

Influential Factors on Entrepreneurial Competencies in Thai Community Development Program Students: A Study in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract – While there has been growing interest in fostering entrepreneurial skills among students, research is scant on the factors influencing these competencies in Thai higher education settings. To address this gap, this study focused on 198 community development majors at Rajabhat University in southern Thailand. It examined the impact of individual characteristics and engagement in extracurricular activities on their entrepreneurial competencies. The study posed two hypotheses: 1) Individual characteristics, such as age, gender, and family income, influence the entrepreneurial skills of these students; 2) There is a positive correlation between students' engagement in learning-enhancing activities and their entrepreneurial skills.

Data were collected through a survey, distributed via stratified sampling, and analysed using a range of statistical methods including t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Chi-square tests, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

The findings revealed high levels of student engagement in extracurricular activities such as club membership and event attendance. Performance metrics indicated strong entrepreneurial competencies among the students. Factors like age, gender, academic performance, family income, educational environment, and chosen field of study were found to significantly influence these competencies. Importantly, a strong correlation was observed between students' engagement in extracurricular activities and competencies like innovation, risk-taking, proactivity, competitiveness, and work independence. This study offers valuable insights into the roles of individual characteristics and extracurricular engagement in shaping entrepreneurial competencies among Thai university students.

Keywords – Entrepreneurial competencies, community development program students, Thai higher education, Rajabhat University.

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1. Introduction

Education is a pivotal force that shapes a nation's evolution and opens doors for social, political, and environmental progress. Effective educational management is crucial for nurturing a highly skilled and adaptable workforce that can meet the challenges of our rapidly changing world.

Recognizing this importance, the Thai government has implemented policies to enhance the educational system. These policies prioritize hands-on, work-integrated learning and foster partnerships between educational institutions and businesses.

The aim is not only to prepare young people for employment but also to equip them with the entrepreneurial skills they will need, all while providing robust support systems to aid them in their future career journey [1].

Rajabhat University, a higher education institution deeply committed to community development, offers a specialized undergraduate program in Community Development that aligns with national development goals. Employing a work-integrated learning approach, the program aims to produce multifaceted professionals capable of contributing to the public and private sectors, as well as becoming community leaders and local entrepreneurs. To realize this vision, the university integrates academic rigor with practical experiences, including classroom instruction, academic events, on-campus extracurriculars, collaborative projects with businesses, and fieldwork in real community settings. Students are encouraged to immerse themselves in local communities, collecting and analysing data to propose collaborative solutions that benefit the broader community. A key component of this holistic educational approach is the community research course, which equips students with market-relevant skills and competencies while also fostering entrepreneurial talents.

Promoting entrepreneurship among students is a key strategy aligned with Thailand's higher education objectives to cultivate a skilled and adaptable workforce. Entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in driving economic growth, diversifying income streams, and fostering corporate innovation, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, instilling entrepreneurial skills in students is essential for their career readiness. While a degree in community development may not necessarily lead to business ownership, the educational experience itself can nurture entrepreneurial competencies. For example, the Community Development program at the Regional Rajabhat University in Southern Thailand serves as a foundation for cultivating these skills. Assessing the level of students' entrepreneurial abilities and identifying the factors that enhance them are crucial steps. This informs curriculum design and instructional methods, ensuring that graduates are equipped with entrepreneurial skills that can benefit not only their own career trajectories but also contribute to value creation in businesses at both national and international levels.

The research objectives are twofold. First, the study aims to evaluate the entrepreneurial skills of students majoring in Community Development at Regional Rajabhat University in the Southern Region. Second, it seeks to explore the relationship between individual characteristics and classroom engagement among these Community Development majors, and how these factors correlate with their entrepreneurial abilities.

