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Factors Influencing Entrepreneurship Curriculum and Pedagogy Towards the Development of Graduate Entrepreneurs in South Africa Higher Education

Juliet Nwakaego Nwachukwu

University of the Western Cape, South Africa

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6489-0320>

Chux Gervase Iwu

Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Economics and Management Studies, University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6290-9864>

Zivanayi Nyandoro

Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Economics and Management Studies, University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6363-5968>

Abstract

South Africa continues to face persistently high levels of graduate unemployment, which restricts economic productivity and further intensifies poverty, inequality, and the marginalisation of young people. In response, the development of graduate entrepreneurs has become a strategic national priority, as entrepreneurial skills are increasingly viewed as a pathway to job creation, innovation and inclusive economic growth. Higher education institutions are, therefore, crucial in equipping graduates with the entrepreneurial abilities required to pursue self-employment and venture creation. To understand the reasons for low entrepreneurial intention, this study examines curriculum and pedagogical factors that shape entrepreneurial intentions among university students in South Africa, using a qualitative research design. Findings reveal that entrepreneurship education remains predominantly theoretical, with critical gaps including a lack of early exposure, limited practical learning, misaligned curriculum and pedagogy, poor integration with non-business programmes, systemic constraints, and insufficiently skilled lecturers. The study argues that without meaningful curriculum reform and pedagogical innovation, entrepreneurship education cannot effectively develop graduate entrepreneurs. Recommendations include adopting experiential and problem-based teaching strategies, strengthening industry partnerships, enhancing lecturer capacity and integrating entrepreneurship across all disciplines. These insights inform policy and practice to transform entrepreneurship education into a more effective catalyst for graduate entrepreneurs and ultimately, contribute to South Africa's socio-economic development.

Keywords: curriculum, pedagogy, entrepreneurship education, graduate, entrepreneurial intention

1. Introduction

Delivering productive entrepreneurship education to motivate graduates for entrepreneurial uptake is influenced by the structure of the curriculum and pedagogy (Iwu, 2022). The structure of the curriculum and pedagogical strategy are significant in stimulating the development of graduate entrepreneurs who will engage in venture creation, as indicated by several researchers (Ajani, 2024; Hoffman, 2020; Iwu et al., 2020). However, designing and implementing an entrepreneurship curriculum that successfully promotes practical, skill-based, and experiential learning remains a complex challenge, particularly within the South African context, where universities face the urgent task of empowering graduates with entrepreneurial mindsets to address persistent unemployment and drive inclusive economic development (Makwara et al., 2024; Mayombe, 2024; Motaung, 2024).

With an official employment rate of 31.9% and a youth unemployment rate of 46.1% recorded in the 2025 Q3 unemployment statistics report, South Africa remains one of the countries with a high unemployment rate (Statistics South Africa, 2025). The report further indicated that unemployment among university graduates has increased to 10.4%, up from 8.7% in 2024, particularly affecting youth graduates aged 15-34 (Stat SA, 2025). This underscores the urgency of developing graduates with an entrepreneurial mindset, given the economy's struggle to absorb the upcoming graduates in the labour market. With traditional employment not readily available, entrepreneurship education is emerging as an alternative that provides graduates with a means of generating their own economic opportunities (Ajani, 2024; Gabrueksson et al., 2020). While Iwu (2022) has noted an increased focus on developing entrepreneurial skills, a considerable number of entrepreneurial initiatives have been launched to support university students in entrepreneurial engagement. These include the Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE), SARCHi Chairs, UNESCO Chairs, institution-funded initiatives, and SETA-funded programmes. Despite several initiatives to support entrepreneurial activities, students' entrepreneurial engagement remains minimal.

Entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy encompass both the content and delivery mechanisms that equip graduates with innovative thinking and self-reliance, essential for employment creation and venture development (Iwara, 2025; Rodrigues, 2023). As hinted *a priori*, despite their central role in shaping entrepreneurial learning, persistent challenges remain that, in a way, impede alignment towards the development of graduate entrepreneurs (Nabi et al., 2017). A growing body of literature indicates that current curriculum structures and pedagogical approaches often fail to produce graduates who successfully transition into entrepreneurial ventures (Cui et al., 2021; Hoffman, 2020; Iwu, 2022; Makwara et al., 2024). Tewari and Ilesanmi (2020) highlighted that the impact of entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy on venture creation remains limited and fails to stimulate entrepreneurial intention among graduates.

Given the significant impact of an entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy, as well as the shortfall identified in the extant literature, establishing their relevance for empowering entrepreneurial ambitions among graduates is paramount (Lee, 2020; Rankhumise et al., 2020). This need is particularly urgent in South Africa and across the continent, where graduate unemployment remains high and pathways for economic participation remain limited. Consequently, the development of a well-structured entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogical framework is crucial in producing graduate entrepreneurs who will make meaningful contributions to national and global development plans, including the South African

National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the United Nations (UN)'s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To that end, this study examines how effectively entrepreneurship course content and delivery applications influence graduates' preparedness to become successful venture creators in South Africa.

2. Review of Related Literature

Entrepreneurship education has been lauded as one of the powerful drivers of effective learning, offering a creative-oriented learning experience that instils graduates with entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and competencies (Taleb et al., 2023). A well-structured curriculum and pedagogy are determinants of this outcome (Iwu et al., 2018). The efficacy of well-structured entrepreneurship education and teaching has been highlighted by Hadley (2025) and Neergaard and Christensen (2017) to provide comprehensive learning experiences that shape the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and prepare graduates to create businesses that generate employment and reduce unemployment. Consequently, Murray (2024) emphasised that an effective, strategically oriented entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy are influenced by integrating early exposure to entrepreneurship, practical learning, alignment of delivery methods, inclusivity of non-business programmes, system structure, and knowledgeable lecturers into their learning components.

