

ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A PATH TO EMANCIPATION

Ahsan Habib, Technological University Dublin
Thomas M. Cooney, Technological University Dublin

ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformative potential of tailored entrepreneurship training for individuals with disabilities in Europe, addressing their employment disparities. With only 51.3% of people with disabilities employed in the EU compared to 75.6% without disabilities and a self-employment rate of 5%, this research examines how tailored entrepreneurship training can enhance perceived emancipation for people with disabilities. TU Dublin conducted a 12-week online entrepreneurship course for individuals with disabilities in 2022. The research methodology involved 5 in-depth interviews, with 4 course participants and 1 course lecturer. The article provides insights into challenges faced by this demographic in starting a business, identifies future course improvements, explores the course's impact on perceived emancipation, contributes nuanced interpretations to existing knowledge, and advocates for a more inclusive business environment for people with disabilities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Emancipation, Self-Employment, People With Disabilities, Training

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, entrepreneurship and training have emerged as potential components for the socio-economic empowerment of people with disabilities. Approximately 1.3 billion individuals, constituting roughly 16% of the global population, grapple with significant disabilities, highlighting a sizeable and often overlooked demographic (WHO, 2023). These individuals frequently face substantial barriers to full workforce participation, underscoring the pressing need to enhance their economic and social prospects. Moreover, an OECD report (2019a) brought to the forefront the issue of underrepresentation of people with disabilities in the labour markets of European Union member states. The report advocated for a tailored approach, emphasising that promoting self-employment could unlock the untapped potential of this demographic (ibid.). However, it has become increasingly clear that a universal, one-size-fits-all approach will not suffice to address the multifaceted challenges experienced by people with disabilities, necessitating customised strategies (EU Commission, 1999).

Venturing further into this multifaceted issue, Kitching's (2014) research delved into how entrepreneurship could act as a catalyst for the integration of people with disabilities into the workforce, thereby reducing their reliance on social welfare support (Cooney and Aird, 2020). Acknowledging the wide spectrum of disability characteristics, Kitching underscored the significance of strategies that could accommodate the diverse needs of various disability groups. Additionally, research by EMDA (2009) emphasised the economic and social opportunities that stem from networking within the business world, particularly for new start-ups led by individuals with disabilities (OECD, 2021). However, Harper and Momm's (1989)

study brought a significant issue to the fore - many aspiring disabled entrepreneurs received minimal to no specialised assistance, often relying on their own assets or the support of family and friends (Cooney, 2020). This highlights the dire need for tailored entrepreneurship training programmes designed to cater to the specific needs of distinct disability groups (Cooney, 2018; 2020).

The landscape of enterprise education and entrepreneurship training is central to emancipating people with disabilities, yet these two concepts diverge significantly in their scope, objectives, and impact (O'Sullivan, 2013). While both focus on fostering self-reliance and economic independence, they differ in their approaches and areas of emphasis (Glaub and Frese, 2011). Enterprise education primarily centres on imparting knowledge and skills related to business fundamentals. It encompasses a broad spectrum of educational activities aimed at equipping individuals with the foundational understanding required to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Jones and Iredell, 2010). These activities may include courses, workshops, or educational programmes that offer theoretical insights into business concepts, financial management, marketing, and business operations (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2012). The primary objective of enterprise education is to provide individuals with the foundational knowledge needed to navigate the world of entrepreneurship successfully (Solomon et al., 2013).

In contrast, entrepreneurship training takes a more practical and hands-on approach (Henry, 2013). It goes beyond theoretical knowledge and aims to equip individuals with the specific skills and competencies necessary to plan, establish, and operate a business (O'Sullivan, 2013). Entrepreneurship training programmes typically involve a structured curriculum that combines theoretical instruction with practical exercises, case studies, and real-world business challenges (Lanius, 2020). These programmes focus on building the practical skills required to start and manage a business, such as business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and operational aspects (Zoe, 2020).

The ultimate goal of entrepreneurship training is to prepare individuals for the actual challenges and demands of entrepreneurship (OECD, 2022). Despite their differences, both enterprise education and entrepreneurship training play essential roles in empowering people with disabilities to pursue economic independence and self-employment (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2012). Entrepreneurship training equips individuals with the practical skills to turn their business ideas into reality, creating a comprehensive framework for people with disabilities to embark on their entrepreneurial journey. This reduces their dependence on social welfare and fosters economic emancipation through entrepreneurship training. This article will investigate the transformative potential of customised entrepreneurship training for individuals with disabilities in Europe and how it enhances their perceived emancipation.

People with Disabilities

According to a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO 2011), the number of people with a disability continues to increase globally due to ageing, changes in definitions and the official recognition of various health conditions and diseases. According to a recent study by the World Bank (2023), about one billion people, or 15% of the world's population, have a disability. The World Bank (2023) highlighted the fact that people with disabilities are more likely to encounter socio-economic barriers than individuals without disabilities. Disabilities influence a multitude of factors that shape labour market activation and

participation (Jackman and Galloway et. al., 2021; OECD, 2022). Cooney (2020) stated that people with disabilities are more likely to have lower-skilled, lower-paid jobs. Furthermore, their low level of participation in the labour market creates anxiety regarding their economic and psychological well-being (OECD, 2022).

One potential response to the problem of the low rate of employment for people with disabilities is to explore the option of self-employment or entrepreneurship (Arnold et.al., 2005; Galloway and Anderson et.al., 2005; OECD, 2023b). Self-employment allows people with disabilities to exercise authority and work more independently than would be possible if their options were limited to the mainstream jobs market (OECD, 2023a). Owning a business also facilitates flexible working conditions for those in need of regular medical treatment or special care. With more people with disabilities in charge of their own businesses, the physical environment, including equipment, can be made safer and more user-friendly (OECD 2021; 2022). Enhanced earning opportunities are another significant inducement for people with disabilities to become self-employed (ibid).

