

**LINKING AND TRANSFER UNIVERSITY IN ARGENTINA: EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF AN EXTENSION PROGRAM ON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

***VINCULAÇÃO E TRANSFERÊNCIA UNIVERSITÁRIA NA ARGENTINA: AVALIAÇÃO DO IMPACTO DE UM PROGRAMA DE EXTENSÃO NO DESENVOLVIMENTO LOCAL NA PERSPECTIVA DO EMPREENDEDORISMO***

***VINCULACIÓN Y TRANSFERENCIA UNIVERSITARIA EN ARGENTINA: EVALUACIÓN DEL IMPACTO DE UN PROGRAMA DE EXTENSIÓN EN EL DESARROLLO LOCAL DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DEL EMPRENDIMIENTO***



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**ABSTRACT:** Universities play a crucial role in shaping and advancing society through education, research, and university extension. This study examined the impact of an extension program at a private, faith-based university in Argentina, specifically focusing on entrepreneurship development. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the program evaluation tool developed by Mora Batista (2018) was adapted for data collection, along with interviews and focus groups. The results indicate an upbeat assessment of the program by the participants. However, it was identified that there is a need to align learning expectations between students and entrepreneurs to optimize the impact on the community. Given the significant presence of women in the program, a future emphasis on female empowerment is recommended. These findings underscore the importance of university extension in promoting entrepreneurship and point to opportunities for collaborative activities between universities and the community.

**KEYWORDS:** Entrepreneurship. University extension. Training. Impact. Local development.

**RESUMO:** *As universidades desempenham um papel nevrálgico na formação e desenvolvimento da sociedade através do ensino, pesquisa e extensão universitária. Este estudo analisou o impacto de um programa de extensão em uma universidade privada e confessional na Argentina, focado no desenvolvimento do empreendedorismo. Utilizando uma abordagem mista, o instrumento de avaliação de programas de Mora Batista (2018) foi adaptado para a coleta dos dados; além disso, foram realizadas entrevistas e grupos focais. Os resultados indicam uma avaliação positiva do programa por parte dos participantes. No entanto, identificou-se a necessidade de alinhar as expectativas de aprendizado entre alunos e empreendedores para otimizar o impacto na comunidade. Dada a presença significativa de mulheres no programa, é recomendado um enfoque futuro no empoderamento feminino. Esses resultados destacam a importância da extensão universitária no fomento do empreendedorismo e apontam para oportunidades de atividades de vinculação entre universidades e comunidade.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Empreendedorismo. Extensão universitária. Formação. Impacto. Desenvolvimento local.*

**RESUMEN:** *Las universidades desempeñan un rol fundamental en la formación y desarrollo de la sociedad a través de la enseñanza, la investigación y la extensión universitaria. Este estudio analizó el impacto de un programa de extensión en una universidad privada y confesional en Argentina, centrado en el desarrollo del emprendimiento. Utilizando un enfoque mixto, se adaptó el instrumento de evaluación de programas de Mora Batista (2018) para la recopilación de datos, además de llevar a cabo entrevistas y grupos focales. Los resultados indican una evaluación positiva del programa por parte de los participantes. Sin embargo, se identificó la necesidad de alinear las expectativas de aprendizaje entre estudiantes y emprendedores para optimizar el impacto en la comunidad. Dada la presencia significativa de mujeres en el programa, se recomienda un enfoque futuro en el empoderamiento femenino. Estos resultados resaltan la importancia de la extensión universitaria en el fomento del emprendimiento y señalan oportunidades para actividades de vinculación entre universidades y la comunidad.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Emprendimiento. Extensión universitaria. Capacitación. Impacto. Desarrollo local.*

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## **Introduction**

Universities have always played a fundamental role in the development of society, but with the advent of technology and the knowledge-based society, these functions have been intensified by the need for innovation, creation, and the production of solutions for sustainable societal development. In this regard, establishing a closer relationship between various social actors such as universities, government (state), and entrepreneurs, for example, has given rise to successful models of ecosystems for local development grounded in knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurial culture.