2.1. Barriers to Effective Entrepreneurship Curriculum and Pedagogy

While various factors have been recognised as contributing to the lack of effectiveness of entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy, such as early exposure to entrepreneurship, practical learning, delivery methods alignment, non-business programme inclusivity, system structure and practical lecturers, scholars of entrepreneurship have identified these factors as instrumental to robust learning (Iwu et al., 2021; Lee, 2020). Lack of structuring these factors, perhaps impeding graduates' motivation to pursue entrepreneurship and thereby affecting the development of practical entrepreneurs in South Africa (Murray, 2024).

Early exposure to entrepreneurship has been identified as fostering entrepreneurial ambition among graduates, which is imperative. Ndofirepi and Steyn (2023) and Boldureanu et al. (2020) argue that early entrepreneurship education programmes provide students with the passion, confidence, and skills to start their own businesses and overcome inevitable challenges. Sezen-Gultekin and Gur-Erdogan (2016) maintained that early entrepreneurial education boosts graduates' confidence, competence and talent. Furthermore, these authors claim that early exposure to entrepreneurship education among students fosters a deeper understanding of the concept and equips them with the ability to apply initiatives that lead to venture creation. Additionally, Paek et al. (2021) contend that the timing of exposure to entrepreneurial learning significantly influences educational outcomes. However, Mothibi and Malebana (2025) highlights that the lack of early involvement in entrepreneurship learning hinders entrepreneurial intention among graduates. Similarly, Qwabe et al. (2025) observed the absence of early exposure to entrepreneurship education across various South African Universities, thereby hindering entrepreneurial interest, preventing the capitalisation of opportunities, and leading to reliance on formal employment.

An effective entrepreneurship education depends on its practical nature, equipping students with real-world skills and promoting innovative thinking (Haneberg et al., 2022). While practical-based learning is paramount in facilitating participatory learning that integrates case and project studies,

internships, and mentorship, ensuring learners actively participate in real-life tasks rather than studying theory (Bell & Bell, 2020). However, Nabi et al. (2017) identify the inadequate acquisition of practical skills and knowledge within the higher education (HE) ecosystem as a significant barrier to producing competent graduate entrepreneurs. Notably, Iwu (2022) revealed that the absence of practical learning integrated in the delivery of entrepreneurship curriculum in South Africa makes it difficult to produce graduate entrepreneurs.

Without aligning the curriculum and teaching methods, producing graduates with an entrepreneurial intent to curb unemployment becomes nearly impossible as they are ill-prepared (Hägg, 2017). The alignment of curriculum and pedagogical approaches is important in offering and promoting a holistic learning experience as it empowers graduates to understand education about, for, and through (Lackéus, 2020; Nabi et al., 2017; Olutuase et al., 2023). However, Nabi et al. (2017) highlight that the lack of alignment between the entrepreneurship curriculum and teaching methods impedes entrepreneurial activities and engagement among graduates. Notably, Vorvornator and Midiniso (2025) and Qwabe et al. (2025) highlighted a persistent misalignment within entrepreneurship education across South African HEIs, emphasising that it lacks essential experiential components such as mentoring, work-integrated learning, and access to entrepreneurial hubs. Dzomonda and Fatoki (2019) share a similar view, stating that academic entrepreneurship courses lack practical knowledge despite graduates gain extensive academic knowledge but little hands-on experience. Therefore, theoretical learning alone restricts students' business potential after graduation (Decker-Lange et al., 2021).

The non-business programme's inclusivity is another essential factor influencing graduates' entrepreneurial uptake (Sirelkhatim & Gangi, 2015). Embedding entrepreneurship education across diverse academic disciplines has emerged as a catalytic force, encouraging graduates from non-business fields to engage with entrepreneurial thinking and practice (Hadley, 2023). Furthermore, the involvement of non-business disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) advances an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates, thereby supporting job creation and innovation (Ozyazici et al., 2025). However, empirical research indicates that the lack of inclusivity in the entrepreneurship curriculum across all academic levels and institutions constrains the development of an entrepreneurial culture, particularly among students enrolled in non-business programmes (Ozyazici et al., 2025; Vorvornator & Midiniso, 2025). Consequently, Iwu et al. (2020) argue that despite being incorporated into university curricula, entrepreneurship education has not yielded a meaningful impact on graduate development. For example, a study by Tengeh et al. (2015) found that although entrepreneurship was incorporated into non-business disciplines at South African Universities of Technology (UoTs), only 15 out of the 46 programmes reported that approximately 33% offered active entrepreneurship learning.

Furthermore, within the system structure of entrepreneurship curriculum, the framework for teaching and learning is crucial (Jones et al., 2018). Equally, the institutional structure comprises culture, mechanisms, and resources that empower the learning of entrepreneurship education (Shirokova et al., 2016). These institutional structures drive entrepreneurship education as a field of study and promote its embedding in non-business programmes (Kuratko & Morris, 2018). For instance, some structures, cultures, and mechanisms that propel entrepreneurial learning include curriculum, effective pedagogical approaches, and the use of educators with expertise in entrepreneurial experience to teach entrepreneurship education (Shirokova et al., 2016). However,

the absence of a systematic structure that aligns with entrepreneurship education is an influential factor hindering effective learning in entrepreneurship (Iwu & Opute, 2021). In South Africa, Mahadea and Kabange (2024) and Mahadea and Kaseeram (2018) argue that entrepreneurship teaching lacks a systemic structure as entrepreneurship is offered as a module rather than a field of study, lacks integration with non-business programmes, and is predominantly theoretical. Hence, graduates tend not to become venture creators that will curb unemployment.

