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PRACTICAL PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR ENHANCING ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND GRADUATE ENTREPRENEUR DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION

ABORDAGENS PEDAGÓGICAS PRÁTICAS PARA MELHORAR O CURRÍCULO DE EDUCAÇÃO EM EMPREENDEDORISMO E O DESENVOLVIMENTO DE EMPREENDEDORES GRADUADOS NO ENSINO SUPERIOR DA ÁFRICA DO SUL

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Abstract
This study explores how practical pedagogy can catalyse the alignment of entrepreneurship education with the development of graduate entrepreneurs in South African higher education. Despite prioritising entrepreneurship education to address unemployment and economic challenges, the current curriculum remains predominantly theoretical, limiting graduates' ability to translate knowledge into venture creation. Drawing on literature and empirical evidence, the study emphasises the integration of theory-based and action-oriented learning, mentorship, and work-integrated programs as essential components for fostering entrepreneurial intention and competencies. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through focus group interviews with 60 students from two universities in the Western Cape and analysed using Atlas.ti. Findings reveal significant gaps in pedagogical strategies, including the absence of practical frameworks, experiential learning, mentorship, and industrial exposure, which collectively hinder entrepreneurial development. The study recommends restructuring entrepreneurship pedagogy to incorporate interactive, student-

Resumo
Este estudo explora como a pedagogia prática pode catalisar o alinhamento da educação empreendedora com o desenvolvimento de empreendedores graduados no ensino superior sul-africano. Apesar de priorizar a educação empreendedora para lidar com o desemprego e os desafios econômicos, o currículo atual permanece predominantemente teórico, limitando a capacidade dos graduados de traduzir o conhecimento em criação de empreendimentos. Com base na literatura e em evidências empíricas, o estudo enfatiza a integração da aprendizagem baseada na teoria e orientada para a ação, a mentoria e os programas integrados ao trabalho como componentes essenciais para fomentar a intenção e as competências empreendedoras. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas em grupo com 60 estudantes de duas universidades na província do Cabo Ocidental e analisados usando o Atlas.ti. Os resultados revelam lacunas significativas nas estratégias pedagógicas, incluindo a ausência de estruturas práticas, aprendizagem experiencial, mentoria e exposição industrial, que, em conjunto, impedem

centred approaches that combine conceptual knowledge with hands-on experiences, supported by mentorship and work-integrated learning. These interventions are critical for cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets and equipping graduates to pursue entrepreneurship as a viable career path.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education. Practical Pedagogy. Theory-Practice Integration. Mentorship. Work-Integrated Learning.

o desenvolvimento empreendedor. O estudo recomenda a reestruturação da pedagogia do empreendedorismo para incorporar abordagens interativas e centradas no aluno que combinem conhecimento conceitual com experiências práticas, apoiadas por mentoria e aprendizagem integrada ao trabalho. Essas intervenções são fundamentais para cultivar mentalidades empreendedoras e equipar os graduados para seguirem o empreendedorismo como uma carreira viável.

Palavras-chave: *Educação Empreendedora. Pedagogia Prática. Integração Teoria-Prática. Mentoria. Aprendizagem Integrada ao Trabalho.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The idea of developing graduate entrepreneurs who translate skills into venture creation depends on the pedagogical approach adopted in entrepreneurship education (Nchu, Tengeh, Hassan & Iwu, 2017). Research has shown that it is essential because developing graduate entrepreneurs in South African universities has been prioritised as a significant concern due to the growing unemployment and weak economic growth (Nicolaides, 2011; Radebe & Vezi-Magigaba, 2021). The real challenge is not only the rising unemployment, but also the absence of a deliberate entrepreneurship curriculum that employs pedagogical strategies to focus on practical and skills-based training, thereby improving graduates' venture creation capabilities (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021).