Mason and Brown (2014) conceptualize the local entrepreneurial ecosystem as a set of interconnected actors, encompassing business organizations (companies, investors, banks), institutions (universities, public bodies, business entities), and entrepreneurs while taking into account variables such as the birth rate of companies, the number of high-growth companies, business success rates, the proliferation of entrepreneurs, motivation for entrepreneurship, and levels of entrepreneurial ambition. This network of connections enables the formal and informal mediation and management of performance within the context of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In this sense, universities are conceived as facilitators between the different actors, with the potential to generate and incubate business projects in the region. These practices have solidified over the years and have led other countries to adopt public policies supporting entrepreneurship and university collaboration.

Considering the current state of the world of work and entrepreneurship, coupled with the social demand directed at educational institutions, there is a recognized need to deepen the analysis of the impact of the connection between a private, faith-based university and a local community in Argentina through an extension program focused on entrepreneurship training and support.

In this context, the study aimed to identify the facilitators and barriers of an extension program coordinated with the local municipality, as well as to understand the perceptions of those involved in the activities and the level of impact of the training program through indicators reflecting the level of entrepreneurial success.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Entrepreneurship**

Guillén *et al.* (2014) argue that entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that involves the management of knowledge for its dissemination among political, economic, and social actors, intending to promote sustainable development for future generations. On the other hand, Vásquez *et al.* (2019) propose that entrepreneurship is the engine of change and economic growth, closely linked to the skills of those who commit to generating innovation.

Aguilar *et al.* (2016), in their literature review, state that the individual who undertakes an entrepreneurial endeavor is the entrepreneur, a term derived from the French *entrepreneur* (pioneer). Initially, it was used to refer to those who took risks to put their ideas into action in a world of opportunities, even if they were unsure of the prospects in their field of operation. As indicated by the authors, to achieve success, entrepreneurs need to acquire specific skills, including flexibility, dynamism, creativity, and motivation, among others. These competencies are crucial as entrepreneurs must be able to adapt to a constantly evolving environment. Furthermore, teamwork often proves to be a critical factor in entrepreneurial projects, as it amplifies the individual capacities of each group member.

The teaching of entrepreneurship has been the subject of study worldwide. Early courses were based on the historical accounts of successful entrepreneurs, although they did not provide the necessary tools to develop ventures. Over the past three decades, theories associated with entrepreneurship have enabled the creation of models that can be adapted to each reality. In the United States, there has been a growing interest in university management programs to meet the demands of the new entrepreneurial education market (Castillo, 1999).

Developed collaboratively, Isenberg (2010) points out that the entrepreneurial ecosystem comprises three fundamental factors: (a) a critical mass of entrepreneurs, businesses, and specialized local institutions, (b) a dense network of relationships among actors, and (c) a culture that encompasses encouraging elements. As observed, the described ecosystem includes factors that involve the functions of entities that foster relationships and promote the development of the culture.

## University Transfer and Extension

Part of the social role of universities concerning the community, as promoters of entrepreneurship involves the transfer and production of knowledge (Nwosu, 2012). Knowledge transfer is understood as a process that encompasses two actions: transmission and absorption (utilization). Transmission is the sending or presentation to a potential recipient, individual, or group (Ariza *et al.*, 2020).

In turn, Romero Alonso *et al.* (2020) identifies three factors for genuine application of learning in the context: (a) the inputs of training (individuals and characteristics of the training process), (b) outcomes of the training process itself, and (c) conditions for the transfer to the performance environment.

According to Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2020), in higher education, active methodologies that involve student engagement not only in their learning but also in service are being promoted. However, lack of student engagement is a common issue. Various studies provide evidence of the importance of active methodologies in student satisfaction and commitment to their studies. These benefits can be achieved by implementing service learning, conceived as an educational approach that integrates learning processes with community service in a single project. In this context, participants learn by addressing the real needs of the community to enhance it (Gallardo, 2017). Therefore, it is advisable to promote service learning in higher education institutions to increase student engagement in their academic education and actions that benefit the community.

