

## **ENHANCING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES AND LOWERING SOCIAL INEQUITY FOR UNDERDEVELOPED REGIONS IN ROMANIA**

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**ABSTRACT:**

*THE UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANIAN REGIONS CONDUCTS TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY REGARDING THE REVENUES, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. THE REMOVING OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IS ONE OF THE EUROPEAN PRIORITIES REGARDING ASSURING THE SAME LIFE CONDITIONS AND RESOURCE ACCESS. ONE OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY EUROPEAN COMMISSION, JOINED TO ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT IS TO ENHANCE THE ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES OF UNDERDEVELOPED REGION POPULATION AND TO FINANCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SMALL BUSINESS ACCORDING TO LOCAL NEEDS. THE PAPER PRESENTS A RESEARCH MADE IN ROMANIAN MUNTENIA-SUD REGION, REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING CURRICULA AND MODEL USED TO ENHANCE THE ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES. FURTHERMORE, THE SYLLABUS, TRAINING METHOD AND ORGANIZATION ARE PRESENTED, TOGETHER WITH THE RECORDED SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE ANSWERS AND THE ACTION PLAN FOR IMPROVING THE TRAINING RESULTS. THE BIZSMART PROJECT IS DEVELOPED BY UNIVERSITY POLITEHNICA OF BUCHAREST, IN SEVEN SOUTHERN COUNTIES, WITH 400 PEOPLE AS TARGET GROUP. THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES COVER INITIAL TRAINING OF SELECTED PERSONS, ACCORDING TO FINANCING REQUEST, THE INDIVIDUAL BUSINESS PLAN COMPLETION AND EVALUATION AND THE FINANCING AND MONITORING OF 80 SELECTED BUSINESS FOR A TWO-YEARS PERIOD, WITH UP TO 40 000 EUR EACH.*

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**KEY WORDS:** ENTREPRENEURSHIP, ENTRPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES, TRAINING.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The continuous need to enhance entrepreneurial competencies is established in<sup>4</sup>, to avoid business cycles influences. According to the Romanian National Employment Agency<sup>5</sup>, unemployment statistics on 31th of August 2016, out of 10 counties with the highest unemployment rate, three are from the South-Muntenia Region (RSM), representing 30%, and from the seven counties with the highest rate of unemployed persons without compensation from the total number of unemployed, two counties are from RSM (28.57%). Also, the information included by the National Prognosis Commission in the report "Projection of the main economic and social indicators in territorial profile until 2017"<sup>6</sup> shows that the unemployment rate projected in 2016 on RSM is 6.6%, and in 2017 it is 6.4%, being just overtaken by South-West Oltenia.

Following the history of sustainable development indicators, according to the reports published by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), turnover in innovation is 5.75% of total turnover in 2012, and innovative enterprises that have introduced new or improved products in 2012 was 149 out of 1216 (12.25%). INS also published a report in 2018<sup>6</sup>, which shows that the number of active enterprises in RSM is 3,108 (11% of the total nationally active enterprises 28,809), a small percentage for the second region as a population. The South-Muntenia Regional Development Agency (RDA) has developed the RSM Intelligent Specialization Strategy (SSI) for 2014-2020<sup>7</sup>. Following the study of this strategy, it was noticed that: RSM has a population of over 3.2 million inhabitants, meaning 15% of the population, being the second most populated region of Romania. With over 53 000 active local units accounting in 2012 12.8% of the turnover achieved by local units at national level and net investment of over 10 billion lei, RSM ranks second in the top regions of Romania to these chapters. Industry accounts for over 42% of the region's total business, but the trend of innovative enterprise development is decreasing (down from 642 to 168 in 4 years).