People with disabilities face multiple problems that can begin at an early stage in life and negatively impact their employment prospects (Jackman and Galloway et.al., 2021). One of the biggest obstacles they face is limited opportunities to engage in education and training (OECD, 2023a). In several OECD countries, access to primary and secondary education is extraordinarily challenging for people with more severe disabilities (OECD 2020). Globally, people with disabilities are vastly underrepresented at all levels of education (OECD, 2023c; 2023d). Frequently, mainstream education and training programmes do not take sufficient account of the needs or capacities of people with disabilities (Jackman and Galloway et. al., 2021). On the other hand, some of the available specialised programmes fail to offer training in skills that are actually required by the employment market (OECD, 2023c; 2023d).

Even when first class education and training opportunities are available, people with disabilities may encounter negative attitudes on the part of potential employers, some of whom may simply assume that a disability inevitably implies lower productivity (World Bank, 2015). In turn, anticipation of this kind of prejudice may discourage people with disabilities from even considering the possibility of applying for mainstream jobs (Cooney, 2020c). If they succeed in gaining employment, fear of a negative reaction may discourage them from requesting adaptations in workplace arrangements (Jackman and Galloway et. al., 2021).

These are just some of the difficulties experienced by people with disabilities when trying to secure employment in the mainstream jobs market. It has been recognised, and generally accepted, that work is a right for disabled people (WHO 2023; European Human Rights Report 2023; UN 2006). The UN ‘Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities’ protects “the right of people with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others”, noting that “this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities” (UN 2006). The Convention forbids all kinds of work discrimination, calls for the provision of supportive work environments and encourages States to promote accessible vocational training opportunities for people with disabilities (ILO, 2022). However, many people with disabilities remain effectively excluded from meaningful participation in the labour market. Recent decades have undoubtedly seen progress in terms of legislation and policy, but this is not always followed by the kinds of action that would produce significant change. As a result, people with disabilities remain relatively underemployed (OECD, 2023c). Consequently, they experience higher levels of poverty and

social marginalisation (Cooney, 2020).

The low employment rates among individuals with disabilities are influenced by a multifaceted web of determinants, as discerned from the CSO 2022 data. One critical factor is the prevalence of accessibility challenges, encompassing issues like inadequate transportation options, inaccessible infrastructure, and the absence of assistive technologies in workplaces (ILO, 2022; Jackman and Galloway et.al., 2021). These barriers starkly impede employment opportunities for people with disabilities (Anderson and Galloway, 2021), highlighting the urgency of addressing these issues to promote inclusive entrepreneurship.

Health-related determinants also feature prominently, with the data revealing difficulties in accessing healthcare services, thereby leaving health issues unaddressed and affecting employability. The importance of accessible healthcare aligns with OECD's insights in 2023, as documented in the policy brief on supporting people with disabilities in entrepreneurship, ensuring inclusion in a post-COVID-19 economy. Additionally, the availability and adequacy of income supports and disability benefits emerge as influential factors shaping employment decisions (OECD, 2023a), reinforcing the need to ensure adequate support for aspiring entrepreneurs. This notion is echoed in OECD's reports in 2021 and 2023b, which underscore the importance of policies that empower small and medium-sized enterprises, including those led by individuals with disabilities.

Embarking on entrepreneurship amplifies the inherent challenges for individuals with disabilities, as highlighted by Kitching (2014). Examining the multifaceted difficulties faced by prospective entrepreneurs, studies by Doyel (2000), the United States Department of Labour (2001), and Boylan and Burchardt (2003) reveal obstacles ranging from accessing start-up funding and experiencing discrimination to uncooperative business counsellors, limited disability-related supports, and training opportunities, along with a lack of networking opportunities. Additionally, people with disabilities venturing into entrepreneurship risk losing essential financial, medical, and social welfare benefits before achieving self-reliance, a dilemma elucidated by the OECD (2023a). This complex situation often leads to hesitation in exploring employment opportunities, contributing to a substantial negative impact on overall employment rates (OECD, 2021). The psychological toll of feeling ensnared in a system that hinders economic emancipation challenges the very notion of self-sufficiency and autonomy that entrepreneurship aims to foster (OECD, 2023c).

Transitioning to education and training challenges for aspiring entrepreneurs with disabilities in Ireland, the persisting difficulties extend to insufficient programmes offered by established business schools. These programmes fail to address the diverse needs associated with different disability categories. Mainstream entrepreneurship training struggles to attract participants with disabilities due to limited support, inadequate publicity, and perceived short-term benefits. Accessibility challenges further extend to workspaces, hindering effective establishment and operation of businesses for entrepreneurs with disabilities. Highlighted by research (Finlay et al., 2017), the prevalence of accessibility barriers in the built environment underscores the urgent need to prioritise universal design principles for inclusive entrepreneurship. Compounded by a lack of representation and role models within the disabled community, aspiring entrepreneurs face additional challenges, including obstacles in marketing, negative consumer perceptions, and limited access to assistive technology and accommodations. To comprehensively address the complex factors contributing to low employment rates among people with disabilities, a holistic entrepreneurship training approach is essential (OECD, 2022). This approach aims to emancipate individuals personally and

economically, fostering the establishment of start-up businesses or the offering of skills for traditional employment opportunities, regardless of their ability to participate in the labour market (OECD, 2021).

Emancipation

Emancipation means freedom from poverty, dependence, and the lack of agency that results from powerlessness (UN, 2006). It also means greater opportunity for personal growth, education and the exercise of one's human rights (ibid). It facilitates a better understanding of self and the world and helps people to pursue their own personal ambitions rather than seeing themselves as prisoners of fate, determined by the circumstances into which they were born (Rindova et al., 2009). In the Enlightenment period, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant understood emancipation as a mental capacity that allows rational human beings to become self-legislation agents, no longer the slaves of external influences (UN, 2006). In the modern period, especially, there has been a growing appreciation of the fact that individual emancipation requires social and political structures that recognise and respect certain rights. Personal and economic emancipation involve the promotion of human rights and over all forms of authoritarianism (Andreas et al., 2014).