Among the various forms of knowledge transfer implemented in universities, the one chosen by the program evaluated in this work has been entrepreneurship training.

## Training

"Training is an educational activity that contributes to developing human capabilities" (Francia, 2018, p. 4, our translation). Training plays a highly relevant role as it represents a systematic and ongoing process of development that empowers individuals to progress as professionals. This process involves the acquisition and transfer of knowledge, as well as the result of skills and competencies that contribute to the holistic growth of the individual. Furthermore, training is designed to meet the organization's needs.

According to Castillo (1999), three tools have been successful in entrepreneur training programs, including (a) the creation of a business plan, translated into a roadmap from the beginning to the established goal, (b) exposure to reality and its interpretation, through students'

participation in research projects or extension activities involving working with entrepreneurs and their development, and (c) case studies or the analysis of situations to illustrate a particular scenario and decision-making.

Reyes *et al.* (2017) conducted a study to analyze the impact of an entrepreneur support program (Fonaes) on business development and propose alternatives to reduce the number of entrepreneurs or companies that cease their activities due to a lack of administrative capacity. The results revealed that the program beneficiaries applied the knowledge acquired and recognized its contribution to the development and operation of their businesses as a fundamental part.

Various authors emphasize fundamental components to be considered in training programs to achieve the consolidation of enterprises. According to Moreno and Escobar Cuervo (2015), these components are represented by contents related to administration and accounting. Aldana Tarazona (2020) emphasizes commercial management, as the ESAN Business School indicates that "small businesses are born and grow thanks to the effort and dedication of the entrepreneur. However, in a competitive environment, this strength is not enough; management skills and tools are needed to accelerate the growth and consolidation of the business" (Aldana Tarazona, 2020, p. 17, our translation). Given this context, there is a need to acquire new techniques and tools that promote the development of commercial management within a company, as it represents the connection with the outside world. Commercial management is responsible for implementing strategies and techniques to execute what is planned in companies dedicated to providing services or selling products.

Another essential tool for a successful enterprise is effective financial management. Cumbicus Vélez (2020), in their analysis of the current state of enterprises served by the Accounting and Auditing career at PUCESE, points out that entrepreneurs have identified the lack of administrative and accounting knowledge as the main weakness. They tend to confuse family or individual finances with the business's profitability, which is why training is essential. According to Pizarro *et al.* (2020), maintaining proper accounting will enable entrepreneurs to determine the production and sales costs, depending on the business sector. This, in turn, can lead to better results. In this way, they will have more accurate and suitable information for decision-making in various tasks within their enterprise, achieving better administrative control.

Since training programs aim to achieve objectives related to the reported benefits for companies, evaluating results becomes critically important for all parties involved.

## Impact Assessment

Assessing impact is not an easy task but is extremely necessary, as it provides feedback on what has been taught. The effect is understood as the change produced in a population compared to what would have happened if no intervention had occurred (García Sánchez; Cardozo Brum, 2017).

In a study related to evaluating the impact of training in organizations (Mora Batista, 2018), the results proved to be satisfactory since there was an increase in customer satisfaction, sales levels, and productivity, which were indirectly influenced by the training. This knowledge transfer is considered an agent of change and improvement in productivity and represents organizations' approach to providing the skills and abilities necessary for individuals, businesses, and society to enhance their performance at work.

Impact assessment provides information about the effectiveness and utility of training during its implementation. For this reason, it is necessary to define guidelines and follow-up to be delivered to training programs to improve the quality of future actions. Quality information must be ensured, and the evaluation should be sustained over time, monitoring the process and subsequent changes resulting from the training (Triana; Medina, 2019).

## Program Effectiveness

Program evaluation should not be one-dimensional but should be approached from a systemic perspective. The effectiveness of training programs can be measured by (a) the extent to which the knowledge, skills, and attitudes are taught to address the participants' needs and (b) the perception of learning the content, its correct application, and sustainability over time (Francia, 2018). The variation in productivity within the company after the program can also corroborate the effectiveness of engagement programs.