Pedagogy refers to the instructional approach used to deliver the curriculum, with the aim of nurturing competencies that translate into entrepreneurial action (Ismail, Sawang & Zolin, 2018). This instructional approach encompasses the integration of both theoretical and experiential methods to offer effective entrepreneurial learning (Motaung, 2024). Similarly, Makwara, Iwu, Sibanda, and Maziriri (2024) argue that the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship curriculum lies in delivering a creative, interactive, and engaging learning experience. However, several studies' findings have shown that South African universities' entrepreneurship programs are theory-oriented, with limited

practical components (Makwara *et al.*, 2024; Motaung, 2024; Musetsho & Lethoko, 2017). Scholars of entrepreneurship education in South Africa have criticised the traditional approach to entrepreneurial learning, which hinders new venture development and makes it difficult for prospective entrepreneurs to emerge (Dugassa, 2012; Ratten & Usmanij, 2020; Iwu, 2022). This pattern of entrepreneurship education has been found to have a negative impact on producing innovative thinkers that drive an entrepreneurial mindset among the graduates (Du Toit & Kempen, 2020; Iwu, Muresherwa, Nchu & Eresia-Eke, 2020).

The significant impact of effective teaching methods is crucial in equipping and empowering entrepreneurial ambitions among graduates (Ratten & Usmanij, 2020; Lee, 2020; Rankhumise, Letsoalo & Nguza-Mduba, 2020). The impact has been overlooked in the establishment and implementation of curriculum (Iwu & Opute, 2021; Iwu, 2022; Motta & Galina, 2023; Nchu et al., 2017). Equally, pedagogical inclusion is urgently needed in entrepreneurship, as it enables universities to empower students to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit and mindset that foster economic development (Motta & Galina, 2023; Jabeen, Faisal, & I. Katsioloudes, 2017). However, Jones, Newbery and Underwood (2017) argue that building graduate-level entrepreneurs involves more than teaching entrepreneurship as a module in conventional classrooms. This is because teaching entrepreneurship involves incorporating practical experience into the course content, which is crucial for establishing comprehensive learning outcomes, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, project-based learning, and experiential learning (Kayyali, 2023; Kuratko & Morris,2018). Equally, Omoyajowo (2022) emphasises that delivering a comprehensive entrepreneurial learning experience necessitates an integrated teaching framework that combines theoretical and practical approaches, mentorship, and work-integrated programs within the entrepreneurship curriculum to foster effective learning. Without such an approach, it is challenging to offer students learning that is opportunity-driven, that inspires entrepreneurial pursuits after graduation (Oo, Habók, & Józsa, 2023). Therefore, the study aims to understand how practical pedagogy can enhance the delivery of the entrepreneurship curriculum to effectively foster and develop graduate entrepreneurs.

2 THE REVIEWED LITERATURE

The purpose of an effective pedagogy in entrepreneurship curriculum is to offer entrepreneurial learning that inculcates ideas, beliefs, attitudes, talents and knowledge (Du Toit & Kempen, 2018). The effectiveness of pedagogy depends on the ability to teach graduates to think critically, solve problems, and develop practical skills to identify and exploit business opportunities (Taleb, Hashim & Zakaria, 2023; Iwu, Magoda & Mandyoli, 2018). While Ellis (2014) and Neergaard and Christensen (2017) argue that instructional methods influence students' entrepreneurial attitudes and guide them toward their career paths, the delivery method is vital for preparing graduates for the real world. (Galvão, Ferreira & Marques, 2018; Hasmawaty, Syam & Saman, 2020). Similarly, Mustafa, Hernandez, Mahon & Chee (2016) highlight that impactful pedagogy integrates the following in their teaching method: effective teaching frameworks, theory and practical learning, mentorship, and work-integrated learning**.** Hence, a well-structured entrepreneurship pedagogy that engages graduates with hands-on learning positions them to compete globally (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021; Shambare & Donga, 2019).