2. Literature Review

The undergraduate curriculum in Community Development at Suratthani Rajabhat University aims to cultivate well-rounded graduates equipped with knowledge, critical thinking abilities, and collaborative skills. Focused on ethical and moral principles, the program prepares students to become self-reliant, equipping them with the vocational skills needed to create jobs, generate income, and participate in community-based entrepreneurship. In doing so, it lays a robust foundation for national development. The curriculum integrates employability skills, encompassing specialized knowledge, procedural techniques, and tools for holistic development, as well as fostering teamwork. Students are encouraged to adopt a positive attitude toward collective endeavors, and they acquire planning and design skills that enable creative and productive work. These competencies collectively contribute to paving the way for their future professional success [2].

Entrepreneurial competency refers to a combination of potential, behavioral tendencies, and attributes that include knowledge, skills, motivation, and other personal characteristics [3]. These competencies are crucial for effectively engaging in business activities to either meet or exceed predefined goals [4]. The five core components vital for entrepreneurship are managerial independence, innovation, proactive work, competitiveness, and risk-taking. These elements contribute to the creation of new products and services, the identification of business opportunities, and improving competitive standing [5]. Effective entrepreneurship also involves participatory activities, fostering relationships among stakeholders to create mutual understanding [6]. The participatory process comprises four steps: 1) participation in decision-making for policy formulation and option evaluation; 2) participation in implementation according to established policies; 3) participation in benefit realization; and 4) participation in evaluation to align business activities with goals and improve future efficiency [7].

Based on this framework, the research proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Students majoring in community development at regional state universities in the southern region display various entrepreneurial competencies influenced by different personal variables.

H2: There is a correlation between the level of student participation in activities that promote learning and their entrepreneurial competencies among community development majors at regional state universities in the Southern Region.

3. Methodology

Within the Thai higher education context, this study centered on fourth-year undergraduate students majoring in Community Development in southern Thailand. Its objective was to explore the impact of individual characteristics and engagement in extracurricular activities on the development of their entrepreneurial competencies. Quantitative data analysis techniques were utilized to scrutinize the survey data that was gathered. Details regarding the data collection process, research instrument, and data analysis procedures are elaborated below.

3.1. Data Gathering

The population under study consisted of fourth-year undergraduate students majoring in Community Development Program of Rajabhat University at Nakhon Si Thammarat, Suratthani, Songkhla, Yala and Phuket totaling 409 students. To ensure a robust sample for analysis, a sample size of 198 students was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's [8] formula for sample group size calculation, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 0.05. The sampling method employed a stratified random approach based on university levels, followed by a simple random sampling procedure in accordance with the respective universities' guidelines [9].

3.2. Research Tools

In this study, research tools were deployed in the form of a comprehensive questionnaire organized into four distinct sections. The first section focused on gathering respondents' personal information and demographic details.

The second section assessed the level of engagement in learning activities, covering four dimensions: participation in decision-making, operational activities, receiving benefits, and evaluation.

The third section delved into students' entrepreneurial competencies, examining innovation, risk-taking, proactive work, competitiveness, and autonomy in management.

Lastly, the fourth section included open-ended questions to solicit additional suggestions and comments from respondents, thereby enriching the quantitative data obtained through the structured questionnaire with qualitative insights.

To ensure the questionnaire's reliability and data dependability, a preliminary test was conducted with a separate sample of 30 students not included in the main study group. The assessment of data dependability was accomplished through the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, resulting in a reliability score of 0.918 for learning activity participation and 0.883 for entrepreneurial competency.

Subsequently, the primary data collection was undertaken, involving a total of 198 questionnaire sets from the main study sample.

3.3. Data Analysis Process

As described in more detail below, the data analysis procedure included a number of analyses, including those of respondents' personal information, student engagement levels, comparisons, and relationships.

3.3.1. Analysis of Personal Information of the Respondents

The examination of respondents' personal information encompassed the utilization of percentages. This analysis covered various aspects such as gender, age, average scores, average monthly family income, educational institution, family/parents' occupation, family business, membership in clubs, participation in extracurricular university activities, and frequency of involvement in university activities.