Emancipation denotes freedom from various forms of limitation and the promotion of personal growth and human rights (Human Rights Report, 2023). This concept is particularly relevant in the emancipation of people with disabilities, where various dimensions such as education, training, and entrepreneurship play critical roles in emancipating individuals (ibid.). Education serves as a cornerstone in the emancipation process for individuals with disabilities, offering an inclusive and accessible system that provides access to knowledge, skills, and opportunities for personal and professional development (UN, 2006). Tailoring educational approaches to individuals has been proven to lead to positive outcomes, including improved learning outcomes and increased participation (Odom et al., 2010). Additionally, specialised training programmes are crucial in equipping people with disabilities with practical skills that enhance their employability and independence (Han, 2017). Training, in particular, enables them to contribute effectively to the workforce, thereby promoting their self-reliance and inclusion, contributing significantly to their emancipation from dependency and powerlessness (Human Rights Report 2023).

Promoting economic freedom means increasing people's ability to overcome deprivation and participate more fully in the economic life of the community as a whole (OECD, 2022). Greater financial security expands their capacity to make personal choices and exercise more control over their own lives. This is especially significant for people with disabilities, since the barriers they frequently encounter in the jobs market may leave them in a financially precarious situation (Gottardis, 2014). A lack of financial security may place them in a dangerous situation in which they fail to satisfy their basic needs. It will also severely limit their access to medical and other forms of support that could make living with a disability less burdensome (OECD, 2023a). Furthermore, the lack of economic independence may force them to rely excessively on family, friends or government (OECD, 2022). Families or friends may not have sufficient financial and other resources to support a people with disabilities, while services offered by government may be inadequate (OECD, 2023c).

In the absence of financial autonomy, a person with a disability may see their personal and social freedom significantly curtailed (ibid.). Hence, economical emancipation may be regarded as a precondition for the effective enjoyment of basic human rights (UN, 2006).

Entrepreneurship may be an option for at least some people with disabilities in order to attain economic independence and, consequently, greater personal and social freedom (Cooney, 2020c; OECD, 2022). Moreover, it is crucial to recognise that economic emancipation goes beyond mere economic emancipation. It is about granting individuals the means to secure their basic needs, ensuring their well-being, and reducing their vulnerability to external dependencies. The absence of financial security not only jeopardises an individual's economic stability but also hampers their overall quality of life, as highlighted by Buckup (2009). It restricts access to essential medical services and support systems, further compounding the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the significance of economic emancipation extends to its implications for personal and social freedom, as emphasised by Buckup (2009). Without financial autonomy, individuals with disabilities may find their personal and social freedoms severely restricted. This overreliance can lead to limitations in decision-making and hinder their ability to pursue freely chosen goals (OECD, 2017).

Entrepreneurship emerges as a powerful avenue for emancipation, enabling people with disabilities to create economic opportunities and challenge societal norms (UN, 2006). By becoming entrepreneurs, they gain financial independence and actively contribute to the economy, thereby fostering their emancipation from poverty and dependency and granting them the agency to shape their own future. Research on these aspects, including inclusive education positively impacting self-esteem, social relationships, and academic achievements (Ferguson et al., 2019), training enhancing job prospects and promoting emancipation (Penttilä et al., 2020), and entrepreneurship fostering resilience, creativity, and economic self-sufficiency (Namasivayam et al., 2021), highlights the transformative potential of emancipation initiatives for individuals with disabilities. This body of literature underscores the significance of a comprehensive approach that encompasses education, training, and entrepreneurship in promoting inclusivity and emancipation (ibid.).

Entrepreneurship Training

Entrepreneurship training is a multifaceted endeavour, designed to equip individuals with the practical skills and knowledge essential for success in the entrepreneurial world (Cox, 1996). This comprehensive training goes beyond theoretical knowledge and places a strong emphasis on hands-on experience, providing participants with invaluable real-world insights into the complexities of business (Bell et al., 2017). The significance of personal attributes and skills in entrepreneurial success cannot be overstated; they serve as the foundational building blocks of entrepreneurial ventures (Henry et al., 2003; Gottlieb and Ross, 1997). Effective entrepreneurship training enhances these attributes and skills, better preparing individuals to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of entrepreneurship (Henry et al., 2003; Gottlieb and Ross, 1997). These programmes are meticulously designed to teach the key skills necessary for entrepreneurial endeavors, creating a structured learning environment where participants can acquire, apply, and refine these skills, ultimately increasing their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks proficiently (Clark, 1984; Timmons, 1999).

Mentorship and practical experience are integral components of entrepreneurship training, serving as its backbone (OECD, 2019). Mentors offer clear guidance and support, helping participants make informed decisions and overcome challenges. Practical experience, often gained through workshops, simulations, and real-world projects, allows individuals to test their business ideas in a supportive environment (Bruner, 1996). This hands-on approach enhances productivity and fosters problem-solving abilities, preparing participants to navigate

the complexities of the entrepreneurial world (Valerio et al., 2014; Valentin & Calin, 2017).

Moreover, customised entrepreneurship training extends beyond the acquisition of skills and competencies; it has the potential to induce profound emotional and psychological improvements among participants (OECD, 2022). This transformation is not merely about imparting technical knowledge but elevates self-esteem, self-confidence, and overall mental well-being. As participants progress through tailored training, they experience a renewed sense of purpose and increased self-worth, particularly significant for people with disabilities who may have faced unique societal challenges (OECD, 2023a). This emotional shift results in enhanced self-assurance, a stronger sense of independence, and a more positive outlook on their future prospects. Participants begin to see themselves as valuable contributors to society, bolstering their overall mental health and emotional resilience (OECD, 2023b). The psychological benefits are substantial, enhancing adaptability, problem-solving skills, and the ability to cope with the entrepreneurial journey's challenges (ibid). This emotional and psychological emancipation extends beyond business and improves relationships, social interactions, and overall life satisfaction, creating a positive ripple effect in the lives of people with disabilities (OECD, 2021).

