrace the strong mission to transmit the message of positive social impact. As there were no mature methodologies available in the literature and the observations from the on-site courses might not be applicable to examine its effectiveness in this regard, multiple methods of data collection were used to enable deeper, but exploratory analysis. Another important challenge was to gain feedback regarding the acceptance and general evaluation of the new online course and its effect on entrepreneurial attitudes, since there was no available experience regarding the shifted entrepreneurial courses at our Faculty. The collection of qualitative data was assumed to allow for the processing of different data sources in order to improve new iterations, and provide a methodological framework for experimental conclusions.

The following subsections of the article report on the achievements along the previously outlined two different dimensions of the analysis: general evaluation and entrepreneurial attitudes, and leveraging the social impact.

The examination of the different factors and research questions was carried out in a qualitative analysis due to the limitations that are indicated in the following subsections.

4.1. Data Sources of Student Feedback Analyses and Quiz Answers to Map the Efficiency of Message Transmission

4.1.1. Data Sources of General Course Evaluation and Assessment of Students' Entrepreneurial Attitudes

The first dataset came from a questionnaire created and shared by the course educator with the aim to map the students' experiences regarding the newly launched course. The respondents were expected to answer 10 different questions (see the questionnaire in Appendix A) aimed to detect whether the course had changed their entrepreneurial mindset, how satisfied they were with the different modules, how useful were the skills and the methods that they would improve, and if they were ready to build in the social impact factor when it came to their new innovative solutions. The questionnaire was available in a Google form, and before it was released, it was circulated among the members of the I&E teaching community to propose changes. The answers of the students were submitted anonymously; no personal data were collected. Students were asked to complete the form before the end of the semester (later, this questionnaire is also referred to as assignment).

Although almost three different cohorts have finished off the new course, an analyzable database was available only in the case of the cohort of spring 2022 due to low response rate and late release of the questionnaire in the case of the first cohort (2021 autumn), and the still ongoing completion process of the autumn cohort of 2022. Nevertheless, the chosen period in the case of all datasets (the below introduced Neptun survey and the quiz) was the same.

The second dataset was extracted from the Neptun Education System (central online educational administration system of ELTE) from an independent report that was available in the case of all of the courses that were conducted (partly or entirely) online in the spring semester of 2022, so the questions were created centrally by the university education coordination, as part of the teacher and course evaluation system, with the aim to assess the students' satisfaction in general. Only those answers were processed from this Neptun survey that were in relation to the content, carrier advancement, usefulness, or methodology of the course. Due to the centrally formed questions, the author aimed to systematize these answers to reinforce or justify the conclusions of the formerly introduced analysis through the special course survey.

The results of these two surveys will be presented in parallel, following the logic of the challenges exposed in the previous section, and by considering the limitations of the research that both the Neptun-based survey and the Google-based questionnaire were only available in the case of the second cohort (spring semester of 2022), therefore only allowing experimental conclusions with regard to the analyzed factors.

4.1.2. Potential Data Sources of Assessing Ability and Willingness to Leverage Positive Social Impact

The most important distinctive character of the new course was the social impact-based positioning. To assess the efficiency of the message transmission in this regard as the second dimension of the analysis, the students' willingness and ability to leverage the positive social impact were examined through three different pilot research questions with different depths of detecting the attitudes.

It was also very challenging to provide appropriate analyzable data due to the formerly described limitations, so the data from two course assignments and one question in the previously introduced questionnaire became the pillars of the answers.

In the case of the first pilot research question—(1) Are students willing to leverage the positive social impact as a determinant factor in the competition?—the answers to one question of the previously described questionnaire were processed.

The second conclusion was derived from the quiz that was released right after the live event to map the critical thinking of the students in relation to social responsibility through question (2): Is critical thinking in relation to social responsibility observable among students?

The third pilot research question—What kind of variables of social impact creation can be identified in the students' individual ideas that can help in assessing their abilities?—was examined through a thorough analysis of the students' final assignment by detecting how they elaborated on social impact in their final assignments.