## **IMPROVING ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AND BIZZSMART PROJECT**

Enhancing entrepreneurial competencies was addressed before, especially for students, using different practices<sup>8</sup> or tools<sup>9</sup>. In this context, the idea of the project POCU / 82/3/7/105944, "Increasing employment through the support and development of innovative entrepreneurship in South - Muntenia - BIZZSMART", developed by POLITEHNICA University of Bucharest was developed. Thus, the project stimulates the development of entrepreneurship, job creation and the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises with a non-agricultural profile in the urban

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<sup>4</sup> Christiano, Lawrence J., Martin S. Eichenbaum, and Mathias Trabandt, "Unemployment and Business Cycles," *Econometrica*, 84, (2016): 1523–1569

<sup>5</sup> Romanian National Employment Agency, "Unemployment rate August 2016 Romania." Accessed: March, 02, 2017

<sup>6</sup> National Prognosis Commission, "Projection of the main economic and social indicators in territorial profile until 2017" Accessed: September 09, 2017

<sup>7</sup> The South-Muntenia Regional Development Agency, "RSM Intelligent Specialization Strategy (SSI) for 2014-2020." Accessed: September 09, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Carutasu, Nicoleta Luminita and George Carutasu, "Collaborative virtual environments using ERP and cloud tools," Paper presented in 10th International Technology, Education and Development Conference, Valencia, 7-9 March, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Carutasu, Nicoleta Luminita and George Carutasu, "Replicating enterprise environment using Office 365 to enhance graduates' employability," MATEC Web Conferences, 121, (2017)

area, able to capitalize the innovative potential in industry and services. The duration of the project is 36 months starting on 29 December 2017.

The BIZZSMART project aims at eliminating or reducing the negative impact of social inequity on target group members (GT) through:

1. Reducing the high outflow of youth from RSM to other more developed areas;
2. Stimulate the employment of the population in the sectors with high added value;
3. Diminishing the number of unemployed and / or unpaid unemployed;
4. Assistance in drafting patent applications for own ideas;
5. Assistance in identifying and implementing untapped patents;
6. Capitalizing on existing resources and sustainable development;
7. Intensifying the collaboration between business and higher education, research and development and technology transfer units.

The **objectives** of the BIZZSMART team are as follows:

**Overall objective.** Ensure long-term sustainability in the South-Muntenia development area by supporting and developing entrepreneurship, creating jobs and setting up small and medium-sized enterprises capable of harnessing the innovative potential in industry and services, while responding to concrete needs of the workplace in the areas covered by the project by supporting the implementation of selected business plans to be funded by minimis aid scheme, while providing an entrepreneurial training program and personalized counseling / mentoring / mentoring services.

**Specific objective 1.** Increase of entrepreneurial abilities and skills unemployed & inactive / employed persons, including self-employed, wishing to start a business by offering an entrepreneurial training program and by providing support in identifying and promoting services in new, high-activity areas of activity or niche (based on inventions or innovations, new or advanced technologies: computer assisted design, computer assisted engineering, assisted manufacturing, 3D printing, medical recovery equipment development, personalized monitoring systems, preventative maintenance, things and others) as well as services in common areas (e.g. franchise business, non-technical services and others) that have market potential.

**Specific objective 2.** Increase in the number of enterprises and the creation of new jobs by supporting the implementation of the business plans selected to be funded under the minimis in the South-Muntenia Region, addressing unemployed & inactive / employed people, including self-employed persons, offering personalized counseling / mentoring / mentoring services.

**Specific Objective 3.** Develop a professional networking network (professional networking) between target group members and other individuals or businesses interested in partnerships or funding - both during and after the project, in order to facilitate partnerships and development business.

To achieve the objectives, the indicators and the proposed results, **the activities** carried out within the project are the following:

**A1.** Professional training in the field of entrepreneurship, with next sub-activities: *informing the potential target group on the training program, the selection methodology and the benefits received by participating in the activities carried out within the project; counseling the target group to select people with entrepreneurship spirit and selecting the target group to participate in the courses organized within the entrepreneurship training program; organizing and running the entrepreneurial training program; selection of business plans to be funded under the project; conducting internships,*

**A2.** Implementing business plans funded by the ESF, with next sub-activities: *providing personalized counseling / mentoring / mentoring services for selected business plans; monitoring the functioning and development of funded businesses, including using ICT tools;*

**A3.** Monitoring the functioning and development of businesses funded under their sustainability period, including using ICT tools;

### **MONITORING THE RESULTS OF THE TRAINING ACTIVITY**

Within BIZZSMART, the Satisfaction Assessment process for training activities starts from the moment the members of the target group access the training services through their participation in the training courses and until the training has been completed.

