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EVALUATING THE 'BASTAU BUSINESS' PROGRAM: IMPACTS ON ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES AND SME FORMATION⁴

The relevance of the problem is since in the state there was a need to create educational programs aimed at the creation of the proper level of entrepreneurial competencies, required to organise their own small or medium businesses. The aim is to investigate the efficiency of the educational program "Bastau Business" in the formation of entrepreneurial competencies, contextualized by existing theories and the changing demands of Kazakhstan's innovation-driven economy. The leading method to study this problem is the questionnaire method, which allows for monitoring the formation of professional entrepreneurial competencies among the graduates of the educational program and to identify the problems they face at the beginning to improve the content and focus of the educational modules. The study showed a high readiness of the graduates of the programme for further independent entrepreneurial activities, which unequivocally indicates its effectiveness. The study also helped identify a range of factors that need to be addressed when improving the educational programme for small and medium business support.

Keywords: entrepreneurial competencies; education; entrepreneurship; medium and small business; entrepreneurial activity

JEL: L26; I25; M13

1. Introduction

Information technology has become deeply integrated into education in the modern world. It enhances teaching and learning in many ways. Information technology tools like computers, software, and internet connectivity allow for more engaging and interactive lessons. Teachers

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⁴ This paper should be cited as: Akhmetova, A., Otar, E., Baigabylov, N. (2024). Evaluating the 'Bastau Business' Program: Impacts on Entrepreneurial Competencies and SME Formation. – *Economic Studies (Ikonomicheski Izsledvania)*, 33(5), pp. 42-61.

can use multimedia content to explain concepts in innovative ways. Students can access digital learning resources, collaborate on group projects remotely, and develop valuable technology skills. Information technology also enables new models of education such as blended or online learning. Leveraging information technology in education leads to heightened student engagement, personalized learning experiences, and the cultivation of technology literacy among students – critical skills for life and careers in the 21st century. With thoughtful integration guided by learning objectives, information technology will continue to transform education for the better.

The article is based on a study of the formation of entrepreneurial competencies among graduates of the “Bastau” training programme. The concept of the project is a training programme aimed at the undoubted financial and social benefits – the possibility of self-employment of graduates, as well as the opportunity to expand professional business competencies for aspiring entrepreneurs (Lackéus, 2020). The aim of the “Bastau” project is to increase the economic activity of the population through involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The basis for the development of entrepreneurial activity is the financial sustainability of the business and further investment in business development (Abudaqa et al., 2021).

The Bastau Business program originated in 2019 as a nationwide government-led initiative to promote entrepreneurship in rural areas. Its curriculum emphasizes hands-on learning and mentorship, aligning with recommendations on impactful entrepreneurship education design (Lackéus, 2020). Human capital theory underscores how programs like Bastau Business can equip participants with entrepreneurial human capital such as skills and knowledge. The theory of planned behaviour suggests entrepreneurial intentions are shaped by attitudes towards entrepreneurship, perceived feasibility, and social norms (Biney, 2023).

The Bastau Business curriculum consists of several modules focused on imparting different aspects of entrepreneurial competencies. This includes a module on business planning where participants learn skills like opportunity identification, financial projection, and business model development. Another module covers interpersonal competencies like negotiation, relationship building, and communication. Participants also complete a hands-on mentorship focused on their own business idea to gain experience-based competencies.

The relevance of the topic was conditioned by the process of entering the Kazakhstan economy into the system of the innovative competitive global environment, which requires finding new approaches to prepare modern youth for entrepreneurial activities. Unlocking and realisation the entrepreneurial potential of the nation is the basis of the institutional resource for the development of a modern economy (Wildan, Sukardi, 2020). The development of entrepreneurship, small and medium businesses in Kazakhstan depends to a large extent on professionally trained professionals (Galvão et al., 2020). An in-depth understanding of contemporary economic issues and the ability to navigate the flow of new innovative technologies significantly increase the competitiveness and professionalism of today's graduates of higher education institutions (Lapidus, 2018). Professionals today must be adapted to the dynamics of demand within the labour market and be ready to implement business projects in any sector of the economy (Cárdenas-Gutiérrez et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial competencies have been defined as the underlying characteristics such as skills, abilities, and knowledge that enable entrepreneurial performance. Key theories that have shaped our understanding include human capital theory, which emphasizes how education and experience develop entrepreneurial human capital, and the theory of planned behaviour, which examines how attitudes and perceived control influence entrepreneurial intentions and actions (Cárdenas-Gutiérrez et al., 2021).

Hence, modern vocational education should include an entrepreneurial component, which aims to prepare a specialist capable of creating and successfully running a business (Shavrovskaya, Pesha, 2021). The preparation of the population for entrepreneurial activity should create favourable conditions for the motivation and development of private entrepreneurs by providing them with support at the early stages of their formation (Kergroach, 2017; Pinchevska et al., 2022). Thus, practical orientation and the creation of new and unique ideas for student entrepreneurship in the form of academic or practice-oriented outcomes are the features of the process of engaging the population in entrepreneurial activity. Mastering such practice-oriented content is implemented through business training, business games, workshops, sociological and marketing research (Koropets, Fedorova, 2018).

