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Turning Assignments into Income: A New Model of Student Entrepreneurship

SAZLIN SUHALMIE MOHD SHARIFF, MASILAH MOHAMAD & MUMTAZ AHMAD

UiTM CAWANGAN NEGERI SEMBILAN KAMPUS KUALA PILAH

The idea of transforming students' assignments into income-generating opportunities offers a practical way to bridge academic learning with real-world entrepreneurship. In many cases, students produce quality work that ends at submission and is rarely developed into outputs with real value. As a result, learning becomes disconnected from opportunities for innovation and income generation. This raises an important question: can assignments be redesigned not only as assessment tools but also as platforms for value creation? Integrating entrepreneurial elements into education enables students to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways while strengthening their employability and financial independence. The Earn-to-Learn model highlights how collaboration between universities, industries, and governments can provide students with paid, real-world experiences (Herbert, 2018), while experiential learning approaches further support student engagement with real challenges beyond the classroom (De Souza-Daw et al., 2022).



However, traditional assignments present clear limitations. They are often designed for grading rather than for value creation, leading students to prioritise marks over meaningful application and to reduce creativity and critical thinking (Agrawal, 2025). In addition, assignments are rarely utilised beyond submission, even when they contain valuable ideas (Winfield, 2023). More importantly, they offer limited exposure to real markets, preventing students from understanding how their work performs in actual business environments and weakening the link between education and employability (Arend & Carlson, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for more practical and application-driven learning approaches.

In response, the "Assignment to Income" concept introduces a value-driven perspective on student work. Assignments can be reframed as potential products, services, or business ideas rather than tasks to be completed. This aligns with entrepreneurial-minded learning, where students are encouraged to solve real-world problems and focus on value creation (Han et al., 2021). At the same time, collaborative environments that connect students with educators and industry practitioners can foster innovation and experimentation. This approach shifts the focus from task completion to value creation, encouraging students to evaluate whether their outputs can address real needs and generate meaningful impact (Du Toit, 2023), while still preserving the broader aims of education.

Importantly, this model is highly practical across disciplines. Business plan assignments can evolve into real startups, allowing students to test and launch ideas. Marketing assignments can involve selling actual products, giving students hands-on experience in customer engagement and financial management (Agustin et al., 2024). Design projects can be transformed into digital products or freelance services, while event assignments can be implemented as real events. These approaches demonstrate that assignments can move beyond theory and become viable tools for entrepreneurship.

For this transformation to succeed, educators play a central role. Assignments must be designed with real-world application and monetisation potential, encouraging students to think beyond submission and towards value creation (De Souza-Daw et al., 2022). Educators can also promote entrepreneurial thinking by guiding students to identify real problems and propose practical solutions, while collaboration with industry partners provides mentorship and exposure to market realities. Pitching platforms and showcase opportunities can further enhance this process by allowing students to present ideas, receive feedback, and explore real opportunities.

Beyond the classroom, a supportive ecosystem is essential. Universities can establish entrepreneurship units and student clubs that provide training, resources, and structured support (Matt & Schaeffer, 2018). Access to selling spaces such as booths or kiosks allows students to test their ideas in real-world market environments, while mentorship and networking opportunities help strengthen their confidence and capabilities. In addition, incubators and accelerators can provide funding, training, and infrastructure to support student ventures (Breznitz & Zhang, 2019). These elements collectively create an environment where assignments can realistically be transformed into income-generating activities.



The implementation of the Earn-to-Learn model has a significant impact on students. They gain opportunities to earn income while studying, reducing financial pressure and making learning more meaningful (Al-Zekri et al., 2024). At the same time, they develop an entrepreneurial mindset characterised by adaptability, initiative, and self-efficacy, along with practical skills such as problem-solving and communication (Shaw & Perez, 2023). These experiences build confidence and reduce reliance on traditional employment pathways, as students become more capable of creating their own opportunities.

In conclusion, turning assignments into income represents a meaningful shift in higher education, where learning extends beyond submission into real-world application and value creation. The concept of “learning by earning” reflects a more applied and student-centred approach (Herbert, 2018). With thoughtful design, strong institutional support, and effective collaboration, assignments can become not only tools for assessment but also starting points for entrepreneurship and future success.

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