2.1 Lack of innovative pedagogical strategies

While pedagogy is a fundamental approach for developing entrepreneurial skills and mindsets (Rodrigues, 2023; Silberman, Aguinis, & Carpenter, 2023), it is well established that the absence of a pedagogical method hinders the skills and knowledge that graduates acquire, thereby impeding the development of innovative ideas for venture creation (Lahn & Erison, 2016; Silberman *et al.,* 2023). Similarly, Dal, Elo, Leffler, Svedberg and Westerberg (2016) argue that the lack of structured pedagogy to guide the learning process, such as an effective teaching framework, theory and practical method, mentorship and internship, hinders the effective delivery of the knowledge and skills needed to cultivate graduates' entrepreneurial mindset and abilities.

This effective teaching framework is essential. Alexander and Hjortsø (2013) and Roy, Akhtar and Das (2017) refer to 'effective teaching framework' as a structured model that outlines the essential components, pedagogical domains, and evidence-based practices that define high-quality teaching. Iwu (2022) highlighted that it is development

to facilitate educators in planning, delivering and assessing instruction to maximise student-centred learning outcomes. Furthermore, Valerio, Parton and Robb (2014) argue that an effective teaching framework provides learning geared toward case and project management, building planning, and participation in entrepreneurship competition programs. However, Bridge (2017) highlighted the absence of a practical teaching framework that impedes innovative, skill- and knowledge-based learning, which in turn, prevents learners from identifying opportunities and developing competence. Similarly, Ncube (2022) revealed that pedagogical implementation in entrepreneurship education in South Africa lacks integration of theory and practical learning, hindering the educational experience and stifling the potential of developing graduate entrepreneurs poised to become innovative venture creators.

The integration of theory and practical learning is crucial for delivering entrepreneurship education in South Africa, as it synthesises conceptual understanding with practical application, fostering problem-solving and critical thinking (Brieger, Arghode & McLean, 2020; Chaker & Jarraya, 2021). However, Lahn and Erison (2016) and Bridge (2017) argue that entrepreneurship education in South African universities is predominantly theory-based, which hinders the delivery of innovative, active learning that fosters a supportive environment for the development of business-relevant skills and knowledge. Consequently, Lee (2015) and Motaung (2024) highlight that a theory-based entrepreneurship education is classroom-oriented and furnishes students with only fundamental knowledge of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Valerio et al. (2014) and Szaban (2018) assert that a theoretically structured entrepreneurship pedagogy cannot build the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and competencies that collectively position graduates to launch new ventures or pursue self-employment. Additionally, the delivery of entrepreneurship education with a theoretical component limits students' conceptualisation of entrepreneurship through the lens of career prospects (Wright, Siegel, & Mustar, 2017; Ncube, 2022).

The integration of action-based, or "learning by doing," into theory-based learning is paramount, given that it constitutes an experiential technique that emphasises real-world applicability (Haneberg *et al.*, 2022). However, Shore (2017) highlighted that entrepreneurship education in South African universities lacks practical integration, thereby impeding participatory learning that equips students with marketable skills and

knowledge. The absence of practical experience limits graduates' ability to apply their knowledge in real life (Klapper & Tegtmeier, 2010). Action-oriented learning limits the inculcation of practical competencies that influence entrepreneurial attitudes, self-efficacy, mindsets, and intentions (Kassean *et al.*, 2015; Colombelli, Panelli, & Serraino, 2022). Bell (2024) and Neergaard and Christensen (2017) propose that the lack of practical education hinders students' uptake of entrepreneurship.

While mentorship is a foundational element of practice-based learning, enabling graduates to acquire practical skills and knowledge essential to entrepreneurial success, Nabi, Walmsley and Akhtar (2021) argue that its absence within entrepreneurship pedagogy hinders the development of entrepreneurial intention. Similarly, Rootman, Venter & Matabooe (2017) highlighted that the lack of integrating mentorship into entrepreneurship education limits the development of practical skills, which influence the engaging of hands-on learning that fosters entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, Bell and Bell (2020) and Govender (2018) emphasised that the absence of learning from professionals hinders the development of confidence, as the mentor-mentee relationship builds the morale and charisma needed to become a successful entrepreneur in the business environment.