The program's effectiveness also depends on the perception of those involved in the program. Ruiz de Maya and Grande Esteban (2006) argue that "perception can be understood as a process of capturing and evaluating stimuli from the outside, selected and organized, allowing us to understand the world around us" (Ruiz de Maya; Grande Esteban, 2006, p. 25, our translation), becoming a way to assess programs from an internal perspective.

The evaluation process of programs and activities aimed at empowering and enhancing entrepreneurial activity in the environment is essential to identify strengths and determine if the transfer of knowledge provided by the university to society meets the needs and expectations of those involved.

## **Methodology**

The study consisted of a single-case study as a research strategy, where the intention is not to achieve generalization of findings but to understand the investigated phenomenon within its context, as per Yin (2005).

The study used a mixed-method approach, where quantitative and qualitative data play a significant role. As Pereira Pérez (2011), points out, a mixed-method design allows for a focus on study topics, especially when the aim is to give voice to participants, meaning not only seeking numerical data but also the participant's perspective. Data triangulation was used to gain a better understanding of the research object. Triangulation can be understood as a process of cumulative validation (quantitative + qualitative) or as a means to obtain a more comprehensive view of the investigated phenomena (quantitative and qualitative) (Kelle, 2001).

## **Instruments**

The perception of the impact of the extension program for entrepreneurs was measured through three data collection techniques: (a) surveys, (b) focus groups, and (c) interviews, all administered after the implementation of the program. The surveys were conducted with entrepreneurs who participated in the university extension program. The two focus groups were worked with the entrepreneurs who participated in the extension program and the students who comprised the program's mentoring team. The interview was conducted with the municipal representative of the local entrepreneurship sector.

Initially, the survey resulted from the adaptation of two instruments used in different related research: (a) the assessment of the impact of training in organizations (Mora Batista, 2018) and (b) the measurement of entrepreneurial capacity (Gonzales Meza, 2018).

The process of adapting the instrument took into account the context in which this research would be applied, involving the exclusion of dimensions and indicators, as well as the modification of some of them. The instrument developed by Mora Batista (2018) initially covers 20 dimensions, of which nine were incorporated. In turn, the mechanism by González Meza (2018) presents three sizes, from which indicators were selected to complement the variable of interest with the dimension of productivity, resulting in the proposed version comprising a total of ten dimensions.

After completing the adaptation process, the research was submitted to six experts in the field to obtain evidence of content validity for the selected dimensions of the study. In the first stage, the evaluators proposed modifications and adjustments for each item to align them

with the concepts associated with each measurement. These modifications were considered in creating the second version of the instrument, which was subjected to expert judgment regarding the clarity and relevance of each item. Following the experts' evaluations, using a scale from one to five, where one represents the minimum attribute level and five represents the maximum attribute level, about the clarity and relevance of each item within the ten dimensions.

The evaluation aimed to refine the items and eliminate the less representative ones to obtain a validated instrument. The degree of agreement among the judges was verified using Aiken's V (1980) as one of the techniques that allow for quantifying the clarity and relevance of each item concerning a content domain formulated by the judges. Its value ranges from zero to one, with a value of one indicating perfect agreement among the judges. The coefficient interpretation focuses on the calculated magnitude and the level of statistical significance obtained. As a criterion for retaining an item, it was assumed that the index should not be less than 0.80 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

After the elimination of items suggested by the Aiken indices, the instrument, which uses a Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," was composed of the following dimensions: (a) pre-training for the university extension program with three items, (b) goals and program content for the extension program with seven items, (c) extension instructors with six items, (d) duration of the extension program with four items, (e) intention to apply the content of the extension program with three items, (f) self-efficacy regarding the extension program with three items, (g) availability of productive factors in the enterprise with three items, (h) overall perception of the extension program with three items, (i) expectations of positive outcomes from the extension program with three items, and (j) resulting productivity with three items.

On the other hand, both the focus groups and the interviews were conducted by moderators using a script of essential topics designed to cover the spectrum outlined by the dimensions addressed in the research. These questions opened the dialogue and enriched it with the emergence of new questions derived from the shared responses.