3.3.2. Analysis of the Students' Level of Participation

The analysis of data pertaining to learning activities and entrepreneurial competencies among students majoring in Community Development at regional universities included the computation of both the mean and standard deviation.

3.3.3. Comparative Analysis

To compare the personal information of students with their level of participation in learning activities and entrepreneurial competencies, the study employed the t-test and one-way ANOVA for data analysis. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3.3.4. Analysis of the Relationship

To investigate the correlation between students' engagement in learning activities and their entrepreneurial competencies, the study conducted a Chi-square test. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

4. Results

The results for the sample group of 198 individuals are summarized as follows:

Table 1. Results of personal information analysis for the sample group

Results of Personal Information Analysis	Quantity	Percentage
1. Gender: Female.	139	70.20
2. Age: 21-22 years old.	112	56.60
3. Average scores: 3.01-3.50.	75	37.90
4. Average monthly family income: 15,001-20,000 baht.	75	37.90
5. Occupation of family/parents: Farmers.	114	57.60
6. Institution: Songkhla Rajabhat	61	30.80
7. Family business: None.	132	66.70
8. Membership in clubs or participation in university activities: Members of clubs or participated in activities.	131	66.20
9. Frequency of participation in university activities: More than 4 times per semester.	83	41.90

Table 1 provides insightful data regarding the personal information of our sample group. A significant majority of respondents, comprising 70.20%, are female, totaling 139 individuals. In terms of age distribution, the majority, constituting 56.60%, fall within the 21-22 years old category, totaling 112 respondents. When considering academic performance, a substantial proportion of participants, accounting for 37.90%, achieved an average score within the 3.01-3.50 range, totaling 75 respondents. In addition, a noteworthy 30.80% of respondents are enrolled at Songkhla Rajabhat University, totaling 61 individuals.

When exploring extracurricular engagement, the data reveals that a substantial 66.20% of students are either club members or actively participate in university activities, totaling 131 respondents.

Furthermore, 41.90% of students engage in university activities more than four times per semester, totaling 83 individuals. In the context of family background, 57.60% of respondents' family/parents are engaged in farming, comprising 114 individuals. Examining income levels, a substantial 37.90% of students' families earn a monthly income falling in the range of 15,001-20,000 baht, totaling 75 respondents.

Lastly, 66.70% of students' families do not own a business, representing the largest share at 132 individuals. These statistics provide a comprehensive view of our sample group's personal attributes and demographics.

Table 2. The level of participation in learning activities of students in the Community Development program at the southern region Rajabhat University

Level of participation in learning activities of students Mean	\bar{x}	S. D.	Level of Participation
1. Decision-making	4.09	0.58	High
1.1 Students participate in providing suggestions for the operation of activities with community professors or team members.	4.20	0.65	High
1.2 Students participate in planning and prepare for activities.	4.07	0.73	High
1.3 Students participate in conducting activities while receiving clear assignments.	4.11	0.65	High
1.4 Students engage in contacting and coordinating with members to participate in activities.	4.06	0.72	High
2. Operational Practices	4.02	0.61	High
2.1 Students actively participate in carrying out activities	4.24	0.61	Highest
2.2 Students contribute financial support, monetary funds for activities.	3.91	0.79	High
2.3 Students contribute material and equipment support for activities.	3.90	0.78	High
2.4 Students provide guidance or serve as advisors for team members in activities.	4.01	0.73	High
2.5. Students participate in coordinating and communicating with external organizations.	3.97	0.78	High
3. Benefits Received	4.06	0.61	High
3.1 Students receive benefits from participating in activities, such as receiving financial support from external sources, earning income from selling goods, receiving compensation or rewards, etc.	3.89	0.93	High
3.2 Students gain respect and acceptance from team members or the community.	4.01	0.74	High
3.3 Students experience personal development through participation in activities.	4.10	0.67	High
3.4 Students feel proud to be part of organizing activities and contributing to the community or team members.	4.14	0.65	High
3.5 Team members or the community that students participate in activities with exhibit strong camaraderie and receive full development.	4.18	0.64	High
4. Evaluation	4.12	0.60	High
4.1 Students actively observe the work of the community or external organizations involved in the activities.	4.06	0.62	High
4.2 Students participate in evaluating the satisfaction of the organized activities.	4.14	0.68	High
4.3 Students contribute to monitoring, improving, and addressing any deficiencies in the activities as guidelines for future endeavors.	4.15	0.68	High
Overall	4.07	0.54	High