Such innovative forms of entrepreneurial training sessions focus on the practical acquisition of entrepreneurial skills (Hubanov et al., 2018). Their main differences are as follows: high intensity of group interaction, active and autonomous participants, use of life experience and empathy (Coursera, 2020). During such training, the mentors share their thoughts and experiences and involve future professionals in the discussion of problems through stimulation. As a result, a model of behaviour in a specific market situation is being formed (Tolochko et al., 2020). In addition, this approach contributes to the acquisition of professional competencies and helps the specialist to solve problems independently in entrepreneurial activities (Youth Business International (YBI), 2019).

Entrepreneurship education implies such forms of education and training as formal and informal, including training for business in production, which fosters an entrepreneurial spirit and prepares to implement activities with or without commercial objectives (Diaz Vidal et al., 2021). It should be noted that the concepts of “entrepreneurship education”, “entrepreneurship development” and “entrepreneurial competence formation” do not yet have a specific commonly known definition and are often used as identical. In each case, it refers in particular to the development of character traits and personality types of the future entrepreneur, which include certain skills and patterns of effective entrepreneurial behaviour (ability to take economic risks, creativity, planning, problem-solving, managing team projects, etc.) (Chernyshova, 2017). Modern models of entrepreneurship education are implemented in institutions of higher, technical vocational, and general secondary education, through the development of entrepreneurial culture, formation of key entrepreneurial skills, special commercial and production skills on examples of “mini-enterprise” using the full cycle of its development (developing of a business plan, preparation of founding documents, marketing, commerce and the like) (Goryushkina, 2019; Azzaoui, Dyba, 2022).

This study addresses critical gaps by investigating if and how the nationwide Bastau Business training program, which originated in 2019 to promote entrepreneurship in rural areas,

actually unlocks the entrepreneurial potential of participants to meet economic diversification goals. Specifically, through a graduate tracer methodology, the authors examine three research questions surrounding competency augmentation, translation of enhanced capabilities into entrepreneurial action, and persisting challenges that constrain microventure sustainability. Findings will have important theoretical and practical implications for entrepreneurial education models, instructional design, and continuous improvement of Kazakhstan’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

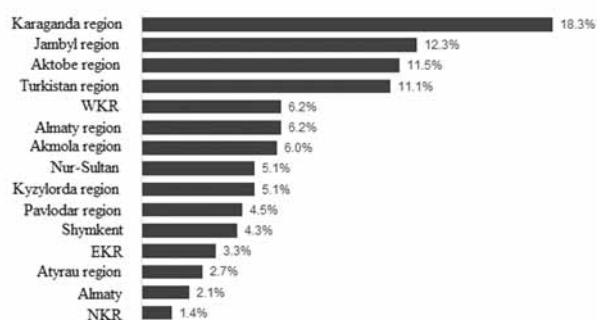
The aim of the article is to investigate the formation of entrepreneurial competencies of different segments of the population after undergoing the “Bastau” training programme. The object of the study: the process of formation of entrepreneurial competencies of young people. The analysis of scientific literature has shown a low degree of development of the problem of using training programs to increase the level of entrepreneurial competencies among the adult population. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the effectiveness of the use of educational programs for the formation of both the public business climate and individual competencies of each graduate of such a program.

2. Materials and Methods

The following research methods were used to achieve the set objectives, in particular theoretical – analysis, synthesis, comparison, systematisation, generalisation of scientific, scientific and methodological, educational literature, normative legal documents to determine the degree of scientific development of the problem of forming entrepreneurial competence of students; empirical – observation, interviews, questioning, testing, a study of products of student entrepreneurship in order to compare the experience of forming entrepreneurial competence of young students: mathematical – to quantify the results of observations and to record the results of scientific research.

A sociological survey with a representative sample was conducted. Alumni of the “Bastau” training programme participated in the survey. The geography of the survey included 14 regions and 3 cities of national importance. Regional coverage of respondents participating in the survey is presented in Figure 1.

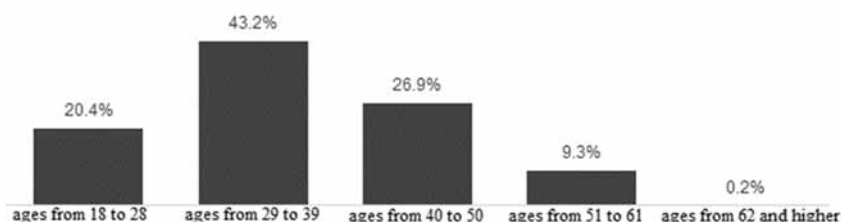
Figure 1. Regional coverage of respondents



Source: compiled by the authors based on the study.

The respondents' ages ranged from 29 to 39. This sample correlates directly with the demographic pyramid of the country's age structure and emphasises representativeness. The age distribution of respondents is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents



Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

This sample allowed the most representative study to be carried out and produced results that were consistent and unbiased. The research on the problem was carried out in three stages:

Stage I of the experiment (from 2020 to 2021) – indicative. Experimental work at this stage included the study of the process of formation of entrepreneurial competence of students; analysis of factors that may reflect the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education; determination of the criterion to be investigated; and preparation for the study. Stage II of the experiment (2021) – formative.