## Procedure

The variable studied was the perception of the impact of the extension program on entrepreneurs. To do so, a non-probabilistic conditional sampling was conducted, consisting of two groups: the first comprised the 12 entrepreneurs who participated in the extension program,

and the second included the 16 students who made up the mentoring team that conducted the program as part of the requirements for the "Seminars and Professional Practice" course in the final year of the Bachelor of Administration. An interview was also conducted with the municipal representative responsible for the local entrepreneurship sector, who provided relevant information for the study.

Initially, the surveys were administered on paper to the 12 entrepreneurs participating in the program, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data after obtaining their informed and voluntary consent. The collected data were tabulated and processed using Sphinx IQ2 software. Subsequently, the entrepreneurs formed a focus group in which they shared their opinions about the training program. The responses were recorded with the participant's consent for later transcription, refinement, and analysis.

Later, a focus group was formed with the 16 students who participated in the extension program, using the same script constructed based on the established dimensions of analysis. The students' responses were also recorded with consent for subsequent transcription and analysis.

Finally, an interview was conducted with the representative of the local entrepreneurship sector, during which valuable information related to their perception of the university extension program was shared. This information contributed to a deeper understanding of the analyzed context.

## **Results**

The "Entrepreneurs Club" extension program was conducted from August to November 2021. The program aims to connect students of Administration at the university with a group of entrepreneurs in their locality, providing training and guidance to micro-enterprises or individuals interested in entrepreneurship.

The program is in its second edition and is coordinated by the Department of Social Development of the respective municipality, acting as a government intermediary. Within the program, entrepreneurs registered in the city have access to information, training programs, and microcredit to promote the development of the local economy.

The training sessions delivered by the students covered topics chosen in collaboration between entrepreneurs and students, including leadership in micro-enterprises, primary Excel usage, basic accounting, cost accounting, sales strategies, product promotion, using social

media to boost sales, time management, and responding to crises. The workshops lasted for one and a half hours over a period of 15 days, during which the students visited the entrepreneurs to guide the use of the new tools they had learned.

The municipality's office maintains an approximate registry of 80 micro-entrepreneurs, but in 2021, only a group of 22 individuals applied to participate in the program and have the opportunity to access the microcredit offered by the municipality. Out of the 22 entrepreneurs who used, only 19 completed the necessary documentation to access microcredit, while only 12 successfully finished the training program, received the program's final certificate, and participated in this study.

Once the data were collected and filtered, quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. The profile of the surveyed entrepreneurs comprised 75% women and 25% men, with an average age of 40 years (Min-Max: 13-62). The businesses were categorized into five sectors: gastronomy (58%), crafts (8%), childcare (8%), gardening (8%), and textile (8%). Among the analyzed enterprises, 42% had been in operation for less than seven months, 17% were in the range of seven to 13 months, and 41% had been in existence for over 28 months.

As reported by the responsible party in the municipal program for social action, the entrepreneurs are categorized into three groups: (a) *changarín* entrepreneur, who views entrepreneurship as an additional source of income, not their primary livelihood; (b) micro-entrepreneurs, whose business is the primary source of family sustenance and frequently seeks microcredit; and (c) SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), who generally do not participate in training due to the perception that they are in a more advanced stage of their activities.

To assess the internal consistency of items within each dimension, *Cronbach's* alpha coefficient was calculated, and the results are presented in Table 1. Most dimensions obtained values exceeding 0.7, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. However, measurements (a) preparation before the university extension course, (c) program extension instructors, and (h) overall perception of the extension program showed values below 0.7. While these values are slightly below the acceptable threshold for this coefficient, it is possible to assume that an increase in the sample size could enhance the reliability of these dimensions.

The descriptive statistical analysis of quantitative data allowed for the identification of trends in the perceptions of both entrepreneurs and students who participated in the program. On the other hand, the content analysis of qualitative data expanded the research landscape,

providing relevant information about the studied reality and contributing to achieving the research objectives.

As can be observed in Table 1, in the first dimension, it was found that the preparation before the extension course had a minimum score of 2. However, with an average of 4.11, it is evident that this dimension was positively weighted with a standard deviation of 0.9.