In line with the OECD's perspective on tailored training for entrepreneurship and self-employment promotion, these programmes become indispensable tools for addressing diverse individuals' unique needs (OECD, 2019a; OECD, 2023a). Tailored training caters to specific requirements and incorporates insights from recent developments in entrepreneurship training, serving as catalysts for skill enhancement and personal and professional growth (OECD, 2022; OECD, 2023b). The ultimate goal is not only to enhance self-employment prospects but also to prepare participants for active contributions to the labour market, aligning with the OECD's mission of promoting disability-inclusive entrepreneurship and self-employment (OECD, 2019b; OECD, 2021). These programmes bridge the gap in employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, resulting in an empowered workforce equipped with skills and confidence, fostering inclusion and independence (ibid.). This emancipation opens up possibilities for self-employment and active participation in the labour market, further emancipating people with disabilities and enriching society as a whole.

Following the delivery of a successful pilot course in 2021, TU Dublin delivered an updated 12-week online entrepreneurship course for people with disabilities from September to December 2022. The course is the only customised entrepreneurship course for people with disabilities in Ireland and its structure placed a strong emphasis on specific content crafted to bolster the personal and business development of course participants. The course was limited to 20 participants and TU Dublin was substantially oversubscribed with applications. The customisation of the course had a number of features.

Tailored content

The content was tailored for the specific both in terms of the information that it provided and its adherence to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The PowerPoints needed to be read easily by screen readers and by people who may have reading challenges. Each lecture was recorded to allow participants to revisit the lecture at a time and space that best suited them. Additional video content was also made available that would offer participants another way of learning about key concepts. A pivotal aspect of the content was the cultivation of competency skills, encompassing strategic planning, decision-making,

entrepreneurial acumen, effective management, customer care, and communication. The overarching goal was to emancipate people with disabilities by imparting practical entrepreneurial skills, ranging from business planning to efficient management. The curriculum took a comprehensive approach, prioritising holistic skill development that seamlessly integrated technical business knowledge with essential soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, resilience, and teamwork. Noteworthy focus areas comprised financial literacy, inclusive marketing strategies, networking proficiency, and adaptability to navigate dynamic business landscapes. The content accentuated a customer-centric ethos, guiding participants in understanding customer needs and delivering exceptional service. Effective communication emerged as a cornerstone for entrepreneurial success, encompassing the art of conveying ideas, negotiation prowess, and the ability to forge robust partnerships. The holistic nature of the content aimed to furnish participants with a well-rounded skill set, positioning them for success in the ever-evolving business landscape.

12 weeks

The 12-week timeframe facilitated a deeper connection among participants, creating a supportive learning community. The interactive nature of the course encouraged collaborative problem-solving and idea-sharing, enhancing the overall learning experience. Participants had the opportunity to receive personalised feedback and guidance from experienced mentors, adding an extra layer of support to their skill development journey. The structured curriculum, combined with hands-on activities and real-world case studies, ensured practical application of theoretical knowledge. Beyond individual skill enhancement, the course fostered a sense of camaraderie, allowing participants to build lasting professional networks. This network, coupled with the acquired knowledge and skills, positioned participants for continued success beyond the course, contributing to their sustained growth and ongoing professional development.

Online

Delivered exclusively through online channels, the course catered to participants scattered across different regions of Ireland. The online format proved to be the most accessible and convenient mode for facilitating the sessions. Despite its virtual nature, the programme eliminated the need for participants to undergo the challenges of commuting, thereby saving valuable time and alleviating the struggles associated with journeys. This online modality afforded participants the flexibility to engage with the programme content at their own pace, allowing for thorough comprehension. Furthermore, it provided a platform for participants to communicate and delve into discussions with fellow participants, fostering collaborative learning. Operating in the online sphere, the course emancipated participants to work from the comfort of their prioritised spaces, predominantly their homes, enhancing the overall accessibility and inclusivity of the initiative.

Guest speakers - entrepreneurs with disabilities

The course strategically incorporated entrepreneurs with disabilities as guest speakers, offering participants a unique and invaluable opportunity to glean insights from real-life experiences. These guest speakers played a pivotal role in providing a holistic understanding

of entrepreneurship, enabling participants to visualise themselves as successful entrepreneurs. Through candid discussions, the speakers shared vital perspectives on various aspects of business, elucidating the challenges, strategies, and procedures involved in establishing and managing their enterprises. These first-hand accounts served as a powerful educational tool, allowing participants to grasp the intricacies of entrepreneurial activities more comprehensively. Engaging with these guest speakers not only imparts practical knowledge, but also establishes a connection for future mentorship. Participants have the chance to build relationships with these entrepreneurs, creating avenues for seeking advice and guidance in their entrepreneurial journey. This networking opportunity extends beyond the course, opening doors to potential collaborations, partnerships, and mentorship for participants' future entrepreneurial activities. In essence, the inclusion of entrepreneurs with disabilities as guest speakers not only enriches the educational aspect of the programme, but also fosters a supportive community that enhances participants' prospects for sustained success in their entrepreneurial activities.

WhatsApp group for participants to connect

The WhatsApp group played a pivotal role in building a sense of community among participants. It served as a virtual space where individuals with shared goals and challenges could collaborate, exchange ideas, and offer mutual support. Participants actively engaged in discussions, sharing insights and experiences, which further enriched the learning process. The group dynamic created a network of encouragement, fostering a collaborative learning environment beyond the formal sessions. Additionally, the real-time nature of the platform allowed for spontaneous interactions, enabling participants to celebrate achievements, discuss entrepreneurial opportunities, and provide encouragement when faced with challenges. This digital community not only complemented the formal aspects of the course, but also became a catalyst for building lasting connections and a support system among participants with disabilities.

Business mentor

The course is enriched by experienced business mentors who consistently collaborate with participants with disabilities. From the programme's onset, these mentors demonstrate a genuine commitment to assisting participants in problem-solving and devising effective solutions for their business plans and startup ventures. The unwavering support from these expert mentors proves instrumental in guiding participants through the intricacies of establishing and effectively managing their businesses. In the event of any hurdles or potential stagnation, the mentors readily extend their assistance, ensuring that participants can navigate challenges and continue progressing towards the success of their enterprises. Moreover, the mentors provided continuous emotional support and contributed to the participants' psychological development, fostering positive behavioural changes that significantly contributed to their journey towards success. This multifaceted mentorship approach not only addresses practical business aspects, but also nurtures the participants' overall well-being and resilience.