At the formative stage, the content of the experimental work included the development of the program of experimental work; implementation of conditions of monitoring the effectiveness of formation of entrepreneurial competence of students in the process of passing the program “Bastau”; control over the course of the educational experiment by means of questioning; analysis and processing of the obtained results during the experiment; summarising the results of the experiment.

A sample size of 500 participants was derived from the Bastau Business program's graduate database. Given a graduate population of 5,000 spanning two years, this sample size surpasses the recommended statistical power of 384 to ensure findings that represent the population within a 5% margin of error. Survey responses were meticulously sifted to retain only those participants who embarked on their entrepreneurial journey subsequent to their Bastau training, thereby omitting participants with pre-existing businesses. This filtration yielded a focused subsample of 342 'post-training entrepreneurs', forming the core dataset for in-depth analyses centred on competency evolution and new business initiation.

Stage III of the pedagogical experiment (2021) – final. The content of this stage of the experiment included systematisation and generalisation of the results of the experimental work and formulation of the conclusions of the study. In conducting statistical research, there was a requirement that the error of representativeness with a probability of 0.95% should not exceed 10%. For this purpose, a coefficient of variation of 0.3 was adopted for conducting the survey and collecting the results, an online survey was conducted to ensure the sanitary

and epidemiological safety of respondents concerning anti-covid measures. The survey was conducted electronically.

The main limitations of the study are the difficulty in identifying the results of the study due to the limited ability to attract a larger number of respondents from the regions of Kazakhstan. Due to quarantine because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some difficulties emerged in the process of research materials testing in a real production process. Google Forms were used for the survey. Data entry and processing were done using SPSS Statistics 17.0. All data are in relative terms (% of the number of people interviewed).

3. Results

3.1. Graduates' attitudes towards entrepreneurship

The main objective of the “Bastau” project is to increase the economic activity of the population through involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

Key objectives of the project:

- mass involvement of the population in entrepreneurial activities;
- support for promising entrepreneurial ideas;
- practical training, to equip participants with business skills;
- promoting entrepreneurship among young people;
- forming a business environment in rural areas.

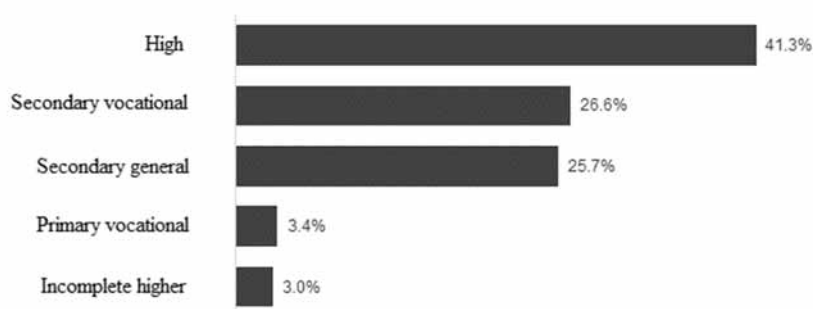
Mass involvement of the population in entrepreneurial activity can be achieved through the popularisation of an educational project among wide layers of the population through the dissemination of information about the project and results of trainees, who passed the training, by the mass media of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Support of promising entrepreneurial ideas by the state is successfully implemented by allocating state grants for business development, which can be received by the project graduates after successfully passing business projects developed by them within a particular area.

As of 31.12.2021, about 15000 people participated in the “Bastau Business” project, of which 12800 successfully completed the training and 2500 started their own business. In the future, through the involvement in the project of wide segments of the population, by opening the next streams of this project and assisting learners in drawing up business plans and their successful implementation in various fields, a qualitative solution is planned for the problem of popularisation of entrepreneurship among all segments of the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in particular, among young people and the unemployed population, which in general will contribute to the diversification of the state economy and the gradual increase in business activity of the state population.

Representatives of Kazakhstani businesses have a high level of education and more than 80% chose the answer “I wanted to have my own business”, which means that people go

consciously, not because they cannot find a job or are underpaid there. The contingent who obtains secondary general and secondary vocational education are mostly inhabitants of rural areas. The level of education of respondents is presented in Figure 3.

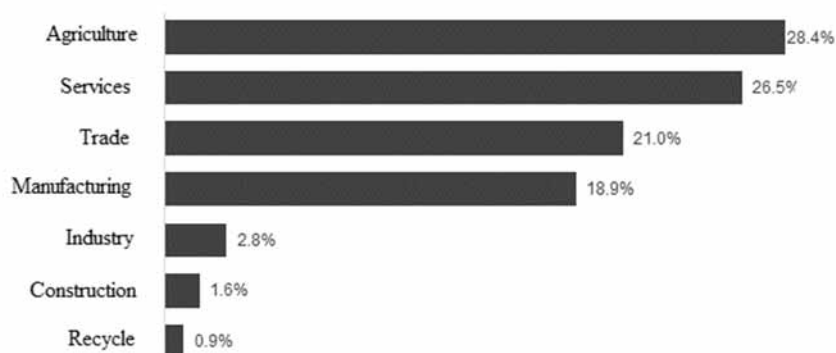
Figure 3. Respondents' level of education



Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

The broad coverage of state support in terms of training and financing has helped to diversify the country's economy. The “Bastau” programme was aimed to reduce the unemployment rate mainly in rural areas. Graduates of the training programme had the opportunity to engage in various types of business. The distribution of the areas of activity of the “Bastau” training programme students is demonstrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Distribution of students' areas of activity



Source: compiled by the authors from the study results.