4.2. General Feedback on the Creativity, Responsibility, and Entrepreneurship Course and Experimental Conclusions on Its Effect on Entrepreneurial Attitudes

In this subsection of the study, the results of the above two different surveys (specific course survey and the central Neptun survey) are introduced with the aim to learn the feedback of the students and the implementation experiences based on the answers of the cohort of spring 2022 are summarized. As outlined in the introduction, this first dimension of the analysis aimed to describe how the participants evaluated the course in general, and whether it affected their entrepreneurial attitudes.

A total of 47.8% of the students who completed (34% of those enrolled) the course in the spring semester of 2022 answered the (Google-based) survey created and shared by the course designer, and 61% of the students who completed the course in the same period (39% of those who enrolled) filled in the Neptun questionnaire.

A total of 82% of the students in the Google survey agreed that the course changed the way they thought about new opportunities.

There were a few general comments in the feedback about the course ("positive", "good knowledge about the basics of innovation"), but the majority of students reported one of the following: (1) they gained a new perspective on (business) opportunities; (2) the business related new knowledge intrigued them and they "started to think more about business models" or even "bought a book to further educate [themselves]"; and (3) they were considering starting a business. Two students mentioned the eye opening effect of the course on their awareness about the social responsibility of the businesses.

The most useful topics of the course according to the students' answers were Marketing of innovative ideas, Leadership, Team building, Financing and funding innovative ventures, USP, Ideas and validation, and Social impact strategies for tech startups. When asked about unnecessary topics, the most common answer was "Team building". Most students agreed that it could not really be learnt, but rather needed to be practiced. When asked about topics that they would also be interested in, they mentioned legal and finance, marketing and sales (persuasion) as well as social entrepreneurship and inclusive workplaces. A few of them commented that they would also love to meet "real life" entrepreneurs.

The Neptun questionnaire focused on a few very important features of the course: the logical setup of the modules was evaluated as good and very good by 87% of the participants, while this ratio in the case of the applicability of the learning management system was 84%. According to 89%, the course was adjusted to the requirements of remote learning, and the teaching materials were appropriate in the opinion of 82%. The lecturer would be recommended according to 79% of the respondents.

After completing the course, 79% of the students felt a shift in the way they were thinking about their future roles, as the Google survey data indicated.

On a scale from 1–5, the students evaluated the clarity of the purpose of the course as 4.2, and the usability of the skills and methods regarding their future career aspirations as 3.9. They were overall satisfied with the course, evaluating the attractiveness of it as 4.14 points. The answers extracted from the Neptun survey resonated deeply with these ratios, since 51% said that the purpose of the course was very clear, and a further 31% stated that it was mostly clear. A total of 77% of the respondents choose that they acquired relevant knowledge along the course.

Regarding future development ideas, a few students mentioned that it was a great opportunity to study in international teams, and would have loved to continue working with their peers (e.g., expanding a business idea). Overall, they enjoyed the experimental approach of the course and found the assignments exciting. They were also happy to welcome more case studies or to meet entrepreneurs, and—if possible—more live events.

As for the factors that can position the course (fifth challenge), social impact and its potential embedding into the innovative processes was mentioned by most of the students, which can be attributed to the strong effect of the live session.

The above presented results can be interpreted from the aspect of the completion of the challenges exposed in the previous section. The positive feedback of the students regarding the structure, the gained skills, the contribution of the course to the carrier advancement, and the change in the entrepreneurial mindset show that the adaptation of the course content and methods to the online environment was successfully achieved (first challenge).

This descriptive subsection, as the first dimension of the analysis, aimed to expand the first feedback on the course in general, with a few valuable considerations regarding its effect on the students' entrepreneurial attitudes. The limitations of the survey—as the answers only came from one cohort—only allow for the above experimental conclusions and call for further comparative analysis in the coming semesters.

4.3. The Efficiency of the Message Transmitted on Positive Social Impact

The efficiency of the message transmission in relation to the importance of positive social impact was analyzed through three different sources from the assignments, which refer to different levels of understanding. The following subsections introduce the answers to the research questions. Although some results are presented in the form of ratios, the analysis remains only qualitative due to the limitations of the available data sources relying only on the answers of one cohort.