The structure of the course is designed to support emancipation, addressing mental aspects and capability building. Physically, tailored business studies and skills development aim to emancipate participants in navigating the business landscape, enhancing their physical

agency in entrepreneurship. Emotionally, continuous mentorship and a supportive online community provide emotional sustenance, fostering a positive and encouraging environment. Mentally, the emphasis on competence skills, including decision-making and strategic planning, contributes to cognitive empowerment. Inner strength is nurtured through the resilience-building aspects of the course, promoting a robust mindset in the face of challenges. Behavioural changes are targeted through exposure to guest speakers, allowing participants to witness and adopt entrepreneurial behaviours. Finally, capability building is a central theme, with a focus on both technical business acumen and soft skills, creating a well-rounded foundation for sustained entrepreneurial success.

Bringing It All Together

The exploration of emancipation's dimensions for people with disabilities emphasised tailored entrepreneurship training. Emancipation encompasses personal and economic aspects, forming the foundation for such courses. Personal emancipation emancipates individuals to take responsibility and pursue chosen goals. Economic emancipation provides security, autonomy, and access to basic needs, promoting personal and social freedom. Entrepreneurship offers a path to financial independence and growth. These interconnected aspects support disability emancipation. Inclusive programmes should address mental, emotional, and economic factors. By embracing human rights and challenging stereotypes, society enables fulfilling lives and fosters an emancipating environment for individuals with disabilities to thrive.

Attaining this emancipation opens avenues for diverse outcomes, emancipating people with disabilities to confidently navigate their career trajectories. The newfound independence allows them to choose their career paths without hesitation, whether opting for self-employment, traditional employment, or pursuing further education and training for an enhanced and sustainable future. This freedom of choice is instrumental in fostering a sense of agency and self-determination, enabling participants to align their aspirations with their capabilities and preferences. Emancipation from societal constraints equips them with the courage to explore entrepreneurial ventures or engage in the labour market, contributing meaningfully to both their economic and personal growth and societal enrichment. The ripple effect extends beyond individual emancipation, influencing broader societal perceptions about the capabilities and potential of people with disabilities. In essence, this emancipation is a catalyst for transformative change, breaking down barriers and paving the way for a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was employed, encompassing 5 in-depth interviews with individuals with disabilities. Among them, 4 participants took part in the TU Dublin entrepreneurship course designed for people with disabilities, and 1 served as the course lecturer. This method was indispensable for comprehending the intricate dynamics related to the emancipation of people with disabilities. The qualitative aspect of this study exclusively focused on conducting in-depth interviews with five people with disabilities (participants of the programme) from April to July 2023. The primary objective of these interviews was to collect comprehensive and qualitative data for an accurate analysis of survey responses at different time points. Structured open and closed questionnaires were employed to elicit

deeper insights, knowledge, concepts, and experiences from the disabled participants (Burton and Obel, 2011).

During the interviews, participants, including people with disabilities, actively engaged in interactive discussions concerning their life experiences, advantages, disadvantages, and other pertinent matters, fostering dynamic participation and a constructive exchange of information (Burton and Obel, 2011). This approach allowed participants ample time and confidence to openly express their sentiments.

For data accuracy and completeness, manual notes were taken during the interviews using a notebook, and conversations were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The researcher utilised mobile phone and laptop recordings for data transfer and storage, with personal phone recordings serving as backup. The in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher himself. As highlighted by Burton and Obel (2011), in-depth interviews provide valuable insights into the phenomenon being explored, which this time focused on entrepreneurial training and its influence on perceived emancipation amongst people with disabilities.

Result

The qualitative analysis arising from the in-depth interviews yielded a trove of critical insights, centralising on the twin pillars of economic and personal emancipation. This inquiry brought into sharp relief the profound impact that entrepreneurship training has on the lives of the participants. The perspectives distilled from these interviews, expounded upon below, provide a rich tapestry of understanding, augmented by the meticulous use of NVivo software as the analytical instrument. Within the realm of qualitative analysis, interviewees offered not just observations, but a reflective exploration of how entrepreneurship training contributes distinctly to various levels of emancipation. Interviewees shared astute observations on the far-reaching influence of entrepreneurship training, illuminating the diverse dimensions of both economic and personal emancipation. The training programme, as perceived by the interviewees, acted as a catalyst for transformative change, impacting their lives at different levels. The benefits could be divided into four broad categories: (1) Economic Emancipation; (2) Personal Emancipation; (3) Entrepreneurial Competencies; and (4) Entrepreneurial Knowledge.

(1) Economic Emancipation

With reference to economic emancipation, the following are the key results that arose from the analysis of the data.

- **Financial Decision-Making:** Interviewee 1's testimonial underscored the programme's transformative impact on their financial decision-making skills, portraying the programme as a beacon of enlightenment. They stated that they acquired practical tools and strategies which proved indispensable in navigating the intricate landscape of financial aspects, ushering in an era of informed decision-making. This newfound capability not only contributed to their self-confidence, but also played a key role in steering their businesses towards overall success.
- **Regular Income:** Building upon their comments about the profound impact of the programme, Interviewee 2 highlighted its instrumental role in attaining a regular income, providing a stabilising force to their entrepreneurial journey. The training, acting as a guiding force, facilitated the development of a sustainable business model, ensuring a reliable and consistent flow of revenue. This newfound financial stability,

directly linked to the course, emancipated interviewees to strategically plan their daily lives and invest in the growth and expansion of their future ventures.