As displayed in Table 2, the analysis of student participation in learning activities within the Community Development program is segmented into four key aspects: Decision-making, Implementation, Benefits, and Evaluation. Here are the findings:

1. Decision-making: Students exhibit a high level of involvement in decision-making processes, particularly in offering suggestions for the operation of activities and collaborating with teachers, communities, or team members. The average score in this category is 4.20, with a standard deviation of 0.65.

2. **Implementation:** Students also show a high level of participation in the implementation phase of learning activities. Notably, the highest rating is in the item where students actively engage in activities. The average score for this aspect is 4.24, with a standard deviation of 0.61.

3. **Benefits:** Students are highly involved in reaping the benefits of learning activities, displaying a strong sense of unity and comprehensive development within their teams or communities. The average score for this category is 4.18, with a standard deviation of 0.64.

4. **Evaluation:** Lastly, in terms of evaluation, students are actively involved in monitoring and

improving activities, and they address any shortcomings as guidelines for future events. The average score in this aspect is 4.15, with a standard deviation of 0.68.

These results indicate that students in the Community Development program at Rajabhat University are not just passive learners but are highly engaged in various aspects of their educational experience. This high level of participation likely contributes to their well-rounded entrepreneurial competencies as evidenced in Table 3.

Table 3. Level of entrepreneurial competencies of Community Development students at the southern region Rajabhat University

Entrepreneurial Competencies of Community Development Program Students	\bar{x}	<i>S. D.</i>	Level of Participation
1. Innovation	4.11	0.59	High
1.1 Students have innovative ideas in presenting work or working with team members consistently.	4.03	0.75	High
1.2 Students do not like to follow others or imitate others' work.	4.24	0.67	Highest
1.3. Students have the ability to think and find multiple directions and perspectives.	4.11	0.71	High
1.4 Students can quickly and effectively come up with solutions and have the highest response rate.	4.04	0.69	High
1.5 Students can creatively integrate various disciplines and apply them appropriately within limited time.	4.16	0.68	High
2. Risk-taking	4.04	0.61	High
2.1. Students consider risks in various activities beforehand.	4.06	0.64	High
2.2 Students have multiple alternative options in managing risks in activities.	3.96	0.76	High
2.3 Students are ready to take risks in every opportunity, even if they lack knowledge, they will make an effort without hesitation.	4.09	0.72	High
3. Proactiveness	4.13	0.58	High
3.1 When there are activities in the classroom or in the field, students are enthusiastic without the need to be persuaded by their peers.	4.17	0.60	High
3.2 Students can analyze systematically and understand the objectives of every task they undertake.	4.11	0.68	High
3.3 Students are always the ones who take action before their team members.	4.10	0.70	High
4. Competitiveness	4.02	0.69	High
4.1 Students enjoy competition to achieve the success they expect.	4.07	0.78	High
4.2 Students participate in competitions organized by the university or external organizations when opportunities arise.	3.98	0.78	High
4.3 Students often seek techniques to win competitions and defeat their opponents.	3.94	0.88	High
4.4 If students encounter obstacles during work or competition, they find ways to resolve them and produce the best outcomes.	4.10	0.70	High
5. Autonomy in Task Management	4.17	0.57	High
5.1 In activities, students give autonomy to their team members in decision-making regarding assigned tasks.	4.17	0.66	High
5.2 Students believe that the best outcomes occur when they make decisions themselves and take action.	4.12	0.68	High
5.3 Students provide freedom of expression to their team members in fully expressing their opinions regarding work.	4.21	0.65	Highest
Overall	4.09	0.55	High