Through the Satisfaction Analysis Questionnaire, we have been looking at the **continuous improvement of the training program**. We also considered a more accurate understanding of learners' needs and expectations, identifying and eliminating the causes of nonconformities, processing and analyzing information provided by learners, objectively assessing quality and improving the training process.

In this way, BIZZSMART team paid maximum attention to the needs of learners, meeting their requirements for quality improvement and a high level of satisfaction. Therefore, the following satisfaction criteria were used to develop the questionnaire:

- Overall degree of satisfaction through participation in the Entrepreneurial Competence course,
- Expectations, in particular,
- Volume of knowledge,
- Teaching methods,
- Attitudes of trainers towards learners,
- The usefulness of the themes, in achieving the objectives of the course,
- The degree of encouragement of participation in the discussions,
- The professionalism of trainers,
- Equipment used for the course,
- Support materials for the course,
- The work of other members of the BIZZSMART team (other than trainers).

Also, the learner was asked to make suggestions to the organizers / trainers to improve the organization and conduct of the course. Concerning the definition of questions, of the three possibilities:

- Closed questions - with a single answer and multiple answer,
- Open questions - with free answer, numerical answer etc.,
- Scoring questions - rankings and sums.

Closed questions were considered for the questionnaire. The way the answers are evaluated is the arithmetic sum of the score for the applicable questions and to calculate the percentage ratio for applicable questions. The analysis questionnaire was applied to a total of 40 trainees (Table 1), representing the graduates of the Entrepreneurial Competence course held between 14.04.2018 - 29.04.2018. Data collection was done on 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2018, after the completion of the course. Before completing the learner questionnaire, they were explained the role of the questionnaire and the fact that the answers provided were confidential. The average time to complete a questionnaire was 10-15 minutes.

Table 1. Classification based on the education level

Crt. No.	International standard education classification (ISCED)	No. of trainees
1.	ISCED 2 – Lower secondary education ISCED 2	1
2.	ISCED 3 – Higher secondary education ISCED 3	6
3.	ISCED 4 – Non-university tertiary education (post-secondary education)	4
4.	ISCED 5 – Short-term higher education	4
5.	ISCED 6 – License Studies	14
6.	ISCED 7 – Master's degree studies	10
7.	ISCED 8 – PhD degree studies	1

*Note: The investigated lot has only indicative, not representative value, providing only an overview of the activity carried out between 14.04.2018 - 29.04.2018.*

### 1. Appreciation of the course in general

To determine the general satisfaction with participation at the *Entrepreneurial Competence* course, the respondents were asked to answer the question: *How do you rate the course in general?* Thus, 22 trainees (55% of 40 respondents) appreciated the course **Good**, 12 trainees (30% of 40 respondents) **Very good** and only 4 (10% of respondents) appreciated the course **Satisfactory**. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 2 and Figure 1. It is worth mentioning the high share of those who positively appreciated the course - 85% of the respondents (34 students).

Table 2. Results for “How do you rate the course in general?”

	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Wick	Very wick
How do you rate the course in general?	12	22	4	1	1

How do you rate the course in general?