Hence, agriculture and the service sector account for more than half of the types of business chosen by the trainees of the educational project. This high share of agriculture is due to the educational programme's focus mainly on the country's rural population, with the purpose of creating a quality business environment in rural areas.

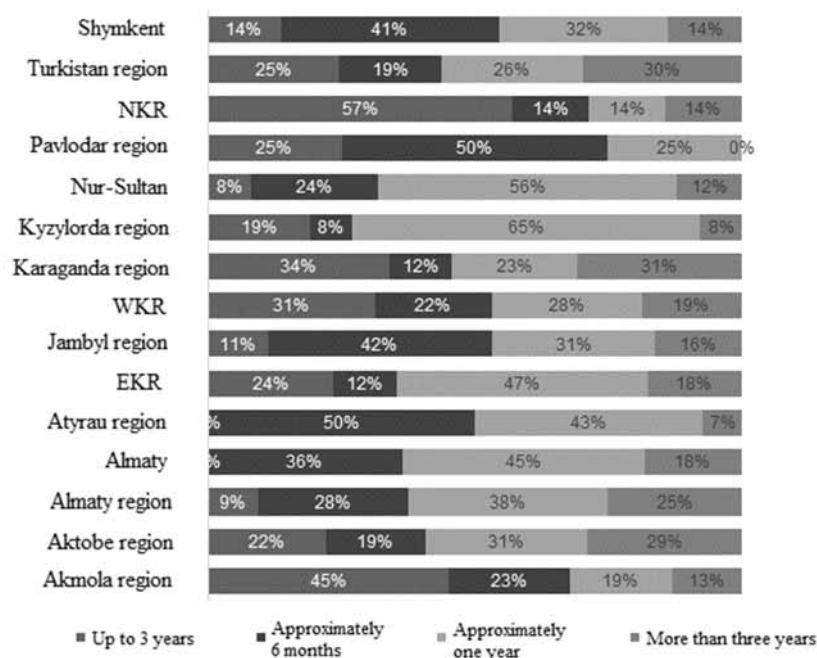
Practical training within the framework of participants' acquisition of business skills is implemented through the step-by-step development of the project trainees' business ideas under the guidance of experienced business mentors. As the agricultural sector is a priority among the “Bastau-Business” programme trainees, special attention should be paid to the practical learning outcomes of the implementation of the business projects developed by the trainees aimed at doing business in the agricultural sector.

The formation of an effective business environment in rural areas implies, above all, the creation of the necessary conditions for entrepreneurial activity in rural areas. In this context, it is necessary to adopt a set of legislative measures aimed at:

- improvement of the existing legal and regulatory framework regulating the main aspects of entrepreneurship development in rural areas;
- improving the taxation system for business entities employed in agricultural activities;
- formation of comprehensive support for business development in the agricultural sector at the state level.

In today's society, amid mobile change, businesses, regardless of their age, carry risks and opportunities to the same extent. Experienced businesses dominate in the manufacturing sector, in terms of capacity, production volume, and product recognition. The age of businesses by region is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The age of businesses by regions

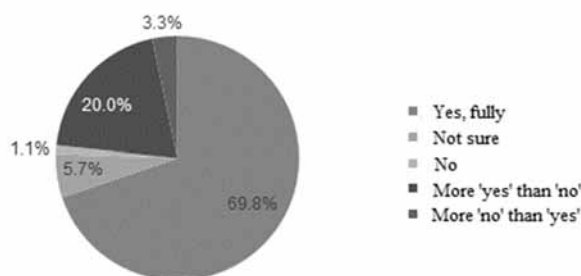


Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

Thus, the market conjecture changes on a daily basis, which could also change consumer taste, which could lead to the transfer of the production line. In the service sector, there is a situation of change amid the global trends in a short period. Trading as a traditional business carries minimal fluctuations in the business environment. It is important to note the fact that whatever the business, its development is directly dependent on the entrepreneurial behaviour of its owner.

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with their choice, the answers to which are shown in Figure 6. About 4.4% of current entrepreneurs are not satisfied with their choice of business activity.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with entrepreneurship choice



Source: compiled by the authors based on study results.

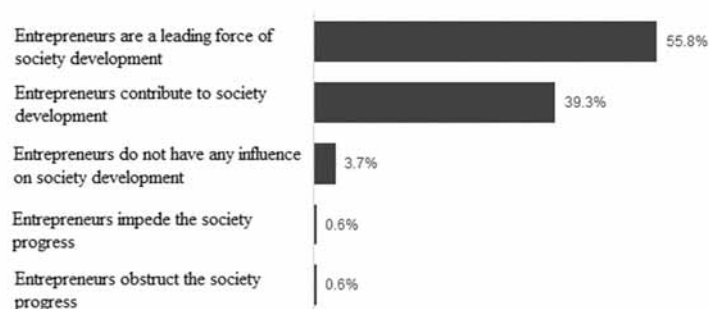
When assessing the level of satisfaction, a correlation between the regional gross product and business development in the region is noticed. If the average indicator is 70%, in the regional context it has a maximum value of 93% – Atyrau region, and a minimum value of 48% – Kyzylorda region. The remaining regions are distributed between these two regions' indicators, but more than 10 regions show a level of satisfaction of more than 70%. Based on the processed data, the overall potential for business development is high. Entrepreneurship is an initiative independent activity of people aimed at generating profit or some personal income, carried out in their own name, on their own responsibility. Therefore, the importance of being in this environment of self-employment plays a great role in the further development of own business and personal characteristics.