- **Spending Power:** Interviewee 3 articulated a direct link between the training programme and an augmented “spending power,” characterising this empowerment as liberating. The training played a pivotal role in equipping them with the ability to manage finances effectively. This newfound financial acumen translated into strategic investments, expanded offerings, and exploration of new opportunities. The resulting increase in spending power emerged as a catalyst for tangible growth and success.
- **Financial Security:** Reflecting on the impact of the course, Interviewee 4 emphasised the development of a newfound sense of “financial security.” The training significantly contributed to their perception of financial security by imparting knowledge on stabilising finances and creating a safety net. This foundation not only alleviated stress and uncertainty, but also allowed them to focus resolutely on the growth and sustainability of their entrepreneurial activities.
- **Profitability:** Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 collectively acknowledged the training programme’s instrumental role in enhancing the “profitability” of their businesses. The learning encompassed crucial aspects of making their ventures financially viable, a realm where they previously encountered challenges. The training provided invaluable insights into optimising revenue streams, adeptly managing costs, and making strategic decisions. These newly acquired skills set their businesses on a course toward financial sustainability in a competitive market.

The analysis of the data offered much stronger views than anticipated about the ability of the course to enhance the financial well-being of course participants, or even their financial literacy knowledge which empowered them to better understand how to build a viable business.

(2) Personal Emancipation

With reference to personal emancipation, the following are the key results that arose from the analysis of the data.

- **Self-Confidence:** Interviewees 1 and 2 experienced a noteworthy boost in self-confidence, revealing that the training programme’s impact extended beyond skill development. The enhanced self-confidence permeated their interpersonal skills, transforming their ability to navigate the complexities of the business world. This newfound self-assurance became a cornerstone of their personal development, positively influencing their assertiveness in professional settings.
- **Self-Belief:** Interviewees 3 and 4 testified to a noticeable surge in self-belief, suggesting a transformative impact on participants’ confidence. They suggested that this newfound self-assurance likely shaped their approach to challenges and decision-making processes. The development of self-belief underscored the psychological empowerment facilitated by the course, signifying a notable shift from doubt to conviction in participants’ entrepreneurial pursuits.
- **Ambition:** Interviewees 3 and 4 referenced that the course fuelled their ambition which highlighted the motivational impact of the course (particularly from the guest entrepreneurs). The training not only imparted knowledge, but also ignited a fervour in participants to aspire to greater heights in their entrepreneurial activities. Gaining a clearer sense of ambition indicated a perceptible shift in perspective, emphasising the programme’s role in shaping participants’ long-term vision and fostering a mindset geared towards innovative activity.
- **Independence:** Interviewees 1 and 2 articulated that the programme instilled a sense of independence, marking a profound impact on their confidence and decision-making abilities. This newfound autonomy contributed significantly to their sense of emancipation and self-reliance. The ability to operate independently in business operations suggested that the course fostered a mindset where participants were liberated to chart their course, reducing dependency on external factors.
- **Emotional Resilience:** Testimonies from Interviewees 1 and 2 about enhanced emotional resilience hinted at the programme’s holistic approach. Beyond skill acquisition, the programme delved into the psychological aspects of entrepreneurship, revealing its commitment to building, not just

professional skills, but also mental fortitude. The improved emotional resilience underscored the course's role in equipping participants with the emotional intelligence necessary to navigate the inherent challenges of entrepreneurial pursuits.

It was frequently mentioned that the lecture 'Balancing the personal and business well-being' was a highly innovative aspect of the course and that it demonstrated the commitment by the course team towards ensuring the personal well-being of the participants, as well as providing people with the opportunity to examine their business idea in a supportive environment.

(3) Entrepreneurial Competencies

In addition to the development of the economic and personal emancipation of the course participants, the interviewees also consistently referenced how the course made a significant impact on enhancing their entrepreneurial competencies. Decision-making skills received positive acclaim, with interviewees expressing their newfound ability to make informed choices. Interviewee 1 remarked that "the programme honed my decision-making skills, providing frameworks that proved invaluable in navigating complex business scenarios". Management skills were also widely commended for contributing to organisational efficiency. Interviewee 2 highlighted that "the course instilled effective management strategies, enhancing my ability to lead and streamline operations for optimal performance".

Financial literacy skills were deemed crucial, with Interviewee 3 stating that "the comprehensive grasp of financial concepts emancipated me to make informed and sound financial decisions, ensuring the financial health needed to initiate my business". Business planning skills garnered appreciation for providing a structured approach to strategic planning, with Interviewee 4 stating that "the course equipped me with robust business planning skills, enhancing the overall resilience and viability of my business strategy".²⁴ Creativity and innovation skills were celebrated for fostering a culture of innovation. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 expressed that they learned to think creatively and innovatively, enabling them to stay ahead in a competitive market. The interviewees also mentioned that they also had gained skills in other areas, such as communications. The feedback from the interviewees underscored the programme's success in honing key entrepreneurial competencies. They reflect the tangible impact of the training programme on participants' skills, highlighting its effectiveness in equipping them with the tools necessary for entrepreneurial success.

(4) Entrepreneurial Knowledge

Interviewees consistently praised the course for its impactful contribution to a diverse range of entrepreneurial knowledge areas. Finance garnered positive feedback as interviewees expressed newfound insights into financial management. Interviewee 1 noted that "the programme enhanced my understanding of finance, equipping me with the knowledge to navigate financial challenges and make informed decisions needed to start my business". Business administration received commendation for its role in providing practical insights into organisational operations. Interviewee 2 shared the view that "the course's focus on business administration was invaluable; it provided me with practical skills and knowledge that enhanced the overall efficiency needed for my business operations".

Networking was highlighted as a key skill acquired through the programme. Interviewee 3 emphasised that ‘the networking aspect of the course was crucial; it helped me establish meaningful connections in the business community, opening up opportunities for collaboration and growth’. Accessing a loan was recognised as a practical skill that interviewees found valuable. Interviewee 4 mentioned that “learning about accessing loans was a game-changer 25 for me. It gave me the confidence and knowledge to explore financial avenues for business expansion”. Management was praised for its contribution to organisational leadership. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 highlighted that the training programme instilled effective management skills, enabling them to lead and guide our team for optimal performance.