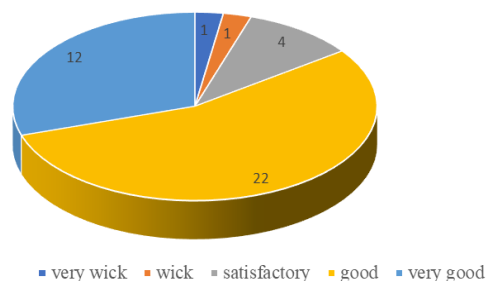


Figure 1. Appreciation of the course in general

### 2. Fulfilling expectations through this course

To find out how to meet expectations by participating in the *Entrepreneurial Competence* course, the learners were asked to answer the question: *How have your expectations been met by this course?* Thus, for 22 trainees (55% of 40 students) the expectations were met **To a great extent**, for 10 trainees (25% of the 40 trainees) **To a high extent** and only for 4 (10% of the respondents) **Satisfactory**. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 3 and Figure

2. Also, as in the case of the first question, there is a high share of those who have positively appreciated their expectations by attending the course - 80% of the students (32 respondents).

Table 3. Results for „How have your expectations been met by this course?“

	To a high extent	To a great extent	Satisfactory	Very little	None
<i>How have your expectations been met by this course?</i>	10	22	4	3	1

*How have your expectations been met by this course?*

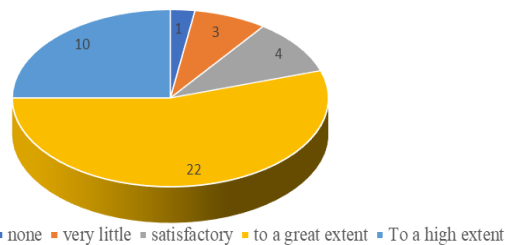


Figure 2. Fulfilling expectations through this course

### 3. The volume of knowledge

To determine the amount of knowledge passed, the respondents were asked to express their opinion by answering the question: *How do you appreciate the amount of knowledge?* As a result, 18 trainees (46.15% of 40 respondents) appreciate a **Good** knowledge, 16 trainees (41.03% of 40 respondents) **Very good** and only 3 (7.69% of respondents) appreciate the course as **Satisfactory**. It is worth noting that 34 students (87.18% of the respondents) positively appreciate the amount of knowledge assimilated by attending the course. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 4. Results for „How do you appreciate the amount of knowledge?“

	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unacceptable
<i>How do you appreciate the amount of knowledge?</i>	16	18	3	1	1

*How do you appreciate the amount of knowledge?*

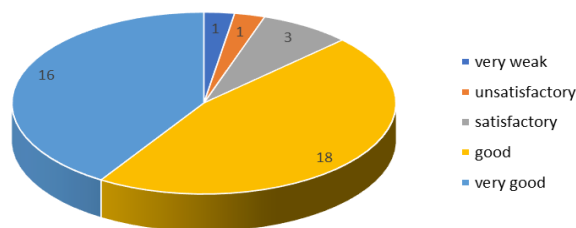


Figure 3. The volume of knowledge



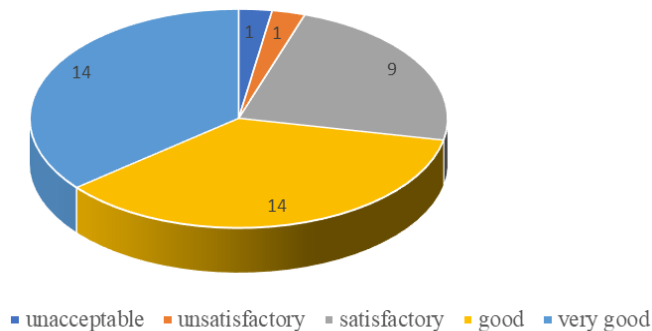
#### 4. Teaching methods

To the question *How do you appreciate the teaching methods?* used by trainers in the training process, respondents stated 71.80% (28 trainees) that the methods were **Good** and **Very Good**, for 23.08% (9 students) were **Satisfactory** and only for 2.56% the methods were **Unsatisfactory** (1 learner) or **Unacceptable** (1 learner). The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 5 and Figure 4.