At the same time, it can be said that society and its specific strata are also enriched through entrepreneurial activity. In the case of consumers, they have access to new goods and services and can choose between a better or a cheaper product, depending on their income and expenses. Not everyone is ready for entrepreneurial activity, as it requires creative thinking, initiative, a propensity for innovation and non-standard methods of solving problems, the ability to engage in new activities, and a constant willingness to take risks and face uncertainty (Shcherban et al., 2022). Entrepreneurship also plays an important role in the economy of a country. It influences the presence or absence of competition and covers a large area of life. Competition enriches a country, creates new technologies, and develops sectors of the economy. A country with well-developed businesses can play a role in production and

marketing, thus increasing the income of the country and its status in the world market (Abudaqa et al., 2019).

In order to determine the role of entrepreneurship in Kazakhstani society, graduates of the Programme were asked questions in a sociological survey with five levels measuring answers. The results of the survey are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. The role of entrepreneurship in Kazakh society



Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

On average, the role of entrepreneurship in Kazakh society is assessed positively, i.e. residents of Kazakhstan are attracted to entrepreneurial activity. In Kazakhstan, more than half of the residents of the business environment believe that being an entrepreneur means contributing to the development of society and the economy.

Entrepreneurship development programmes are already being developed and actively implemented at the state level in the Republic of Kazakhstan, aimed at developing the necessary competencies to conduct entrepreneurial activities. In particular, Government Decree No. 968 of 24.12.2019 approved the “State Programme for Business Support and Development “Business Road Map 2025”. The implementation of the programme is designed for the period from 2020 to 2024, and its main tasks are:

1. Improving the conditions for financial support to small businesses.
2. Increase in production volumes in the manufacturing sector.
3. Creation of competitive industries.
4. Developing entrepreneurial competencies.
5. Establishing new business relationships.
6. Ensuring business development in an informative and analytical context.

In addition, there are several key areas of the programme to develop entrepreneurial competence:

- business support in rural areas and small towns;
- support for entrepreneurial activity in specific branches;

- reducing the currency risks of business activities;
- providing non-financial support in starting and running a business.

The state programme is implemented through financial and non-financial support from several foundations, holdings, and lending institutions, which act as operators of the programme. As part of participation in this programme, entrepreneurs have access to free training in various business areas, with the possibility of gaining or improving competencies in such areas as:

- the construction of a business plan and its consistent implementation;
- assessing the risk of doing business in a particular industry;
- receiving state support for entrepreneurial activities;
- recruitment and personnel management;
- promoting the business;
- keeping records and filing tax returns.

3.2. Prospects for graduates in entrepreneurship

Specific activities help build competencies identified as key for entrepreneurial success (Lackéus, 2020). For instance, completing a full business plan develops planning competencies. Roleplaying customer interactions in a retail context builds interpersonal competencies. Troubleshooting case studies impart problem-solving abilities. Receiving ongoing mentor guidance on launching a venture provides concrete experience leading to experiential competencies.

It is important to pay attention to basic investment skills for entrepreneurs. The starting point for building investment competence is the ability to carefully evaluate potential investment opportunities. This requires the development of critical business analysis skills to research markets, assess trends, conduct competitive analyses and identify factors that may affect the profitability of an investment over its lifetime. Budding investors should be able to identify promising opportunities in line with strategic priorities and demonstrate their viability using numerical forecasts and models. Training methodologies that involve interactive case studies of forecasting returns on various investments can sharpen analysis skills.

After identifying attractive ventures, investor-entrepreneurs must determine how to optimise the selection and allocation of investment projects to balance returns and risk. Key skills include quantifying inherent risk factors, understanding when to use aggressive high-yield opportunities and when to use stable assets to offset potential downturns and volatility. Using portfolios to manage investors' risk appetite and strategic objectives requires mathematical knowledge and risk modelling skills. Portfolio modelling exercises that demonstrate diversification strategies in practice allow you to develop these skills.

In addition to selecting investments, entrepreneurs must be adept at negotiating the terms of the deals themselves. Critical skills here include financial structuring, valuation strategies,

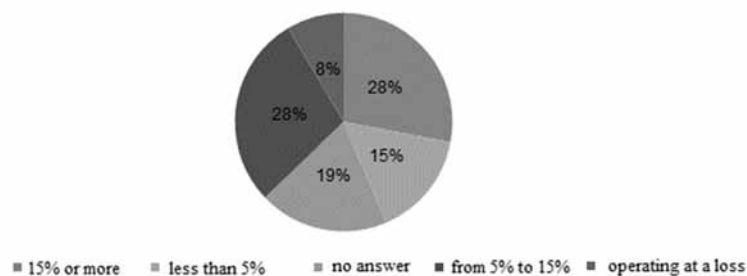
dividing ownership stakes, establishing control points and creating favourable arrangements even when assigning an interest in a venture. Training in deal-making through role-playing IPO negotiation, venture capital offers and joint ventures helps to practise this delicate skill. Finally, even the skills of selecting and structuring profitable investments must be complemented by the competencies of active investment management. This requires the ability to track performance benchmarks, identify underperformance, and determine where to double down and where to cut losses and redirect capital. Entrepreneurs can be trained to pivot through the interactive display of dynamic investment management dashboards.