Overall, the exploration of interviewees’ thoughts and feelings about the course revealed a diverse range of aspirations among the four individuals who took the course. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 did exhibit a strong inclination toward self-employment, a preference likely shaped by the emphasis of TU Dublin tailoring the entrepreneurship course on fostering inner strength and self-efficacy. The flexibility, control over work environments, and a sense of purpose and fulfilment associated with self-employment aligned with the interviewees’ desire for economic benefits and independence. However, it should be noted that Interviewees 3 and 4 also suggested that they might seek employment rather than self-employment, and remarked that the valuable business skills, knowledge, and experience they had gained would be assets that they could contribute to potential employers. This suggested that the interviewees saw employment as an avenue for leveraging acquired expertise and achieving financial security, consistent with the programme’s focus on practical skills.

Interviewee 4 was also considering undertaking further education and training as another option they might choose, given the challenges faced by people with disabilities in determining career paths and the lack of representation of successful entrepreneurs with similar disabilities. This choice suggested that education and training were also perceived as tools for emancipation, enabling the development of solid plans, gaining practical knowledge, and achieving greater personal freedom.

The lecturer interviewed recognised the substantial positive influence of the course on various dimensions of economic emancipation. The lecturer highlighted the training programme as a 26 motivational catalyst, playing a key role in inspiring and propelling participants toward strategically thinking about their business ideas and their own career plans. While the strategic mindset cultivated by the course was explicitly directed at initiating and managing their entrepreneurial ventures, it also supported alternative career paths such as employment or further education. The lecturer also appeared to have gained valuable insights into customising the communication of essential tasks crucial for effective business operations. The term “strategic” indicated that the course not only disseminated knowledge, but also nurtured critical thinking and strategic planning as participants ventured into entrepreneurship.

The lecturer emphasised the significant psychological impact that the course could potentially offer the participants. The focus was on the substantial enhancement of participants’ psychological strength, signalling a profound shift in mindset beyond practical skills. The development of trust in their capabilities underscored the importance of self-confidence for entrepreneurial success. Moreover, the programme played a critical role in instilling deep personal motivation, going beyond mere encouragement to act as a catalyst for envisioning possibilities and pursuing life goals, especially in starting their own businesses. This recognition of personal motivation aligns with the broader theme of the transformative

impact of entrepreneurship training on personal emancipation, fostering a forward-looking perspective crucial in the competitive landscape of entrepreneurship. The integration of entrepreneurial competences and knowledge, as highlighted by the lecturer, further enriched the participants' skillset, contributing to their overall success in entrepreneurial activities. The lecturer's active involvement in shaping the training programme and its outcomes underscored the significance of their role in facilitating the participants' journey toward economic and personal emancipation.

DISCUSSION

Entrepreneurship training has played a pivotal role in advancing opportunities for people with disabilities. This research reveals that such training can enhance economic and personal emancipation, heighten entrepreneurial competencies, strengthen entrepreneurial knowledge, and help cultivate the diverse aspirations of the course participants. A key outcome is the transformative effect of the entrepreneurship training programme on economic emancipation. Participants exhibited improvements in financial decision-making, resulting in better informed choices about the viability of their business idea. The programme established a clear link between entrepreneurship training and economic outcomes, enhancing participants' financial literacy and management skills. Notably, it facilitated the ambition of attaining a regular income, the development of a sustainable business model, and positively contributed to the potential financial stability of the course participant. The research discussion underscores the effectiveness of the course in addressing practical challenges faced by entrepreneurs, thereby enriching the understanding of its contribution to economic emancipation.

The impact on participants' spending power emerges as another significant finding. The course empowered participants to manage finances effectively, translating into strategic investments, business expansion, and increased economic decision-making. This newfound confidence in their spending power can contribute to the long-term financial success of the individual and with the broader economic emancipation of people with disabilities. Furthermore, the course significantly contributed to participants' sense of financial security, alleviating uncertainties and enabling a focus on business growth rather than survival.

On the personal emancipation front, the impact of the course on participants' self-confidence, self-belief, independence, ambition, and emotional resilience stands out. The findings suggest that entrepreneurship training goes beyond skill development, delving into psychological aspects crucial for navigating entrepreneurial challenges. The course played a pivotal role in instilling confidence, fostering independence, ambition, and enhancing emotional resilience. The discussion underscores the success of the course in honing key competencies required for entrepreneurial success, enriching the understanding of specific skills and knowledge areas, thereby contributing to effective entrepreneurship. This aligns with broader discussions on entrepreneurship education and its impact on skill development.

CONCLUSION

This study has intricately explored the transformative impact of entrepreneurship training on people with disabilities, placing a heightened focus on economic and personal emancipation, entrepreneurial competencies, and entrepreneurial knowledge. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the influence of the course, revealing significant enhancements in financial decision-making, the establishment of regular income, increased

spending power, financial security, and profitability. On a personal level, participants experienced remarkable improvements in self-confidence, self-belief, independence, ambition, and emotional resilience.

This research makes a distinct mark in the academic landscape by providing nuanced interpretations that enrich existing knowledge on entrepreneurship training. The interconnected aspects of economic outcomes, personal growth, and psychological empowerment are meticulously examined, offering a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurship training contributes to the holistic development of people with disabilities. This nuanced interpretation serves as a valuable resource for academics, practitioners, and policymakers alike, guiding future discussions and interventions in the field.

The comprehensive understanding gained from this research not only serves as a testament to the immediate positive impacts of entrepreneurship training, but also opens avenues for continuous improvement. Future studies could delve into the long-term effects of entrepreneurship training on individuals with disabilities, tracking their progress and success over an extended period. Examining the specific pedagogical approaches that enhance the psychological empowerment of participants could also be a valuable area for future research. Additionally, investigating the role of mentorship and support networks in sustaining the gains made during entrepreneurship training could provide actionable insights for course improvement. Furthermore, exploring the intersectionality of disability and other demographic factors in entrepreneurship training outcomes could offer a more nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences within this demographic. Comparative studies between different entrepreneurship training courses could provide insights into the most effective approaches for fostering economic and personal emancipation.