**Table 5. Results for „How do you appreciate the teaching methods?“**

	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unacceptable
<i>How do you appreciate the teaching methods?</i>	14	14	9	1	1

*How do you appreciate the teaching methods?*



*Figure 4. Teaching methods*

#### 5. Attitudes of trainers towards learners

To find out the attitudes of the trainer's trainers, they were asked to answer the question: *How do you appreciate the attitudes of the trainers towards learners?* Nearly all trainees, representing 95% of the respondents, positively appreciated the attitudes of trainers (32 trainees - **Very good**, 6 trainees - **Good**) and only 5% of respondents (2 trainees) **Unsatisfactory**. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 6 and Figure 5.

**Table 6. Results for „How do you appreciate the attitudes of the trainers towards learners?“**

	Very high	High	Average	Low	Unacceptable
<i>How do you appreciate the attitudes of the trainers towards learners?</i>	32	6	0	2	0

How do you appreciate the attitudes of the trainers towards learners?

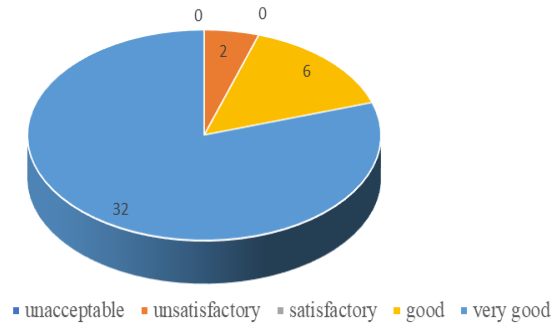


Figure 5. Attitudes of trainers towards learners

### 6. The usefulness of studied themes

To measure the degree of achievement of the course objectives, respondents were asked to answer the question: *How do you consider the usefulness of studied themes in achieving the objectives of the course?* Among them, 19 respondents (47.50% of the students) appreciated the usefulness of the themes as **High**, 11 respondents (27.50% of the students) with **Very high**, 7 respondents (17.50% of the students) with **Average** and only 3 respondents (7.50% of learners) respectively **Low** and **Unacceptable**. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 7 and Figure 6.

Table 7. Results for „How do you consider the usefulness of studied themes in achieving the objectives of the course?“

	Very high	High	Average	Low	Unacceptable
How do you consider the usefulness of studied themes in achieving the objectives of the course?	11	19	7	1	2

How do you consider the usefulness of studied themes in achieving the objectives of the course?

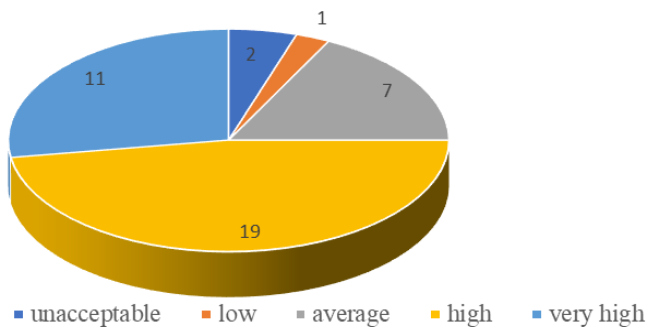


Figure 6. The usefulness of studied themes



7. Degree of encouraging participation into discussions

Determining the degree of encouragement to participate at discussions that were generated during the course was achieved by asking: *How do you rate the degree of encouragement of participation in discussions?* Thus, 14 trainees (35% of 40 respondents) appreciate encouraging discussions **Over average**, 21 trainees (52.5% of 40 respondents) **High** and only 5 trainees (12.5% of respondents) **Average**.

It is worth mentioning the high share of those who positively appreciated the degree of encouragement of the participation in the discussion - 87.5% of the respondents (35 students). The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 8 and Figure 7.