4.3.1. Students' Willingness to Leverage Positive Social Impact as a Competitive Factor

The first pilot research question (1) Are students willing to leverage the positive social impact as a determinant factor in the competition? was analyzed based on the answers of the eighth question of the above referred (Section 4.1) questionnaire. Table 1. shows the distribution of the chosen answers:

Table 1. Willingness to leverage positive social impact based on the answers of the questionnaire.

Question//Answers	Yes	Maybe	No
Q8. Will you consider building in social impact into your innovation projects or improvement processes from the very early phase?	53%	47%	0%

All students agreed that they would consider ingraining social impact into their innovation projects or improvement processes from the very early phases, with 53% stating a very solid yes, and 47% with a maybe.

The high ratio of positive and the lack of negative answers allows us to conclude that most of the students had the willingness to leverage positive social impact. Since the basis of the analyzed samples was only one cohort and not sufficient for statistical analysis, the conclusion to the first pilot research question remains experimental.

4.3.2. Students' Critical Thinking in Relation to Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies

The second data source to describe the students' ability to leverage positive social impact was introduced by examining their knowledge regarding corporate social responsibility strategies in general. This analysis might refer to more complex thinking among the necessary terms, and searching for the answer to the second pilot research question: Is critical thinking in relation to social responsibility observable among students?

As the new course embraced the social responsibility of tech innovations as an unshakable requirement in all business processes, the study wished to report on how this message could be transmitted to the participants, mainly in comparison to students who had followed similar courses (Business fundamentals, and the Hungarian version: Innovatív vállalkozás menedzsment) through live synchronous (mandatory) classes, while the Creativity course students only attended one live session. The analysis of critical thinking in relation to positive social impact was based on a short quiz that focused on detecting the level of critical thinking when it came to social responsibility strategies.

This same quiz was shared with the students in all of the basic entrepreneurship courses, with three false or true statements, which enabled us to show the efficiency of the transmission of positive social impact in the case of the different student groups, but can also refer to the significance of the topic covered in the live event, and in general, provides a picture to the researcher on how this topic can be effectively discussed. Since the positive social impact-based positioning of the course content was identified as one of the distinctive characteristics, it might show an interesting pattern in this regard.

The idea was to share the same quiz in all three cohorts in different basic entrepreneurship courses in the spring semester of 2022 to detect observable differences in how the students understood or accepted the logic of the introduced social responsibility questions. The importance of the creation of positive social impact from the birth of the venture was explained through the related theories of Kapor [21], as it can mean a distinctive characteristic in the marketplace. The two-faced corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies of some big industrial companies were introduced through recent examples, following the classification method of CSR actions of Jung [22].

A total of 84% of the Hungarian students (in Innovative vállalkozás menedzsment course), 50% of the students in Business fundamentals, and 65% of the students in the Creativity, responsibility, and entrepreneurship course answered the quiz questions published in the last week of term.

The first statement of the quiz (Social responsibility and profitability are mutually exclusive in the case of business ventures) intended to detect how the attitudes changed due to the literature introduced on social responsibility since the beginning of the course.

A total of 98% of the Hungarian students, 69% in the Business fundamentals course, and 75% in the Creativity course gave the correct answer; in the case of the English-language courses, we could not see a considerable variance in that respect whether they were run in a live, synchronous, and/or online asynchronous format.

In the quiz, the second question (New tech ventures have to strengthen their position in the market, so they cannot focus on responsibility aspects) aimed to analyze, if due to the introduced examples, the student's opinions had changed. In the quiz, we observed that 69% of the Business fundamentals students and 80% of the Creativity course students chose the correct answer (there was no data from the course in Hungarian due to slight differences in this question). We can assume here that the message about the possibility of creating a for-profit venture, while focusing on social responsibility, was transmitted via the asynchronous course, although we have to notice here, that the lesson on social impact was introduced in the only live session.

The third statement of the quiz (Big tech companies integrate social responsibility in their business strategies) showed various answers in the case of the participants of the different courses. As Table 2. shows, 76% of the Hungarian students and 84% of the Creativity course students gave the correct answers, only 44% of the Business fundamentals' students did the same.

Table 2. Comparison of the answers in relation to critical thinking on the social responsibility strategies in the different basic entrepreneurship courses.