According to a survey of “Bastau Business” graduates, 73% of respondents invest profits in further business development. At the same time, the share of profits in investment is not significant. Hence, only a third of graduates invest more than 15% of profits in business, i.e. the remaining 43% of graduates invest less than 15 profits, which is a rather low level of investment. This can lead to business stagnation in terms of further development. For example, given that the programme is mainly focused on rural areas where property prices are lower and less liquid compared to urban areas (cities of national importance or regional centres), the loan received will also be lower.

An average “Bastau Business” trainee is estimated to receive a loan of up to 3 million tenge. Given the average level of profitability of an estimated 30% of the investment, i.e. the size of the loan, the estimated business profit on a loan of 3 million tenge would be 900 thousand tenge per year. Therefore, if a graduate invests less than 15% of his/her profits in his/her business, the amount of investment per year would be less than 135 thousand tenge or less than 5% of his/her annual expenses. Thus, there is a risk that almost half of the graduates may face stagnation of their business, i.e. further development, and in case of business shocks (livestock mortality, market decline due to relocation, etc.) may go bankrupt altogether. It is important to invest a larger share of the profits in further business development, as a start-up business with state support will only allow the business to start at a rather low profitability level due to the low volume of the loan (Shahini et al., 2023).

At the same time, given that 8% of respondents indicated that they are already operating at a loss, taking steps to support the further development of “Bastau Business” graduates' businesses becomes relevant. The share of profits invested in the business is demonstrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Share of profits invested in business development



Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

It is noteworthy that the situation with investment in business development differs significantly across regions, which may be due to the mentality of the population or the different approaches to the training of the business coaching teams in the regions. For example, in Turkestan, West Kazakhstan, Almaty, Aktobe regions, and in Nur-Sultan city, almost every third graduate sets aside more than 15% of his/her profit for further business development.

The situation is much worse in the East and North Kazakhstan regions, where almost every fourth graduate is working at a loss. Special monitoring and a more in-depth analysis of problems are needed in these regions. A rather low level, less than 5%, of the share of profits is invested for business development in Atyrau, Kyzylorda region and the city of Almaty (Table 1).

Table 1. Share of profits invested in business development by region (%)

	15% or more	less than 5%	no answer	from 5% to 15%	operating at a loss
Akmola region	29	10	29	23	10
Aktobe region	34	12	17	29	7
Almaty region	35	19	19	19	6
Almaty	18	36	9	18	18
Atyrau region	21	43	21	0	14
EKR	12	12	12	41	24
Jambyl oblast	27	13	19	37	3
WKR	34	19	9	28	9
Karaganda region	26	15	25	22	13
Kyzylorda region	19	35	4	38	4
Astana	35	19	23	19	4
Pavlodar region	4	4	52	26	13
NKR	14	0	43	14	29
Turkestan region	39	9	11	39	4
Shymkent	24	19	19	29	10

Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

The reasons for people to participate in the “Bastau Business” programme may be financial problems, the programme's widespread among the population, or a real desire to run their own business. The survey showed that almost one in four of those who had to participate in the programme because of financial or other problems are now operating at a loss. However, a third of these participants invest more than 15% of their profits in the development of their business.

At the same time, a fairly low level of those operating at a loss is observed among graduates who took part in the “Bastau Business” programme when they received a partnership offer (i.e. had specific marketing) or who deliberately wanted (purposefully) to run their own business. This indicates that citizens who consciously wish to have their own businesses build a better business policy and become more successful compared to those who feel a high level of material need or who became participants in the programme accidentally. The second group of citizens does not run their businesses with medium- and long-term business development in mind, spending the profits on personal needs (Table 2).

Table 2. Share of profits invested in business development, taking into account how the graduate became an entrepreneur (%)

	15% or more	less than 5%	no answer	from 5% to 15%	working at a loss
Forced to do so because of material or other problems	32	5	20	20	23
Received an offer of partnership	25	31	6	31	6
Accidentally, under the influence of circumstances (influenced by family, etc.)	15	19	15	38	15
I wanted to have my own business	29	16	20	28	7

Source: compiled by the authors based on the study results.

As for graduates' plans for business expansion, there is a positive trend. For example, about 66% of respondents say they plan to expand their business. At the same time, one in five say that they do not plan to expand their business, and 4% say they will downsize. Thus, almost one in four graduates has no plans to expand their business. In this regard, it is necessary to introduce short-, medium- and long-term lectures on doing business into the training modules for “Bastau Business” programme participants. This in turn will help graduates to build and maintain a step-by-step business development strategy.

The state of graduates' psychological state of mind regarding satisfaction with the chosen type of business also has a noticeable effect on the value of the share of profits they are willing to invest in business development. For example, graduates who indicated that they are completely satisfied and rather yes, compared to other graduates, save more for business investment from the profits received. At the same time, one in three graduates who indicated that they were not satisfied with their choice of niche operated at a loss. These processes occur, because not being satisfied with running their business for one reason or another, the entrepreneur ends up not planning to develop it further at all and invest in it accordingly.