Additionally, engaging experienced lecturers with an entrepreneurial speciality to teach entrepreneurship education is paramount (Vorvornator & Midiniso, 2025). The effectiveness of any teaching depends on the educators' skills and competencies, which empower them to master the technicalities of conveying knowledge (Latip et al., 2020). Educators are a significant element to consider in entrepreneurship education because they play a pivotal role in developing and instilling knowledge that stirs up entrepreneurial spirit and behaviour among graduates (Lackéus, 2020). Several schools of thought, such as Nabi et al. (2017) and Iwu (2022), have debated the competence of entrepreneurship educators in South Africa as a significant challenge to the development of graduate entrepreneurs. Iwu et al. (2021) reported that the lack of knowledgeable and skilled lecturers who inspire and motivate students towards entrepreneurship is one of the key factors hindering student entrepreneurial intention in South Africa.

2.2. The Influence of the Curriculum and Pedagogy on Stimulating Graduate Entrepreneurs

The essence of a well-structured curriculum and pedagogy is to influence graduates' motivation and foster effective entrepreneurial learning (Roy et al., 2020). It promotes lifelong learning by equipping graduates with the entrepreneurial mindset, skills, competencies, and knowledge necessary to take initiative (Baggen et al., 2022).

In motivating graduates to pursue entrepreneurship, early structuring of entrepreneurship education into the curriculum to provide students with exposure is paramount. When considering graduate entrepreneurial acquisition, Olutuase et al. (2023) note that early exposure to entrepreneurship will enable students to develop an entrepreneurial mindset before they specialise in their field. Nzembayie et al. (2024) and Branca et al. (2025) emphasise that early involvement in entrepreneurship provides an explicit articulation of pedagogical delivery methods that effectively engage learners. Equally, early exposure to entrepreneurship influences career choices as students are encouraged to view it as a viable and rewarding path (Lee, 2020; Olutuase et al., 2023). Importantly, these elements collectively shape the perceived attractiveness of entrepreneurship education, contingent on both the curriculum content and its delivery mechanisms among the graduates (Hunter & Lean, 2018).

While practical-based learning is essential, it promotes experiential, interactive learning that helps students develop an entrepreneurial spirit and mindset (Lackéus, 2020). Notably, this type of learning engagement involves classroom time, hands-on learning and soft skills that encourage learners (Awaah et al., 2023). Consequently, practical-based learning promotes lifelong learning that emphasises innovation and the development of creative skills, thereby stimulating learners' entrepreneurial intentions (Awaah et al., 2023; Gan et al., 2022). In order to promote graduates' venture-creation capacity, a well-structured curriculum and pedagogical framework that integrates practical, soft-skill, and theoretical skill development is needed (Gryazeva-Dobshinskaya et al., 2020). Lee (2020) contends that entrepreneurship-focused

pedagogy, particularly when designed to incorporate experiential and action-based learning, stimulates the development of an entrepreneurial mindset, core competencies, and applied skills. Accordingly, the following forms of knowledge are considered fundamental for effectively engaging graduates in entrepreneurship education.

The alignment of the curriculum and delivery approach is one of the most influential factors in developing graduate entrepreneurs in South Africa (Iwu, 2022). The importance of alignment is to create a comprehensive learning experience that is tailored towards empowering students with an entrepreneurial mindset and intention (Nzembayie et al., 2025). Notably, Decker-Lange et al. (2021) emphasise that a well-designed entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy define clear learning outcomes and adopt an effective teaching approach that is tailored to graduates' developmental needs, while simultaneously providing opportunities for them to explore and cultivate their talents. It is worth noting that the curriculum and pedagogy framework sparks students' interest and increases graduate engagement (Lee, 2020). Hence, a structured entrepreneurship education programme makes students more likely to become entrepreneurial and start their own enterprises (Mukhtar et al., 2021).

The non-business programme's inclusivity is an important factor that helps students from other disciplines develop entrepreneurial interest. The integration of entrepreneurship education across diverse academic disciplines has emerged as a catalytic force, encouraging graduates from non-business fields to engage with entrepreneurial thinking and practice (Hadley, 2023). However, a persistent misconception that entrepreneurship education is exclusively intended for students in business-related programmes remains (Awaah et al., 2023). The importance of inclusivity in non-business programmes in entrepreneurship education is to ensure that, regardless of their field of study, the venture-creation potential is identified and nurtured (Iwu, 2022). As such, this interdisciplinary approach advances entrepreneurial thinking and start-up orientation among graduates, making them more dynamic in the job market (Jones & Jones, 2014; Jones, 2019). Jones et al. (2018) further argue that embedding an entrepreneurship curriculum across various academic domains is essential, helping non-business graduates to create their own employment opportunities rather than relying on traditional career pathways.

Building a solid systemic structure framework is a significant factor in producing effective entrepreneurial learning and developing graduate entrepreneurs (Mahadea & Kaseeram, 2018). The role of the system structure is to ensure that the curriculum framework is designed to offer itself as a stand-alone discipline and to be integrated into interdisciplinary studies (Mahadea & Kabange, 2024). Consequently, an effective systemic structure promotes a pedagogical framework that aligns the three teaching components: theoretical, practical, and soft-skills learning (Olutuase et al., 2023). Further, ensure that knowledgeable lecturers, who are experts in the field of entrepreneurship education, are used to deliver instruction that instils entrepreneurial spirit and intention (Kuratko & Morris, 2018). Hence, a system that ensures that entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy provide a step-by-step roadmap that leads to venture creation, reducing unemployment and impacting economic growth (Mukhtar et al., 2021).