**Table 1** – Descriptive Statistics of Perception Dimensions for the Impact of the Entrepreneurial Extension Program

Dimensions	Corporate group (n=12)				Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha$
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (S)	
Preparation	2,00	5,00	4,11	,90267	,657
Objectives	3,71	5,00	4,59	,43001	,866
Instructors	4,00	5,00	4,55	,34329	,609
Duration	3,50	5,00	4,33	,54703	,814
Intent	3,67	5,00	4,72	,44571	,814
Effectiveness	4,00	5,00	4,61	,44571	,725
Availability	3,67	5,00	4,69	,45965	,825
Global Perception	3,67	5,00	4,52	,43712	,661
Expectation	4,00	5,00	4,80	,38817	,939
Productivity	3,00	5,00	4,13	,61065	,853

**Source:** Author's elaboration using Sphinx IQ2

On the other hand, the dimensions with a minimum score equal to 4 were revealed to be (a) program instructors, (b) entrepreneur's self-efficacy, and (c) outcome expectations. The means obtained in these dimensions were above 4.5, with standard deviations not exceeding 0.45, while the measurement corresponding to outcome expectations had the highest mean of 4.8.

As general observations, the evaluations by the entrepreneurs exceeded the minimum score of one (Strongly Disagree) in all dimensions, while they all achieved the maximum score of five (Strongly Agree). The mean for each dimension was more significant than four, with deviations less than one, suggesting that the impact of the program, as perceived by the entrepreneurs, was satisfactory.

The qualitative data collected from the three groups (entrepreneurs, students, and the manager) were analyzed based on the ten predefined categories in the quantitatively operated instrument (deductive approach). The method used was content analysis, where the information from the focus groups and interviews was transcribed and coded using selected recording units: the theme (statement about an article, a sentence, or a compound sentence) and the informant character (entrepreneurs, students, or the manager), to understand opinions, values, beliefs, or attitudes related to categories (Bardin, 2011). In the coding of qualitative data, 919 words



the start of the study period, there was a discrepancy in the perception of preparation before the program between entrepreneurs and students, a situation was corrected as trust was built between both parties.

Regarding the dimension of program objectives and content ( $M=4.59$  and  $S=0.430$ ), entrepreneurs stated that it "met expectations, was better than we expected, there was personalized service. Effort is valued." However, for the students, there was a lack of connection and interest on the part of the entrepreneurs in participating in the program: "Entrepreneurs did not respond to messages; it was evident that they were more interested in microcredit and did not see the benefit they could obtain from the student's knowledge. We even had to go from house to house to secure commitments from the entrepreneurs." On the other hand, for the municipality, the program's objective was "more specialized support for students in meeting the needs of entrepreneurs, a richer support where theory is applied to reality."

From the perspective of the extension program instructors, the support provided by the students in creating access to microcredit portfolios is essential, as they also learn the process. The "willingness, dedication, and goodwill of the students" is acknowledged. Regarding the duration of the extension program, entrepreneurs express the opinion that "time is too short to cover all the content," while students state that they are "swamped in the last semester." The municipal manager notes that "there is always a shortage of time to delve into certain topics or explore others." The different perceptions indicate the need to review the content and activity schedule.

In the dimensions related to the intention to apply the content of the extension program, perceived self-efficacy resulting from the extension program, the availability of productive factors in entrepreneurship, and the resulting productivity, no significant discrepancies were identified among the participants since these dimensions are generally based on the self-perceptions of entrepreneurs and their businesses. However, in the dimensions of the overall perception of the extension program ( $M=4.52$  and  $S=0.437$ ) and positive outcome expectations from the extension program ( $M=4.80$  and  $S=0.388$ ), qualitative data reveal divergent perceptions, as evidenced in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2 – Overall Perception of the Extension Program**

Interviewee	Text
Entrepreneurs	"We have noticed a change as entrepreneurs, but also on a personal level. Impact: reflection, motivation, learning, self-confidence, guidance, organization, positive."
Students	"It doesn't seem to me that this project is in the final semester of the undergraduate program because they are very loaded with the thesis, and this program demands time." "For the next year, the goal is to split the course into two levels, a basic one and a more advanced one, as it was the most recurrent observation from the entrepreneurs."
Municipal Manager	To finalize a virtual platform for entrepreneurs (currently, we are working with one entrepreneur). To make the program more widely known."