Table 8. Results for „How do you rate the degree of encouragement of participation in discussions?“

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<i>How do you rate the degree of encouragement of participation in discussions?</i>	21	14	5	0	0

*How do you rate the degree of encouragement of participation in discussions?*

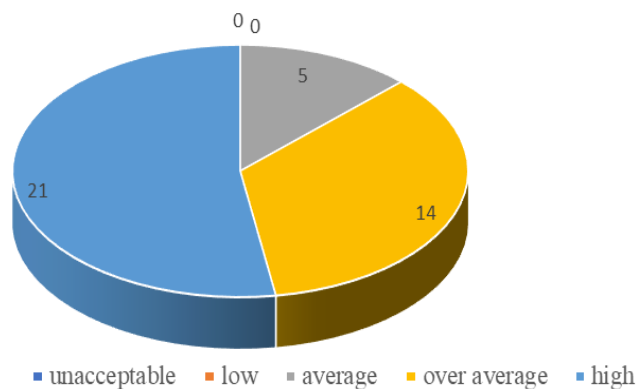


Figure 7. Degree of encouraging participation into discussions

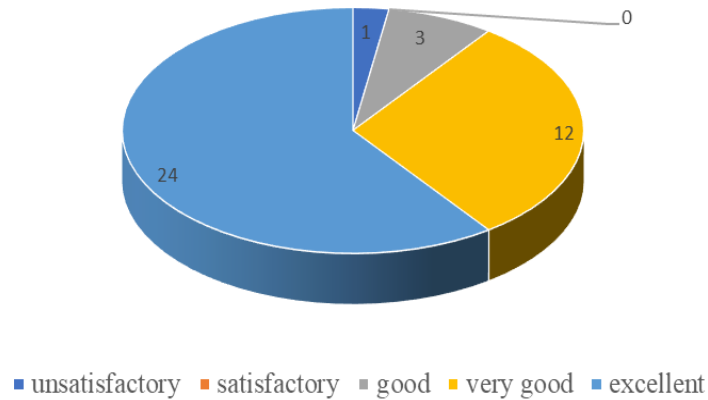
8. Degree of professionalism of trainers

To find out the professionalism of trainer trainers, they were asked to answer the question: *How do you appreciate the professionalism of trainers?* Nearly all trainees, representing 90% of the respondents, appreciated positively the professionalism of trainers (24 students - **Excellent**, 12 trainees - **Very good**) and only one trainee (2.5% of respondents) **Unsatisfactory**. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 9 and Figure 8.

Table 9. Results for „How do you appreciate the professionalism of trainers?“

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<i>How do you appreciate the professionalism of trainers?</i>	24	12	3	0	1

*How do you appreciate the professionalism of trainers?*



*Figure 8. Degree of professionalism of trainers*

### 9. The facilities used for the course

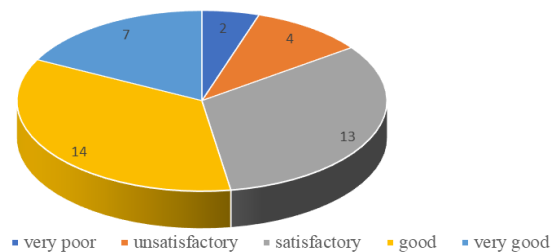
To the question: *How do you appreciate the equipment used for the course?* in the training process, the students stated that 52.5% (21 respondents) said that the facilities were **Good** and **Very good** for 32.5% (13 students) **Satisfactory** and only for 15% **Unsatisfactory** (4) students) and **Very poor** (2 trainees).

The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 10 and Figure 9.

Table 10. Results for „How do you appreciate the equipment used for the course?“

	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very poor
<i>How do you appreciate the equipment used for the course?</i>	7	14	13	4	2

*How do you appreciate the equipment used for the course?*



*Figure 9. The facilities used for the course*

*10. Support materials for the course*

To determine the quality of course support, the respondents were asked to answer the question: *How do you rate course support materials?* Thus, 23 students (57.50% of 40 respondents) appreciate the support materials for the course **Very good**, 10 trainees (25% of 40 respondents) **Good** and only 3 (7.5% of respondents) **Satisfactory**. The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 11 and Figure 10.

Table 11. Results for „How do you rate course support materials?“

	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Very poor</b>
<i>How do you rate course support materials?</i>	23	10	3	3	1

*How do you rate course support materials?*



Figure 10. Support materials for the course

*11. The work of the other members of the BIZZSMART team*

To the question *How do you rate the activity of other BIZZSMART members (other than trainers)?* the trainees selected 57.5% (23 respondents) the **Very Good** rating, 27.5% (11 trainees) the **Good** grade and only 7.5% **Unsatisfactory** (1 trainee) or **Very Poor** (2 trainees).