Designing a meticulous entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogical framework demands the engagement of knowledgeable lecturers with deep expertise in entrepreneurship education (Matlay, 2018). Consequently, Ncube (2022) states that developing graduate entrepreneurs in South Africa is imperative and requires a range of highly specialised skills and knowledge. Similarly, Cui et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of engaging educators who are knowledgeable and skilled in

business and management, equipped with entrepreneurship knowledge, and are business owners. Thus, engaging such practitioners would enhance the relevance and appeal of entrepreneurship education, particularly for graduates aspiring to pursue entrepreneurial careers in South Africa.

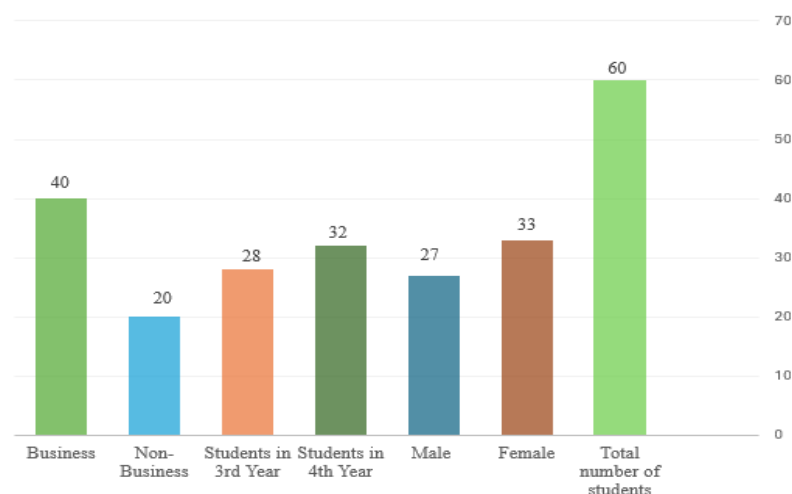
3. Methodology Framework

The study employed a qualitative research design involving two universities located in Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa. Basically, data collection was conducted through focus group conversations using open-ended interview questions. To engage in the discussion, 60 participants were selected and organised into 12 groups, each comprising five students. While the study auto-recorded all sessions, transcription and data analysis were performed using ATLAS.ti software to ensure systematic coding and thematic were accurately interpreted. To avoid the clashing of academic lectures and scheduled interviews, the researchers carefully considered to accommodate all participants' academic commitments. To explore the emerging patterns and perspectives, the interpretivism paradigm and inductive approach were adopted (Khatri, 2020). Furthermore, an exploratory design was utilised to investigate how the curriculum and pedagogical frameworks influence entrepreneurial interest and intention among graduates to take entrepreneurship as a viable career option (Majid, 2018). Additionally, to achieve a robust contextual understanding and deepen analytical insights, case study techniques were the best option suited for the study (Maxwell, 2021).

3.1. Sample

The study population consisted of 60 students designated from two universities in Cape Town, situated in Western Cape Province, South Africa. The participants in this study were chosen based on specific criteria to ensure diversity and relevance. The sample inclusivity were students who had been exposed to entrepreneurship learning and those who had not. The participants accepted in these discussions were students in their third and fourth academic years, as they were expected to have sufficient academic maturity to provide meaningful insights into the topic under investigation. The population size was intentionally designed to generate rich perspectives on the factors that influence the alignment of curriculum and pedagogy, thereby stimulating graduates' entrepreneurial intention. Note that the 60 participants were organised into 12 groups, each consisting of five students, to ensure high-quality data collection, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. STUDENTS' CLASSIFICATION



Source: analysed data by the authors

3.2. Research Authorisation

Ethical authorisation of this study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape, South Africa (UWC). Adherence to ethical principles to ensure the protection of participants' rights, such as safety, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, while avoiding deception and maintaining fairness. In accordance with these regulations, all participants signed an informed consent form before participating in the study.