The "Bastau Business" program appears to utilize a comprehensive entrepreneurship curriculum spanning critical competencies needed for new venture success. The breadth of topics covered across modules suggests thoughtful design aimed at building well-rounded competencies. Specifically, the training program includes dedicated modules focused on business planning, financial management, marketing, interpersonal communication, negotiation, and problem-solving abilities. Walking entrepreneurs through this diverse range of entrepreneurial activities indicates intentional curriculum planning by the program developers.

Additionally, the highly practical, hands-on nature of the instructional methodologies is a strong suit of the Bastau Business educational experience. Relying heavily on experiential learning via real-world simulations, case study analyses, mentor guidance, and learn-by-doing project development is an impactful way to impart entrepreneurial skills. These approaches align with pedagogical best practices that promote active skill-building through applied challenges. The positive self-assessments from graduates regarding improved competence levels validate that these interactive activities were beneficial in unlocking their entrepreneurial potential.

However, the study data also reveals some gaps in the program materials when it comes to adequately promoting longer-term strategic thinking. The finding that 25-45% of graduates struggle with appropriately reinvesting profits and planning business growth trajectories indicates a need for better integration of modules focused on scaling existing operations. While opportunity spotting and initial planning seem well-addressed, materials could be strengthened to stress future-oriented decision-making equal to early-stage considerations.

The Bastau Business teaching methodologies leverage proven approaches like project-based learning via mentorship for impactful entrepreneurial education. And the breadth of critical competencies covered is commendable. As the program continues to mature to address the growth limitations noted by researchers, the instruction is sure to produce even more well-rounded, business-ready graduates through its fundamentally sound experiential approach. Maintaining relevance through continuous improvement while retaining core interactive activities should be the twin priorities moving forward.

4. Discussion

In a developed society, the share of small and medium businesses (hereinafter referred to as SMB) in the structure of the gross domestic product (GDP) is quite high. The study shows that there is a high degree of sympathy for entrepreneurship in society. M. Lackeus (2020) in his study also notes the positive attitude of society towards entrepreneurship. Satisfaction with work is an integrative indicator reflecting well-being or dysfunction in the workforce. This indicator contains assessments of interest in the work performed, satisfaction with relationship with colleagues, management, and the level of aspirations for professional activity. International experience shows that for high school students, it is advisable to introduce the basics of economics through a practice-oriented approach, case studies, and other methods that are used in the study of entrepreneurship in general (Bocheliuk et al., 2022). These results are confirmed by the research of foreign scientists, namely C. Jones, K. Penaluna and A. Penaluna (2019).

The subject “Basics of Entrepreneurship and Business” provides for the acquisition of regular knowledge of the basics of entrepreneurship, economics, management, marketing, and the development of entrepreneurial thinking, an active lifestyle, and the skills needed to organise further independent activities in the modern market environment. “Bastau Business” programme participants should involve their own children in their business in order to effectively pass on the business as a legacy. Children's interest in their parents' businesses contradicts the findings of S. Bridge (2017). One of the important factors of successful business development is the sales market, which in turn depends on the potential of consumers as well as the existence of competition. In this study, “Bastau Business” graduates were asked about the existence of competition in the market. It is worth noting that competition is quite a significant factor that can negatively affect the development of any business, especially start-ups with small budgets. This position of respondents contradicts the data given in the study by H. Advance (2019).

The survey demonstrated a high level of uniqueness of “Bastau Business” projects in the areas. For example, according to the graduates' survey, 12% said that there was no

competition in their chosen niche. Thus, it can be concluded that one in ten projects is unique in its way. In general, this is due to the fact that the majority of projects are located in rural areas where small businesses are poorly developed, especially in the service sector (Shahini et al., 2022). This situation is due to the small market (small number of inhabitants in the villages) and the lack of capital to start a business. Many inhabitants of villages travel to a district or regional centres to purchase goods and obtain necessary services (Almujaini et al., 2021). Unique types of business for rural areas include hairdressing salons, dry cleaners, saunas, household chemicals, treatment rooms, and breeding of traditional pets (rabbits, turkeys, etc.). In addition, most of the above-mentioned types of business projects can have significant competition in big cities. Such data contradict the research of foreign scientists, in particular G. Azanza et al. (2017).

Effectiveness was evaluated by mapping modules and activities to targeted entrepreneurial competencies and surveying graduates on their perceived gains across these competencies. For instance, 79% indicated that the business planning module enhanced their skills in opportunity recognition and risk assessment. This data suggests that the training curriculum is adeptly designed to cultivate a variety of pertinent competencies through practical, hands-on learning. Additionally, a correlation between self-reported competency gains and entrepreneurial outcomes such as starting a business revealed a significant positive impact (Sorokin et al., 2022). This finding underscores that heightened perceived competencies correspond with increased entrepreneurial activity post-program completion.

Businesses were segmented based on their operational age into startups (less than 1 year), emerging ventures (1-3 years), and mature businesses (beyond 3 years), drawing from established growth stage frameworks (John et al., 2023). Challenges differ across these categories, particularly for nascent ventures grappling with processes and market positioning, which implies that the business owner's competencies play a pivotal role during these stages (Grimes, Millea, 2011).