**Source:** Author's elaboration using Sphinx IQ2

**Table 3 – Expectation of Positive Program Extension Results**

Interviewee	Text
Entrepreneurs	"It helped to have more faith in what you do; we began to value the product before the price. Personal confidence varied; there is a difference between my product and the competition's. The quality is better, and it's worth more. I learned that even if it's more expensive, I don't need to compare it to the other prices for the same product since mine has its virtues."
Students	"In my case, none of the expectations were met because when I wrote to the entrepreneurs, I realized that they weren't very committed and were only interested in getting microcredit. They also didn't put in the effort to meet with the students and get better advice. It happened to me and my teammates."
Municipal Manager	"The goal was effectively achieved, and expectations were met. Some entrepreneurs got lost because they didn't know how to articulate."

**Source:** Author's elaboration using Sphinx IQ2

The qualitative results are consistent with the entrepreneurs' perception of value regarding the program, with which they often exceeded their expectations. Although the overall perceptions have reflected a satisfactory trend (67% positive and 33% negative), it is estimated that the workload, lack of time, and other demands on the university students may have been partially responsible for the percentage of negative perceptions about the program. The municipal manager's assessment coincided with the program's shortcomings, although the expectations and overall perception were highly satisfactory, creating an opportunity for future collaborative efforts between the university and the municipality.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Considering that the first dimension, "Preparation before university extension course," received the lowest evaluation, it's worth noting that in the focus group, entrepreneurs expressed their lack of understanding about the program's purpose. Initially, some attended only as a requirement to obtain microcredit, or they had no expectations about what the program could provide.

It's also important to mention that among the dimensions that received higher scores (program instructors, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and outcome expectations), entrepreneurs in the focus group expressed satisfaction with the support they received from the students, as well as the training and motivation offered. This aligns with the scores obtained in those dimensions, as students have encouraged the development of perceived self-efficacy in entrepreneurs, creating expectations and tools for their future ventures.

The interview with the municipal representative revealed that there are more than 80 registered businesses in the municipality, but only around 20 are participating in the various programs the municipality offers. The municipality's entrepreneurship sector, linked to social development, reaches out to individuals interested in entrepreneurship and invites them to join the entrepreneurs' club. The lack of proper promotion of this initiative may be the underlying reason for the low program participation.

It is noteworthy that over 75% of the entrepreneurs participating in the program are women. While one might speculate that the cause of this reality is related to the fact that, in general, women are the primary breadwinners for their families or may face more significant difficulties in entering the job market, there is a substantial need for future research to provide reliable information about this phenomenon. Such analysis can contribute to addressing issues that strengthen women's entrepreneurial experience, promoting topics such as women's empowerment, community leadership, and family entrepreneurship.

At the same time, one of the major issues perceived was the lack of correspondence and understanding between entrepreneurs and students. Entrepreneurs express communication limitations caused by their lack of knowledge of their needs or the lack of assertiveness in seeking help. Some students, on the other hand, participate in the program only to fulfill a course requirement and not as a community service. Studies like Losada *et al.* (2019), indicate that students participating in a service-learning project acquire civic-social and relational skills to a greater extent, which would have an impact not only on their professional development but also on their personal lives.

Therefore, there is a need to incorporate service learning as part of the curricular activities in all higher education courses. This aims to promote the comprehensive development of students and meet community demands.

It is worth noting that, when filling out the survey, participants realized different shortcomings in their businesses. Given this scenario, there is a need for the university to provide training in accounting and commercial management for entrepreneurs. These training programs can be designed through distance or hybrid pedagogical options, using the university resources to empower entrepreneurs and increase the potential for making their projects more efficient.

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