Ratio (%) of Correct Answers in the Quiz/Course Title	Innovatív Vállalkozás Menedzsment (in Hungarian)	Business Fundamentals	Creativity, Responsibility, and Entrepreneurship
Social responsibility and profitability are mutually exclusive in the case of business ventures	98%	69%	75%
New tech ventures have to strengthen their position in the market, so they cannot focus on responsibility aspects	N.A.	69%	80%
Big tech companies integrate social responsibility in their business strategies	76%	44%	84%

From the results of the quiz answered by the students of the three different basic entrepreneurship courses, we can see that the messages of the module on the role of social responsibility transferred well, and we could not observe major differences in the answers of the students in the new online asynchronous course compared to the answers from the participants in the live courses. This result again confirms the positive impact of a live session in an online course. Since the ratio of correct answers was high in the case of the new Creativity course, for the second pilot research question, we can experimentally conclude that the examined example showed strong critical thinking in relation to the social responsibility strategies.

4.3.3. Identifiable Variables of the Social Impact Description in Students' Innovative Ideas

The third pilot research question focused on detecting the variables to assess the students' ability to develop positive social impact. As described earlier, the topic of social responsibility in the case of new ventures was introduced during the live event where the students were expected to develop innovative ideas with strong social impact in randomly distributed teams. Through the following qualitative analysis, the study aimed to introduce the experimental findings regarding this third level of the students' knowledge in the domain of social responsibility. The basis of the analysis was the final assignments of the students in the spring semester of 2022, who had to present their responsible individual innovative ideas in the form of an attractive one-pager or a 3-min long oral pitch. Among the requirements of this mandatory assignment, an elaboration of the positive social impact was also listed.

In relation to the first two pilot research questions, experimental conclusions were reached on the students' willingness to leverage positive social impact and their critical thinking regarding CSR strategies. Here, we expand on what kind of variables can be identified regarding the social impact creation in the students' individual ideas.

A total of 69 final individual ideas were submitted (part of the completion of the assignments and the course). The analysis of the social impact description aimed to detect the variables that enable the identification of differences. One dimension in the comparison became the profit orientation of the idea, and the other dimension was a scale that showed the clarity of a social impact introduction involving the below categories:

- Positive social impact is mixed up with environmental impact and sustainability,
- Dubious or forced positive social impact;
- Clear concept on positive social impact; and
- No elaborated social impact.

As the above variables were derived and categorized from the students' final assignments, in Table 3. they might show an interesting picture of what the distribution of the answers looks like. Although the results are presented in the form of ratios, the analysis remains qualitative.

Table 3. The identified variables and their distribution in the social impact description of the students' individual ideas.

Clarity of Social Impact//Profit Orientation of the Idea	For-Profit Idea	Non-Profit Idea
Positive social impact is mixed up with environmental impact and sustainability	31.88%	1.45%
Dubious or forced positive social impact	24.64%	0
Clear concept on positive social impact	24.64%	7.25%
No elaborated social impact	10.14%	0

We could see that the majority of the students strived to form a positive social impact-based idea, although we observed that a positive environmental effect was frequently mixed up with a positive social impact. It can be considered as a positive outcome that a quarter of the students developed a really clear concept based on a positive social impact in the case of a for-profit idea. The low ratio of missing social impact descriptions justifies the willingness of students to leverage the positive social impact expounded in Section 4.3.1. Given that the answers from only one cohort does not provide sufficient data for statistical analysis, the above conclusions remain experimental, but might be worthwhile in suggesting an approach for future analyses. Regarding the third research question, variables were identified for the assessment of social impact in the final ideas that—in a tailored format—could be applied in further analyses.

5. Discussion of Methodological and Theoretical Considerations with Experimental Conclusions

5.1. Achievements in the Light of Completion Rate and Internal Attractiveness of the New Asynchronous Online Course

This subsection highlights the achievements of the new course in the InnCHANGE project.