Furthermore, work-integrated learning programs have become a well-established and integral component of entrepreneurship education, promoting practical learning for the development of graduate entrepreneurs (Drewery, David, Pretti & Church, 2020). However, Mabiza, Mahlalela and Mbohwa (2017) argue that the lack of work-integrated learning as a systematic framework that provides graduate students with practical experience in professional environments limits the development of practical knowledge and skills. Rothman and Sisman (2016) note that these programs emphasise hands-on learning by integrating classroom theory with professional experience. Pietersen and Malatjie (2012) and Huda (2020) state that the absence of work-integrated learning programmes in entrepreneurship education hinders graduate entrepreneurs from translating their academic expertise into practice. Hence, such programs are necessary to prepare graduates for entrepreneurial careers (Huda, 2020).

2.2 Impact of practical pedagogical approach

The practical impact of pedagogical methods is essential to entrepreneurship learning, as this approach promotes an understanding of the extent to which delivering entrepreneurship course content influences graduates' skill acquisition and practical application (Ismail & Sawang, 2020).

In delivering entrepreneurship education, an effective teaching framework is important as it facilitates lifelong learning that equips graduates with the skills and mindset to become successful entrepreneurs (Iwara & Kilonzo, 2022). Consequently, Oo *et al*. (2023) emphasised that a well-structured teaching approach fosters innovative learning by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application, thereby strengthening the link between entrepreneurship education curriculum and skill development. These outcomes align with Qwabe, Ngibe and Bingwa (2025) and Roy, Schlosser and Pasek (2020), who maintained that a robust instructional design promotes entrepreneurial interest among students through experiential and multidisciplinary course collaboration. Therefore, Sirelkhatim and Gangi (2015) contend that for entrepreneurship education to be meaningfully impactful, pedagogical approaches need to be strategically designed and delivered through practical application.

Theory–practice-based learning equips students with contextual knowledge of entrepreneurship while offering experiential techniques that engage them in real-world projects, a combination that is essential for fostering entrepreneurial intention (Ncube, 2022; Haneberg *et al.*, 2022). Bridge (2017) and Shore (2017) emphasise that theoretical components provide foundational understanding, whereas practical learning facilitates participatory experiences such as case studies, project management, business plan competitions, and pitching. These activities cultivate entrepreneurial attitudes, self-efficacy, and intentions, positioning entrepreneurship as a viable career path (Kassean *et al.*, 2015; Colombelli *et al.*, 2022). Scholars such as Bagheri and Lope-Pihie (2013) and Nag and Das (2015) argue that entrepreneurship education blends science and art, while Mustapha and Selvaraju (2015) highlight its scientifically structured theoretical foundation, which enhances graduates' comprehension of entrepreneurial concepts. Similarly, Wright *et al.* (2017) suggest that theory-based approaches systematically develop entrepreneurial mindsets and opportunity-recognition skills. Complementing

this, Bell and Bell (2020) and Neergaard and Christensen (2017) contend that experiential learning prepares students for entrepreneurial uptake, and Basardien, Friedrich and Twum-Darko (2016) underscore its importance in cultivating entrepreneurial thinking and enabling graduates to launch successful ventures. Furthermore, Bell (2024) and Kassean et al. (2015) affirm that integrating theoretical and practical strategies into course content and teaching methods ultimately strengthens entrepreneurial traits and competencies among graduates.