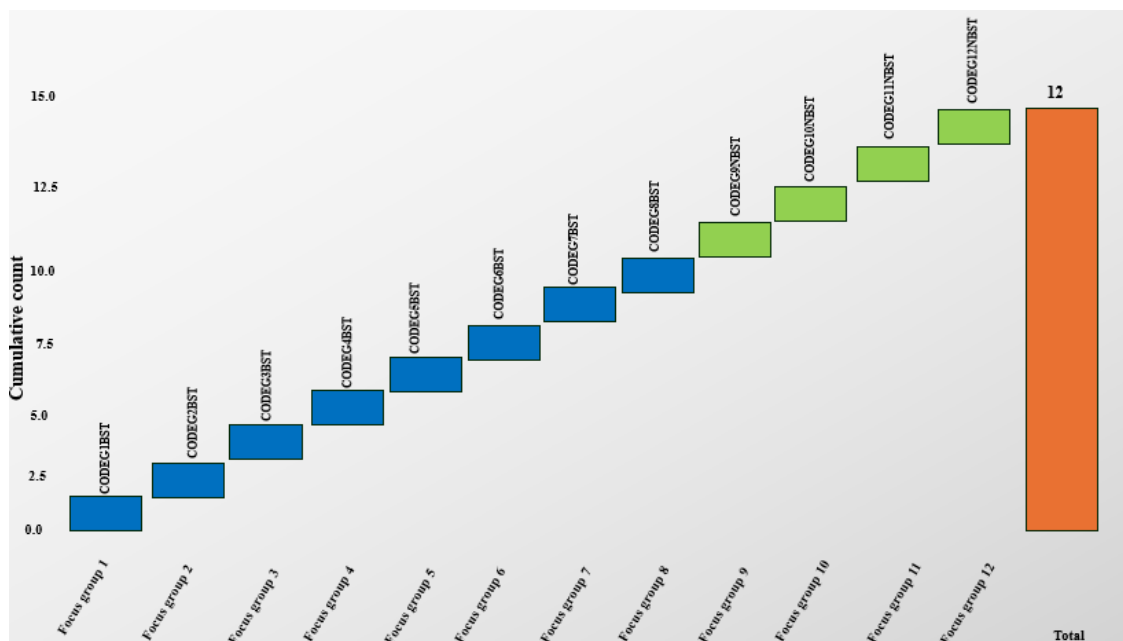
4. Empirical Findings and Evaluation

The purpose of this study was to examine how the curriculum and pedagogical framework employed in entrepreneurship education in South Africa are used to engineer the alignment of graduate entrepreneurial development. The following section provides analysis based on insights drawn from transcribed interview data.

4.1. Presentation of Codes

For the purpose of clarity and uniformity in code identification, each group was assigned a distinct identifier. The code framework was structured to distinguish participants enrolled in business-related programmes from non-business-related disciplines. Specifically, codes CODEG1-8BST correspond to business-related students, whereas CODEG9-12NBST represents non-business students. This categorisation supports systematic analysis and is visually depicted in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2. PRE-GROUP WATERFALL WITH CODES



Source: analysed data by the authors

4.2. Findings

4.2.1. Early Learning Exposure

The initial stage at which entrepreneurship education is delivered to graduates plays a crucial role in reshaping the overall exposure to entrepreneurial learning. This foundational level

significantly influences how well-prepared and motivated graduates will be as they embark on the entrepreneurial journey. Most respondents (9 of the 12 participants, representing 75%) reported enrolling in entrepreneurship education during their undergraduate studies, specifically in their second and third years while 25% of the participants reported never having had any entrepreneurial learning experience. Hence, this lack of early introduction to entrepreneurship learning affects graduates' entrepreneurial intentions. To confirm the effect on entrepreneurial intention, the participants shared their views:

“According to the majority of participants in this group, their first exposure to entrepreneurship education occurred only in their second or third year of study.” (Focus Group 3/CODEG3BST – 3 out of 5 participants)

“In our second year, we were introduced to entrepreneurship education as an elective module, designed and structured within the Introduction to Economics and Business course and offered for only one semester.” (Focus Group 5/CODEG5BST – participants 2 & 4)

“We were exposed to entrepreneurship learning during our second and third years of study.” (Focus Group 6/CODEG6BST – all participants chorused on this)

In contrast to the above responses from business graduates, non-business programme graduates sadly shared the view that they had not had the opportunity to study entrepreneurship, with the exception of two participants.

Several participants shared similar experiences, with two noting, “We were not exposed to entrepreneurship education at any stage during our academic programme.” (Focus Group 11/CODEG11BST – 2 participants)

One participant shared, “We only started learning about entrepreneurship in our second year” (Focus Group 10/CODEG10NBST, participant 3). *Another participant added, “For me, it only came in the third year.”* (Focus Group 10/CODEG10NBST, participant 4)

The absence of early exposure to entrepreneurship learning among graduates has a profound impact on their intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities. These critical gaps highlighted the importance of introducing entrepreneurial concepts at the formative stages of learning. The research conducted by Iwu (2022) and Mothibi and Malebana (2025) supports the finding that neglecting to incorporate entrepreneurship education into the curriculum, which offers fundamental elements early in the students' academic journeys, hinders their entrepreneurial appetite. As a result, many potential entrepreneurs are deprived of essential skills, knowledge and mindset necessary to inspire innovative thinking and business creation. Failing to cultivate an interest in and understanding of entrepreneurship from the outset impedes the development of a proactive entrepreneurial culture among graduates.

4.2.2. Practical Learning

In entrepreneurship education curriculum and pedagogy, practical learning is characterised by its ability to engage graduates actively in the entrepreneurial learning experience to complement theoretical learning. This promotes dynamic learning that captivates graduates' interest and ignites their passion for practical, hands-on experiences. However, all participants unanimously

stated that their entrepreneurial learning lacked experiential guidance on application, which helped graduates explore best practices and develop skills to drive entrepreneurial success in the complex business world. Below are some of the respondents' views:

“The entrepreneurship learning we were exposed to lacked experiential engagement and excitement. This learning primarily relied on textbook knowledge, which denied us the opportunity to apply practical knowledge that inspires creativity.” (Focus Group 2/CODEG2BST, participants 1, 3 & 4)

“The entrepreneurship learning that instils graduates with confidence, lacks practical application and impedes their desire among graduates to become entrepreneurs, is not integrated in our entrepreneurship education curriculum and pedagogy.” (Focus Group 3/CODEG3BST, all participants)

“We do not believe that entrepreneurship learning has been effective in empowering graduates to pursue entrepreneurship as a career so far, because the delivery method has several limitations, including a lack of practical exercises that offer project management, business plan development, and pitching of business ideas for the upward process. All these limit our interest.” (Focus Group 4/CODEG4BST, participants 1, 3 & 5).

Additionally, non-business programme graduates shared their views as follows:

“The current approach to entrepreneurship learning delivery for graduates falls short of delivering an enriched learning experience that inspires us to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. We were only offered a basic understanding of entrepreneurship, which does not provide us with the detailed knowledge and skills necessary.” (Focus Group 10/CODEG10NBST, all participants)

Within the entrepreneurship education curriculum and pedagogy, the analysis has revealed that experiential learning, an aspect of learning that provides lifelong benefits and complements the theoretical approach, is inadequate, supporting the findings of Cui et al. (2021), Mizaur (2020), and Vorvornator and Midiniso (2025). This analysis of the ineffectiveness of entrepreneurship learning in offering practical guidance hinders aspiring graduates from becoming venture creators. Hence, this ineffective learning significantly hinders the growth and development of graduates who pursue entrepreneurship as a viable career option.