In the first round (autumn 2021), the launch of the course was promoted among all of the students at the partner institutions, on all possible channels. Unexpectedly, a high number of students (~280) applied to the course, and 252 students officially enrolled in the course and joined the LMS (learning management system, Canvas). The high number was due to the students from the four different partner institutions. In the second round, 103 students applied, and 98 students enrolled in the course of the ELTE, since from the spring semester of 2022, teachers of the InnCHANGE partner institutions launched local courses at Babes-Bolyai University, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, and Plovdiv University Paisi Hilendarski, respectively. The cumulative number of students who completed the basic entrepreneurship courses at the three universities of the consortia exceeded the magic number of 500 in the spring semester of 2022.

As this article aimed to introduce the experiences of the newly established course at ELTE, the completion rates of the different cohorts were only presented from this institution: in the autumn semester of 2021 in the case of the pilot round; 154 of the 252 enrolled students, in the spring semester (2022); and 63 of the 98 enrolled students completed the course. In the first batch, more than 60%, and in the second batch, 15% of the students applied from partner universities.

In the second semester (spring of 2022), 15% of the students who completed the course came from other faculties of ELTE and chose the new course as an elective from the business discipline.

The high completion rates of 61% and 64% compared to the analysis in Jordan's research where the completion rates varied from 0.7% to 52.1%, with a median value of 12.6% [23], show that the measures taken to counteract the high dropout rate were efficient, and the number of applicants (82) in the third cohort of the autumn semester of 2022 proves that the new course can be positioned in the wide portfolio of different entrepreneurship courses.

5.2. Assessment of Course Implementation from the Aspect of Challenges of the Assembly and the Theoretical Considerations

The adaptation of the methods and contents to the needs of the asynchronous format—addressed earlier as the first challenge—originated from those of the experiences learned from the EIT Digital going blended process as described by Pisoni [15], and we used the concept of Daskalou [5] that suggests considering the entrepreneurial learner as a thinker, player, and doer. This approach was complemented by conceptual and methodological elements that take into consideration the differences of the Eastern European entrepreneur, following the classifications of Radnóti [3]. The 12 parts of the online course invited the students on a journey through which they could act and develop their skills as a prospective entrepreneur or intrapreneur while developing their individual ideas through different stages. The contents and methods in each lesson were nurtured by the experiences that were gained along the years of the on-site entrepreneurship courses of the consortium leader, and the learning management system (Canvas) also relied on mature and tried methodology.

The second challenge was the need to create a special module that enabled cooperation, teamwork, and networking in general, and contributed to a better learning experience. Due to the COVID-19 related restrictions in the pilot (autumn, 2021) semester, two live online events were organized, where students were offered two live lectures on the hot topics of social impact and digital transformation. Students were grouped into distributed teams (in every team, students from different institutions joined) and worked on responsible smart solutions together. Mentor teachers from the teaching community supported the teams, and students could base their contributions on the experience and knowledge they gained during the development of their own innovative ideas.

In the spring semester of 2022, a real, on-site live event was organized, where two thirds of the enrolled students participated. Student teams appreciated the unique meeting and networking opportunity, and as Keren [18] defined, signs of higher level social interactions were observable during the event. Relying on Toledo's [20] observations that were introduced in the third part, the scheduling of the live sessions in both semesters was to counteract the potentially high dropout rate in the last phase of the course.

As a special chapter, the positive social impact-based positioning was discussed during the live event. The results of the analyses provided an opportunity for experimental conclusions in relation to the analytical and developmental skills gained in this domain. Through the basis of the data on only one cohort in the different analyses, it was proven that the message of the positive social impact-based positioning was received very well. This achievement also underpins the completion of the fifth challenge regarding the creation of a unique pattern for the course. Further evidence in relation to the same challenge of distinguishing the course can be the high application levels in the second and the recently launched third round, where the ratio of local students remained with an increasing number of applicants from other faculties. These students chose the new online course over the regular one because of the flexibility of the former. The combination of the identified distinguishing factors enabled the good positioning of the course, and the positive evaluation of the course content and quality as well as the contribution to the carrier advancement showed in the surveys might envisage its sustainability.

The third challenge embraced the creation of an evaluation framework that provided continuous feedback to the students, similarly to the live and synchronous courses. The fourth challenge was about the sharing of methods, with a learning by doing approach, to train the teachers of the partner universities and support their preparation to launch their own local courses.