The results obtained in this question are shown in Table 12 and Figure 11.

Table 12. Results for „How do you rate the activity of other BIZZSMART members (other than trainers)?“

	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Very poor</b>
<i>How do you rate the activity of other BIZZSMART members (other than trainers)?</i>	23	11	3	1	2

How do you rate the activity of other BIZZSMART members (other than trainers)?

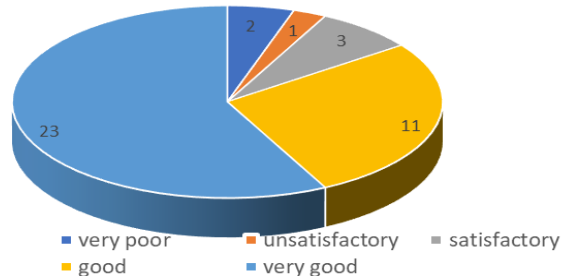


Figure 11. The work of the other members of the BIZZSMART team

## CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation questionnaire included 11 questions designed to collect data on different aspects of the entrepreneurial training program. Some were focused on collecting data on the effectiveness of the training session in achieving the stated objectives (e.g. knowledge volume, course support material, methods of teaching, the usefulness of the themes, encouraging participation in discussions, etc.) and others on collecting data on how to organize (e.g. the equipment used, etc.). Responses indicate that an average of over 80% of respondents agreed that the training objectives were achieved and that they are very pleased with the quality of the learning and teaching experience provided during the training sessions.

In general, the answers indicate a high level of satisfaction among learners, the investigated group having an indicative value, not representative, giving only an overview of the activity carried out between 14.04.2018 - 29.04.2018. From the analysis of the evaluation questionnaires, it is obvious that the training activity was carried out with professionalism, the course materials have been well-developed. Also, the themes were well-prepared and appropriate for the objectives of the training and the proportion of presentations and work activities was well balanced and appropriate to achieve the training objectives. Furthermore, the formative and summative learning has been well integrated and ICT tools have been used to organize and assist the teaching-learning process. A detailed set of recommendation is presented in table 13.

Table 13. Detailed recommendation for organizers and trainers

	<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>Appreciations:</b>
Recommendations and appraisals for the	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Being the first two groups, it is normal to need different improvements, some examples in this regard would be: hardware infrastructure improvement, time management and more practical examples,</li> <li>2. A higher period for the course,</li> <li>3. More flexibility towards learners,</li> <li>4. More hours / knowledge / counselling is needed to make a proper and complete business plan.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I have learned to work in a new program, having access to textbooks and explanatory material,</li> <li>2. Very dedicated people;</li> <li>3. People who know what and how to do, able to send us the appropriate message,</li> <li>4. Actively involved, respond quickly to emails,</li> <li>5. I have accumulated much knowledge even if the amount of information was high and at a high level,</li> <li>6. I learned new things in a relaxing atmosphere,</li> <li>7. I learned new and interesting things that will help me to realize my project.</li> </ol>

<i>Recommendations and appraisals for trainers</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Several examples for designing and implementing the business plan,</li> <li>2. The rotation of trainers from one group to another within the same series,</li> <li>3. More concrete synthesis of information,</li> <li>4. Presenting as clearly as possible the criteria on which funding is granted,</li> <li>5. Provide more time for training courses.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interest, academic quality,</li> <li>2. I appreciated the fact that the trainers had the patience to explain what we did not understand, very involved,</li> <li>3. Modern, interesting and useful methods,</li> <li>4. All chapters were explained to everyone, although the time was short for the area covered,</li> <li>5. Professionally trained, moral and physical trainers,</li> <li>6. The materials have included all the necessary information and very well elaborated,</li> <li>7. Only words of praise and positive attitude.</li> </ol>
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