4.2.3. Delivery Method Alignment

The pedagogical style is an essential element to consider when designing an entrepreneurship curriculum as it advances strategies and techniques that facilitate the development of innovative skills, knowledge, and mindset. The majority of the participants (83%) affirmed that teaching delivery lacks practical applications alignment, which impedes graduates' engagement in innovative, interactive learning that inspires entrepreneurial intention. While the remaining 17% had no clue about the delivery method of entrepreneurship education. Hence, the teaching is not in alignment with the above. Below are the participants' responses.

“..... A curriculum pedagogy that is overloaded with theories can be a turn-off for graduates who aspire to become entrepreneurs.” (Focus Group 4/CODEG4BST, echoed by all participants)

“Participants noted that ineffective learning results from a mismatch between the curriculum and teaching practices. They added that entrepreneurship education in South Africa remains predominantly theoretical, offering few practical or interactive learning experiences.” (Focus Group 5/CODEG5BST, participant 5)

“..... our entrepreneurship learning predominantly focuses on theory concepts and lacks the practical learning that enables graduates to observe and experiment with the acquired skills and knowledge. Hence, this creates a substantial gap which impedes our entrepreneurial mindset and intention.” (Focus Group 7/CODEG7BST, participant 4)

Consequently, the participants from non-business programmes commented as follows:

“.... The lack of alignment between content delivery and the pedagogical approach has hindered our motivation for entrepreneurial pursuits. Notably, the absence of workshops or seminars limits opportunities to showcase ideas and engage with industry experts.” (Focus Group 9/CODEG9NBST, participants 2 & 4)

“We had no idea about the delivery method, as we had never been exposed to entrepreneurship education in our department.” (Focus Group 12/CODEG12NBST, all participants echoed this)

These findings align with those of Cui et al. (2021), who noted that the delivery approach to entrepreneurship education in South Africa often lacks alignment and practical application. This impeded graduates' ability to learn from real-world examples and participate in collaborative problem-solving. As a result, graduates were not inspired to enter entrepreneurial ventures.

4.2.4. Non-Business Programmes Inclusivity

While examining the universality of entrepreneurship education curriculum in non-business programmes, most participants (75%) confirmed that an entrepreneurship learning curriculum was not universal in South Africa. Notably, this has prevented graduates from non-business programmes who aspire to pursue entrepreneurship as a career from succeeding. The experiences of non-business programme graduates are reflected below:

“.... Regrettably, entrepreneurship education remains absent from the curriculum of non-business programmes. Integrating entrepreneurship curriculum into non-business programmes would be a strategic step toward ensuring that all graduates are meaningfully engaged in entrepreneurial education.” (Focus Group /CODEG9NBST, all participants)

“Entrepreneurship education is not currently integrated into our module. However, incorporating this learning into the non-business programme curriculum would be highly beneficial, as it offers substantial potential for promoting self-employment intentions and encouraging entrepreneurial exploration among students.” (Focus Group 11/CODEG11NBST, participants 1, 2 & 4)

“Even among non-business faculties, specific departments within our institution lack the integration of an entrepreneurship curriculum into their module, thereby denying students the opportunity to engage with entrepreneurial learning.” (Focus Group 12/CODEG12NBST, participants 2 & 4)

4.2.5. System Structure

While analysing the findings on the non-integration of entrepreneurship curriculum into non-business programmes, it is evident that this hinders potential graduates who aspire to become entrepreneurs. This observation aligns with the arguments of Vorvornator & Midiniso (2025) and Sirelkhatim and Gangi (2015), who assert that incorporating entrepreneurship education into non-business curricula effectively promotes entrepreneurial aspirations among graduates in these faculties. This theme emerged from all the participants' responses, which revealed that the system's structure plays a significant role in motivating graduates to pursue entrepreneurship education. The lack of a system structure that supports graduates in pursuing entrepreneurship hinders entrepreneurial intentions. This resonated with the respondents' experiences as follows.

“The absence of a supportive institutional framework considerably heightens the challenges faced by graduates in developing and advancing entrepreneurial ideas.” (Focus Group 2/CODEG2BST, participants 3 & 4)

“We contend that the absence of an institutional framework to support the financing of graduates' business ideas poses a significant barrier to our entrepreneurial aspirations. In the absence of such support, many promising ideas fail to progress beyond the initial stages of development.” (Focus Group 3/CODEG3BST, participants 4 & 5)

“Yes, institutionally, it prevents students from developing their creative ideas. Every business requires funding and financial support to thrive. However, this challenge affects us, particularly those with disadvantaged backgrounds, as we often lack the funds necessary for business development.” (Focus Group 5/CODEG5BST, all participants echoed this)

An analysis of participants' responses showed that institutional failure to provide adequate support significantly undermines the development of entrepreneurial intentions among graduates.

4.2.6. Practical Lecturers

In entrepreneurship education, identifying who is best positioned to teach entrepreneurship is fundamental. This theme emerged from this study as the participants believed that the lack of innovative lecturers hindered their entrepreneurial spirit.