As presented in Table 3, the entrepreneurial competencies of students in the Community Development program span five dimensions: innovation, risk-taking, proactive work, competitiveness, and autonomy in task management. Each dimension presents the following findings:

1. Innovation: Students generally display high levels of innovative competencies. The standout aspect here is their reluctance to imitate or copy others' work, which scored at the highest level. The average score for innovation is 4.24, with a standard deviation of 0.67.

2. Risk-taking: Overall, students show a strong willingness to take risks, even when they lack prior knowledge in a particular area. This dimension has an average score of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.72.

3. Proactive work: Students exhibit a high degree of enthusiasm in participating in classroom and extracurricular activities, indicating strong proactive work competencies.

The average score for this dimension is 4.17, with a standard deviation of 0.60.

4. Competitiveness: Students are highly competent in dealing with challenges and obstacles, always seeking to produce the best outcomes. This dimension has an average score of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.70.

5. Autonomy in task management: Students demonstrate high levels of autonomous task management. Notably, they score highest in allowing team members freedom of expression in work tasks. The average score for this dimension is 4.21, with a standard deviation of 0.65.

These results suggest that students in the Community Development program are well-rounded in terms of entrepreneurial competencies, excelling in multiple dimensions including innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, competitiveness, and autonomy.

Table 4. Summary of the Entrepreneurial competency hypothesis testing for students in the Community Development program at the southern region Rajabhat University

Variable	Innovation	Risk-taking	Proactive work	Competitiveness	Autonomy	Overall	Results of Hypothesis Testing
Hypothesis 1: Different personal factors have an impact on the entrepreneurial competency of students in the Community Development program, Rajabhat University in the Southern Region							
Gender	0.400	0.893	0.263	0.115	0.970	0.686	<i>Not supported</i>
Age	0.300	0.081	0.203	0.990	0.377	0.285	<i>Not supported</i>
Average score	0.066	0.923	0.520	0.169	0.821	0.625	<i>Not supported</i>
Average monthly family income	0.209	0.009*	0.029*	0.142	0.131	0.062	<i>Not supported</i>
Educational institution	0.533	0.493	0.813	0.768	0.922	0.793	<i>Not supported</i>
Occupation of family/parents	0.121	0.261	0.554	0.067	0.028*	0.130	<i>Not supported</i>
Family's business ownership	0.657	0.514	0.708	0.728	0.056	0.892	<i>Not supported</i>
Membership in clubs or university activities	0.176	0.383	0.998	0.476	0.838	0.503	<i>Not supported</i>
Frequency of participation in university activities	0.008*	0.050	0.056	0.022*	0.030*	0.300	<i>Not supported</i>
Hypothesis 2: Participation in learning-promoting activities is correlated with the entrepreneurial competency of students in the Community Development program, Rajabhat University in the southern region							
Participation in learning-promoting activities	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	<i>Supported</i>

Note: * statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

As shown in Table 4, the results for Hypothesis 1 revealed that a range of personal factors—such as gender, age, average academic score, monthly family income, type of educational institution, occupation of parents or family members, ownership of a family business, and involvement in university clubs or activities—did not significantly influence the entrepreneurial competencies of students in the Community Development program at Rajabhat University in the southern region ($p > 0.05$). In other words, these personal variables were not statistically relevant in affecting the entrepreneurial skills of the students in the sample.

On the other hand, the outcomes for Hypothesis 2 indicated a significant correlation between students' participation in activities that promote learning and their entrepreneurial competencies. Specifically, engagement in such activities had a noteworthy impact on various facets of entrepreneurial competency, including innovation, risk-taking, proactive behavior, competitiveness, and autonomy, as well as overall entrepreneurial skills ($p < .001$). This suggests that active participation in learning-related activities is a key driver in the development of entrepreneurial capabilities among students in the Community Development program.