The assignments were set with long deadlines in order to enable the catch-up of those students who joined later from different institutions. The motivation and engagement of the students could be kept by continuous, but different types of communication actions: announcements, reminders, and individual message replies. Students received continuous feedback regarding their advancement through the assessment of their assignments

and the teaching community strived to answer all of their questions within a short time. Furthermore, the implementation of the course was a cooperative task undertaken by the teaching community.

The extremely high number of students who joined and completed the local courses confirms that the methodology and content shared with the partner universities by ELTE was worth further development and adaptation, and that all of the partners had the competencies and experience to run basic entrepreneurship courses.

With the systematic implementation of all of the above activities, in the first two cohorts, a very high completion rate (over 60%) was achieved.

Therefore, instead of finding new methods to further increase the completion rate, new elements need to be detected that can deepen the acquirable knowledge of the students, also considering the feedback from the surveys that refer to improvable contents.

The first conclusions regarding the curriculum and methodology could only partially be outlined due to the limitations of the available data resources: based on the experiences gained by the evaluation of the individual assignments, it was observed that students must delve deeper in the elaboration of their creative ideas. In the second round of the course (spring 2022), more detailed requirements were published and a one-pager or a short video pitch was required to introduce individual ideas. The weekly individual assignments in the case of a few chapters have to be reconsidered from the aspect of how they can be more interrelated with individual idea planning. The existing Faculty and EIT Digital case pools have to be connected to the course, some selected cases presented in the modules, in order to provide more entrepreneurial situations and examples.

As for ELTE, the most important benefit is that the already broad portfolio of courses that aim to form the innovative thinking and entrepreneurial mindset of students took on a new direction with the asynchronous online Creativity, responsibility entrepreneurship course that offers more flexibility for students, but does not miss the networking aspect due to the live events.

The collection of qualitative data allowed us to obtaining significant findings on how shifted courses influence the entrepreneurial attitudes of students and through which variables the observation of the students' willingness to leverage social impact is possible.

The introduced experimental conclusions might be valuable for course designers who intend to establish a new online course within any entrepreneurial or creativity domain, and are open to some hands-on experience and applicable methods from the domain of social impact-based positioning.

5.3. Further Research Opportunities

The basis of the analyses was formed from three different data sources from course assignments, and aimed to obtain feedback on the most important positioning principles of the new asynchronous course. The limitations due to the answers only being available from one cohort only allowed for experimental conclusions to be made, although the data enabled us to conduct exploratory research, which enabled the systematization of the different data along with the challenges in two different dimensions. Through the pilot research questions, different analytical aspects of the students' attitudes were explored, which can pave the way to the extension of this research in other entrepreneurship courses and cohorts, and might initiate further examination of the current conclusions. The identified variables in relation to the social impact forming ability of the students call for the detection of potential differences in the case of students' innovative ideas in the future that envisions deeper and more complex opportunities for analysis.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire—Creativity, Responsibility, and Entrepreneurship Course, Spring Cohort 2022					
Question	Answer type				
Q1. Did the course change the way how you think about new opportunities?	Yes		No		
Q2. How would you describe the above effect of the course in your own words?	textfield				
Q3. Which topics of the course are the most useful in your opinion? (Please, mark the 5 most important topics)	list of course chapters				
Q4. Which topics were less useful in your opinion? (if any, please, explain shortly)	textfield				
Q5. Are there any further topics/cases you would suggest to discuss in this course?	textfield				
Q6. Did your thinking change regarding your potential future roles due to the course?	Yes		No		
Q7. How clear was the purpose of the course?	5	4	3	2	1
Q8. Will you consider building in social impact into your innovation projects or improvement processes from the very early phase?	Yes		No	Maybe	
Q9. How useful are the skills and methods provided by the course from your career aspects?	5	4	3	2	1
Q10. In your opinion, how interesting was the course?	5	4	3	2	1
Q11. What are your main impressions regarding the course (experimental approach, new course, teacher’s attitude, etc.—everything you have not shared yet)? Positive and negative feedbacks are welcome, either.	textfield				
Q12. Other remarks, suggestions:	textfield				

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