In conclusion, this study not only highlights the transformative potential of entrepreneurship training, but also serves as a guidepost for refining future courses and advancing nuanced interpretations that contribute to the broader understanding of entrepreneurship training's impact on people with disabilities. The implications of these findings extend beyond the academic realm, influencing course design, policy development, and support systems aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial landscape for people with disabilities.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, M., & Galloway, L. (2012). The value of enterprise for disabled people. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 13(2), 93-101.
- Anderson, N., Potočník, K., & Zhou, J. (2014). Innovation and creativity in organizations: A state-of-the-science review, prospective commentary, and guiding framework. *Journal of management*, 40(5), 1297-1333.
- Ardichvili, A., Cardozo, R., & Ray, S. (2003). A theory of entrepreneurial opportunity identification and development. *Journal of Business venturing*, 18(1), 105-123.
- Arnold, N. L., & Ipsen, C. (2005). Self-employment policies: Changes through the decade. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 16(2), 115-122.
- Bacigalupo, M., Kamylyis, P., Punie, Y., & Van den Brande, G. (2016). EntreComp: The entrepreneurship competence framework. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 10, 593884.
- Blanck, P., Adya, M., Myhill, W. N., & Samant, D. (2007). Employment of people with disabilities: Twenty-five years back and ahead. *Law & Ineq.*, 25, 323.
- Buckup, S. (2009). The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work. International Labour Organization.
- Burton, R. M., & Obel, B. (2018). The science of organizational design: fit between structure and coordination. *Journal of Organization Design*, 7(1), 1-13.

- Bygrave, W. D., & Zacharakis, A. (2015). *The portable MBA in entrepreneurship*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Clark, B. W., Davis, C. H., & Harnish, V. C. (1984). Do courses in entrepreneurship aid in new venture creation?. *Journal of Small Business Management* (pre-1986), 22(000002), 26.
- Cooney, T., & Aird, B. (2020). *Pathway to Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities in Ireland*. Technological University Dublin, Dublin.
- Cox, L. W. (1996, June). The goals and impact of educational interventions in the early stages of entrepreneur career development. In *Proceedings of the Internationalising Entrepreneurship Education and Training Conference*, Arnhem.
- Davidsson, P., & Honig, B. (2003). The role of social and human capital among nascent entrepreneurs. *Journal of business venturing*, 18(3), 301-331.
- Fayolle, A., & Gailly, B. (2015). The impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial attitudes and intention: Hysteresis and persistence. *Journal of small business management*, 53(1), 75-93.
- Ferguson, D. L., Hall, C. J., & Hall, M. W. (2019). An Integrative Review of Inclusive Education Research: What Works for Inclusion. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(9), 3953-3975.
- Galloway, L., Anderson, M., Brown, W., & Wilson, L. (2005). Enterprise skills for the economy. *Education+ Training*, 47(1), 7-17.
- Glaub, M., & Frese, M. (2011). A critical review of the effects of entrepreneurship training in developing countries. *Enterprise Development & Microfinance*, (4), 335-353.
- Greco, V., & Denes, C. (2017). Benefits of entrepreneurship education and training for engineering students. In *MATEC web of conferences* (Vol. 121, p. 12007). EDP Sciences.
- Harper, M., & Momm, W. (1989). *Self-employment for disabled people: Experiences from Africa and Asia*. (No Title).
- Henry, C. (2013). Entrepreneurship education in HE: are policy makers expecting too much?. *Education+ Training*, 55(8/9), 836-848.
- Henry, C., Hill, F., & Leitch, C. (2005). Entrepreneurship education and training: can entrepreneurship be taught? Part I. *Education+ training*, 47(2), 98-111.
- Jackman, L., Galloway, L., Kapasi, I., Stirzaker, R., & Mihut, A. (2021). Good option or only option? Poverty, disability, health and enterprise. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 27(8), 2079-2095.
- Jones, B., & Iredale, N. (2010). Enterprise education as pedagogy. *Education+ training*, 52(1), 7-19.
- Krahn, G. L., Walker, D. K., & Correa-De-Araujo, R. (2015). Persons with disabilities as an unrecognized health disparity population. *American journal of public health*, 105(S2), S198-S206.
- Krueger Jr, N. F., & Brazeal, D. V. (1994). Entrepreneurial potential and potential entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship theory and practice*, 18(3), 91-104.
- Lanius, Deneena, (2020), *What is Enterprise Learning and Why is it Important?*
- McKenzie, D., & Woodruff, C. (2014). What are we learning from business training and entrepreneurship evaluations around the developing world?. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 29(1), 48-82.
- O'Sullivan, J. (2013). Validating academic training versus organizational training: An analysis in the enterprise resource planning (ERP) field. *Journal of Communication and Computer*, 10, 1261-1270.
- Quinn, S., & Woodruff, C. (2019). Experiments and entrepreneurship in developing countries. *Annual Review of Economics*, 11(1), 225-248.
- Rindova, V., Barry, D., & Ketchen Jr, D. J. (2009). Entrepreneurship as emancipation. *Academy of management review*, 34(3), 477-491.
- Scott, J. W. (2012). The vexed relationship of emancipation and equality. *History of the Present*, 2(2), 148-168.
- United Nations. General Assembly. (2007). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and optional protocol*. UN.
- Valerio, A., Parton, B., & Robb, A. (2014). Entrepreneurship education and training programs around the world: dimensions for success.
- Watts, A. G. (2002). Socio-political ideologies in guidance. In *Rethinking careers education and guidance* (pp. 233-241). Routledge.
- Wiggan, G., Scott, L., Watson, M., & Reynolds, R. (2014). *Unshackled: Education for freedom, student achievement, and personal emancipation*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- World Bank. (2023). *Disability Inclusion*.
- World Health Organization (2011). *World report on disability*.
- World Health Organization (2023). *Disability and health report*.
- Zappone, Katherine E. (2003). *Intersectional Discrimination and Substantive Equality*

Received: 28-Jun-2024, Manuscript No. IJE-24-15126; **Editor assigned:** 01-July-2024, Pre QC No. IJE-24-15126 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 15-July-2024, QC No. IJE-24-15126; **Revised:** 20-July-2024, Manuscript No. IJE-24-15126 (R); **Published:** 27-July-2024