5. Discussion

The study revealed that students majoring in Community Development at a Regional State University in the southern region exhibited a high level of entrepreneurial skills and active participation in learning activities. Interestingly, personal factors like gender, age, GPA, family income, and parents' occupations did not significantly impact these entrepreneurial competencies. These findings echo the study by Tungsongcharoen [10], which also found that traits like gender and income did not substantially affect entrepreneurial features among Bangkok-based MBA students. Furthermore, the study confirmed that there was a positive correlation between the level of participation in student learning activities and various entrepreneurial competencies such as innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitiveness. These results suggest that even without direct business administration coursework, students acquire the necessary skills for entrepreneurial ventures, possibly owing to the supportive curriculum and learning environment provided by the university.

These findings align with other research in the field, such as the study by Karabulut and Doan [11], which found strong entrepreneurial skills among Sports Science students, and Panida Vashararangi's study [12], which found favorable correlations between entrepreneurial competencies and student characteristics in MBA programs. This consensus underscores the theories proposed by Dess *et al.* [5], which highlighted the significance of autonomy, innovation, proactivity, competitive aggression, and risk-taking in entrepreneurial ventures. The positive and strong associations between these variables and overall entrepreneurial competencies further bolster the argument that these dimensions are integral for the successful operation of entrepreneurial businesses. Such consistency across multiple studies, including Lee and Lim's research [13] on SME entrepreneurs in Seoul, reinforces the idea that these competencies significantly contribute to positive business performance.

6. Program Implementation Suggestions

To better prepare students for their future careers, it's essential that program administrators and instructors actively nurture their entrepreneurial skills before graduation. While the research indicates that students in the Sports Science department possess strong entrepreneurial potential, running a successful business requires a diverse skill set that includes financial management and accounting. Therefore, the curriculum should integrate additional skill-building modules, such as elective courses focused on entrepreneurship. This would be especially beneficial before students embark on service-learning projects or internships in the private sector, as it would equip them with a comprehensive set of entrepreneurial skills, ultimately contributing to national development.

Moreover, program administrators should create platforms or venues where students can showcase their skills and engage in competition, fostering a spirit of innovation and competitiveness. Given that Community Development students are required to conduct fieldwork and research, the curriculum should be designed to allow students to leverage the data and insights they have gathered. The value-added resources generated from such research could be critically analyzed and then presented in creative formats—such as idea competitions or tournaments. This is particularly important considering the research findings, which indicate that while students show high entrepreneurial competencies in various areas, they lag in competitiveness.

Implementing initiatives that bolster this dimension will enhance students' skill sets, critical thinking, and competitiveness, qualities they can carry forward into their professional or entrepreneurial futures.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

One promising direction for future research involves an in-depth examination of entrepreneurial competencies within individual programs in a faculty setting. By doing so, the faculty can pinpoint the unique entrepreneurial skills each field of study necessitates, providing actionable insights for curriculum improvement. Such a targeted approach not only enriches the educational framework but also ensures that students are better prepared for the particular challenges and opportunities inherent to each discipline.

Additionally, it would be beneficial for future research to expand its focus beyond entrepreneurial competencies to include other determinants of entrepreneurial success, like entrepreneurial intentions and attitudes. A more diversified research scope would result in a broader set of findings, invaluable for enhancing curricula and teaching methods. This, in turn, would lay a stronger foundation for preparing graduates for successful entrepreneurial careers.

8. Limitations of the Research

In this study, the data was collected through self-reported and self-evaluated surveys completed by student respondents. It is important to acknowledge that this approach could introduce biases or inaccuracies into the data analysis. To mitigate such limitations and enhance the reliability of future research, it would be advisable to incorporate additional measurement instruments and assessment methodologies alongside self-reported surveys.

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