“.... we lack innovative educators who are competent enough to nurture entrepreneurial ideas, as the current lectures primarily offer theoretical instruction, suggesting a lack of practical expertise. We need practical knowledge to improve graduate stimulation in pursuing entrepreneurship as a career.” (Focus Group 2/CODEG2BST, participants 1, 4 & 5)

“We believe that those who should teach entrepreneurship are academic lecturers who specialise in the field and serve as mentors to their graduates, a role that is currently lacking in the entrepreneurship education curriculum in South Africa.” (Focus Group 6/CODEG6BST, participants 4 & 5)

In contrast, the participants in this group had this to say:

“..... our lecturers are knowledgeable, but the delivery methods used in entrepreneurship education are demotivating and discourage us from pursuing entrepreneurship.” (Focus Group 9/CODEG9NBST, participants 1, 3 & 4)

While analysing the participants' feedback, it is worth noting a strong consensus that educators play a vital role in delivering entrepreneurial learning that develops entrepreneurial intention among graduates. However, the participants considered the lack of lecturer innovation a barrier that hindered the cultivation of entrepreneurs' interest. Notably, Iwu et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of competent educators in teaching entrepreneurship education in South Africa.

4.3. Discussion of the Findings

The entrepreneurship education that motivates graduates to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path depends heavily on the curriculum framework and the pedagogical strategies adopted (Iwu et al., 2021). Drawing on feedback from the majority of participants within the selected institutions, the study emphasised that the absence of early exposure to entrepreneurship education reduces graduates' motivation. The lack of early involvement in entrepreneurship hinders the stimulation that would enable them to develop an entrepreneurial interest and an understanding of opportunities before their field of specialisation (Kariv et al., 2025). Ultimately, the findings of the study validate Paek et al.'s (2021) report, which highlighted that early engagement in entrepreneurship education affects entrepreneurial intention among graduates. Overall, Nzembayie et al. (2024) maintains that for curriculum and pedagogy to develop graduates with an entrepreneurial mindset, the integration of early entrepreneurship engagement into the curriculum should be evaluated.

The practicality of entrepreneurship education is the ultimate strategy for designing curriculum and pedagogy, as it aims to provide graduates with active entrepreneurial learning (Haneberg et al., 2022). The majority of the students' responses who participated in the study revealed that the entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy are limited in applying experiential learning, such as project-based tasks, development of business plans, mentorship and work-integrated programmes, which, in a manner, hinder the active learning approach (Bell & Bell, 2020). These findings support Iwu's (2022) and Mukhtar et al.'s (2021) studies, which emphasised that the lack of an experiential approach in the delivery of entrepreneurship education hinders graduates from engaging in active learning that enables them to apply their initiative in real-world settings. In a nutshell, this approach places a solid emphasis on hands-on experiential learning as it helps students build skills and knowledge, tackle issues, and provide solutions, ensuring that entrepreneurship learning bridges theory and practice (Gryazeva-Dobshinskaya et al., 2020; Lackéus, 2020; Lee, 2020).

The alignment of the entrepreneurship curriculum and its teaching methods is a vital factor in dynamic learning that fosters active learning and produces entrepreneurial graduates in South Africa (Mukhtar et al., 2021). While the participants' responses indicated a lack of adoption of the combination of the curriculum and pedagogy in the delivery of entrepreneurship education, which discourages students from pursuing an entrepreneurial career path, they also highlighted the need for specific methods to translate ideas into implementation (Olotuase et al., 2023). The findings of Lackéus' (2020) study align with participants' feedback that the pedagogical approach to delivering entrepreneurship is not aligned with entrepreneurial goals, as the delivery is predominantly theoretical and less interactive, experiential, and problem-solving. Thus, integrating learning experiments with theory-based learning fosters alignment and nurtures young people's entrepreneurial interest (Nabi et al., 2017).

The accessibility of entrepreneurship education to non-business programme students is essential for promoting entrepreneurial interest (Vorvornator & Midiniso, 2025). The absence of incorporating entrepreneurship education into an interdisciplinary programme has created an

entrepreneurial intention gap, leading to self-employment among graduates as most participants echoed. Similarly, the studies conducted by Nzembayie et al. (2024) and Vorvornator and Midiniso (2025) highlighted that the lack of integration of entrepreneurship education with non-business disciplines affects students' participation and limits entrepreneurial uptake. Hence, non-business students need to be provided with entrepreneurship education in order to foster innovative learning across disciplines (Jones, 2019; Jones et al., 2017).

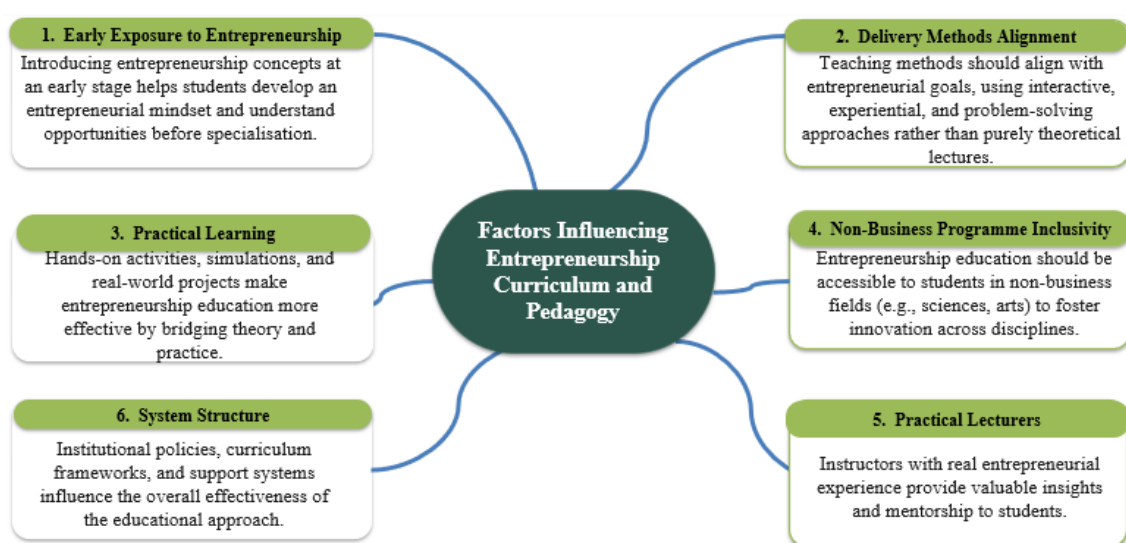
Building a systemic structure to oversee the impact of well-structured curriculum and pedagogy on the delivery of entrepreneurship is vital (Mahadea & Kabange, 2024). While the majority of participants highlighted the lack of a well-systemic framework as hindering the effectiveness of the curriculum and pedagogical delivery. For instance, offering entrepreneurship education as a module, lacking a combination of curriculum and pedagogy, and limited to non-business disciplines, has deprived aspiring graduate entrepreneurs of opportunities. These findings align with Kuratko and Morris (2018), who emphasised that a weak systemic structure hinders the provision of a comprehensive entrepreneurial environment that fosters skills development, thereby reducing the impact of unemployment on the economy.