Profit reinvestment categories were delineated through a Delphi method, involving consultation with 10 seasoned microfinance professionals in Kazakhstan. The threshold for low reinvestment was set at less than 15%, influenced by standard profit margins observed in microenterprises and the minimum reinvestment recommendations sourced from our expert panel.

A matrix cross-referencing business motivation against specific training modules completed was created based on in-depth interviews with a representative subset of 100 participants. Patterns emerged from this analysis: participants driven by financial needs predominantly completed the accounting module, whereas those motivated by business opportunities were inclined towards the marketing module (Zahra, Welter, 2008).

At the same time, according to the survey, more than 60% of the respondents note a high level of competition, which may subsequently become a significant psychological barrier to the development of their business. In this regard, the programme concept implies that the main emphasis on the selection of business projects will be aimed at the fact that they should be quite unique and not have a high level of competition. For this purpose, the programme operator, together with the local executive body, needs to conduct an ongoing market analysis and identify niche projects. Worth mentioning, that “Bastau Business” graduates can also be

attracted to existing local business projects. For example, to have a graduate of the programme produce raw materials for a nearby manufacturing facility or provide services to a larger business. This will ensure a steady market for the product.

Concurrent data from 100 participants who were business proprietors prior to the Bastau program highlighted marginal competency enhancement. A mere 22% acknowledged proficiency augmentation in recognizing opportunities, contrasting sharply with 69% of post-training entrepreneurs. Such stark differences bolster the assertion that it is predominantly the Bastau training, rather than inherent participant qualities, that facilitated competency augmentation and entrepreneurship among the majority of the graduates.

Regarding market analysis, the study revealed that 7% of graduates are not aware of the existence of competition in their niche, which is not acceptable for a successful business manager. Therefore, strengthening market analysis as part of the training modules for the programme participants is necessary. Regarding the impact of the entrepreneurial age, there is also a positive correlation in terms of business expansion. The older the business, the higher the share of those who plan to expand and the lower the share of those who plan to downsize. Such a trend is also mentioned in the study by A. Penaluna and K. Penaluna (2021).

As the discussion indicates, nearly one-third of Bastau Business graduates reported difficulties with market oversaturation and high competition. This aligns with thesis 1, suggesting that competency building alone is insufficient if competitive barriers pose significant hurdles to new venture success. Broader interventions may be needed to facilitate market entry and growth for aspiring entrepreneurs, such as access to finance to enable differentiation and policies to ease competitive pressures (Lagotyuk, 2023). Additionally, incorporating content on analyzing industry dynamics into training programs could better equip individuals to navigate competitive landscapes.

Although graduates invest marginally more in the trade sector than in other sectors, their business expansion opportunities are lower than in other sectors. Overall, there are no significant differences in terms of business expansion plans by industry. However, manufacturing, agriculture, and construction have the highest proportion of business expansion as compared to other sectors. This structure of business prospects contradicts the findings of L. V. Lapidus (2018).

It is worth noting that graduates have a fairly correct approach to measures to outperform their competitors. Thus, the majority of respondents note that in order to increase competitiveness in the market it is necessary to improve the quality of goods produced and services provided. At the same time, graduates argue that price reduction and marketing tools can also be effective. Support for graduates of the programme in the future can be taken up by branches of the district chambers of entrepreneurs with the involvement of the regional chamber of entrepreneurs by engaging experts (larger entrepreneurs in the region) and borrowing their experience of effective work. The relevance of sales market issues and availability of competition for “Bastau Business” graduates is confirmed by the results of the survey when asked about the main difficulties in doing business. Almost one in three mentions the problem of oversaturation of the market and high competition. At the same time, graduates mention the problem of high-interest rates on loans. This problem is not relevant, as a loan under the “Bastau Business” programme is issued at a low-interest rate of

about 6% per annum. Given that the question was asked about the difficulties of doing business in the country, it is likely that graduates answered for all entrepreneurs in general.

5. Conclusions

The study concluded that the "Bastau Business" training programme has proven effective in developing professional entrepreneurial competencies among citizens of Kazakhstan. The programme not only contributes to building new skills necessary for business operations, but also aims to improve the overall entrepreneurial environment. The research demonstrated that the acquisition of core entrepreneurial competencies requires abilities like gathering and critically analyzing information, finding compromises, conducting business negotiations, continuous learning, and adapting to changing business conditions. The "Bastau Business" curriculum facilitates the development of these key competencies.

When defining the components of entrepreneurial competence, it is important to consider the specific entrepreneurial activities and niches. The study showed that modern information technologies can be useful tools in developing entrepreneurial skills for diverse populations in the "Bastau Business" programme. Using IT can serve the dual purpose of improving both technology competencies and the latest approaches for organizing and running businesses. Therefore, the "Bastau Business" programme has the potential to become an effective mechanism for enhancing professional entrepreneurial competencies among citizens. While graduates are currently competent in selecting a business niche and drafting plans, the focus can shift to building profitable investment abilities as the next stage of advancing entrepreneurship education. The programme may also benefit from ongoing monitoring and improving the quality of training materials to address the evolving needs of participants. The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that the systematised theoretical ideas and generalised practical experience of forming entrepreneurial competence can be creatively used in the process of forming this competence among students of higher educational institutions.

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