In entrepreneurship education, who teaches the curriculum is essential because learning leads to the development of graduate entrepreneurs (Iwu, 2022). The majority of participants reported that lecturers in entrepreneurship education lack the competencies required for innovative learning and prioritise the theoretical component over the practical. Notably, Cui et al. (2019) highlighted that the lack of competent educators has been identified as a key challenge for entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy, which hinders entrepreneurial intention among graduates. Matlay (2018) emphasised that employing lecturers who are knowledgeable in delivering entrepreneurship education will enable them to provide valuable insights and mentorship to graduates, helping them build entrepreneurial skills.

4.4. Summary of the Study

Figure 3 illustrates the factors that influence the curriculum and pedagogy and their impact on stimulating graduates' entrepreneurial uptake.

FIGURE 3. SIX PILLARS OF EFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY



Source: authors' own compilation

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The findings from participants in the study suggest that within the two universities investigated, several learning components, specifically, the curriculum and pedagogical practices used in entrepreneurship education, appear to fall short in meaningfully shaping graduates' entrepreneurial uptake. Participants highlighted that limited early exposure to entrepreneurship education may restrict students' ability to develop an entrepreneurial mindset during their foundational year of study. Likewise, the predominance of a theoretically oriented curriculum, with minimal practical or experiential integration, was perceived as reducing opportunities for hands-on learning that could strengthen entrepreneurial readiness.

While these insights point to a misalignment between the intended outcomes of the entrepreneurship curriculum and its classroom implementation. According to the participants, pedagogical strategies did not consistently foster creativity, critical thinking, or innovation, skills commonly associated with entrepreneurial development. Additionally, the programme was not widely viewed as interdisciplinary, with limited evidence of intentional integration to diverse academic fields. The absence of an overarching system structure was perceived to contribute to fragmented delivery and an inconsistent learning experience. Participants also noted concerns about educator preparedness, highlighting that educators lacked the pedagogical competencies and innovative teaching methods required to reflect the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship.

While these findings were reflected within the studied institution, it remains necessary to strategically address these challenges. The entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy may require a more comprehensive transformation that includes early student involvement in entrepreneurship, integrating practical applications into delivery, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and adopting innovative pedagogical frameworks. These reforms have the potential to enhance students' entrepreneurial intentions. However, additional empirical evidence would be needed to determine their broader contribution to venture and job creation in South Africa.

5.2. Study Constraints

While all research has limitations, acknowledging them enhances transparency and guides future inquiry. This qualitative study has several methodological and contextual constraints. First, the use of purposive sampling, appropriate for qualitative research, limits generalisability because participants were selected for relevance rather than representativeness. Second, the sample size of 60 students from two universities restricts the diversity of perspectives and may not reflect experiences across other South African institutions. Third, focus group discussions, although rich in insights, are susceptible to group dynamics, the dominance of certain voices, and social-desirability bias. Additionally, the study's focus on two Cape Town universities introduces geographical limitations, as institutional contexts vary nationally. Finally, the exclusive use of qualitative methods means the findings do not provide statistical evidence. Future studies should consider mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to test these themes on larger and more diverse samples.

5.3. Proposed Actions

The findings indicated that the lack of entrepreneurship education being offered as a discipline is a significant factor affecting early exposure to entrepreneurial learning, thereby impeding entrepreneurship intention and interest. Therefore, the researcher recommends implementing an entrepreneurship education curriculum as a field of study.

While integrating entrepreneurship education curriculum into non-business programmes is imperative, the researcher recommends embedding an entrepreneurship education curriculum as an interdisciplinary module tailored for non-business disciplines, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and holistic learning experience for graduates.

The study's findings highlighted the importance of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education curriculum and pedagogy, as well as its effectiveness in developing practical skills, such as creativity and idea generation, through project- and case-based activities. Considering the above, the researcher recommends integrating experiential learning theory to develop a more comprehensive and effective curriculum and pedagogy for entrepreneurship education.

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Declaration Statement

Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

AI Use

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Ethics Statement

For studies involving human participants, the authors confirm that the research complied with relevant institutional and national ethical standards. Ethical approval was obtained where required, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection. If ethical approval was not required, the authors confirm that the study adhered to applicable ethical guidelines.

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Corresponding Author

The corresponding author for this manuscript is Juliet Nwakaego Nwachukwu who can be contacted by email via 4008697@myuwc.ac.za.