Mentorship equips graduates with critical skills and knowledge that promote creative thinking, facilitate career advancement, and encourage the pursuit of new opportunities (Lunsford, Crisp, Dolan & Wuetherick, 2017). Similarly, Johnston (2019) emphasises the importance of mentorship in entrepreneurship education to foster the development of business-related competencies, including business planning, human resource management, and financial planning. Moulson (2015) and Moses and Akinbode (2014) further assert that mentees gain critical developmental insights from practical experience and success-oriented guidance from mentors, which support their entrepreneurial endeavours. For example, Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, has emphasised the critical role mentorship played in his entrepreneurial journey, citing Freddie Laker, the British airline founder and entrepreneur guru, as a pivotal mentor who provided guidance and support during the early, challenging period of Virgin Atlantic's development. Branson emphasised the value of early mentorship in overcoming initial entrepreneurial challenges. Ahsan, Zheng, DeNoble and Musteen (2018) further assert that mentorship strengthens novice entrepreneurs' knowledge and capabilities in operating business start-ups and identifying opportunities. Significantly, mentorship also contributes to the development of both professional and personal competencies by offering psychological support focused on business growth and career progression (Rootman, Venter & Matabooe, 2017).

In work-integrated programs, Eisenstein and Raz (2021) and Holyoak (2013) highlight that these programs boost entrepreneurship growth by offering industrial experience. Ismail (2018) emphasised that exposing graduate entrepreneurs to internships enhances their skills and mindset to succeed as business owners. Consequently, Rothman and Sisman (2016) note that these programmes emphasise hands-on learning by integrating classroom theory with professional experience. Furthermore, Pietersen and

Malatjie (2012) and Huda (2020) state that work-integrated learning programmes in entrepreneurship education enable graduate entrepreneurs to leverage their academic knowledge. Therefore, integrating work-integrated programs is necessary to establish graduates for entrepreneurial trajectories (Huda, 2020).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

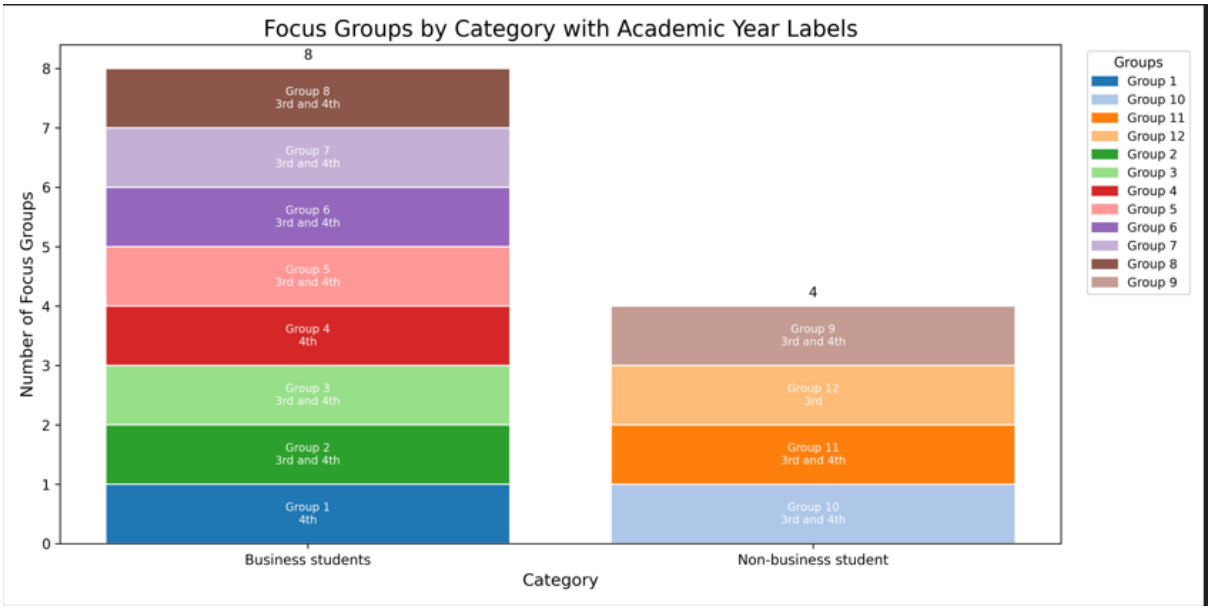
A qualitative approach underpinned this study, which collected data from two universities in the Western Cape, South Africa. A focus group technique was used to conduct a semi-structured interview, engaging 60 participants, organised into 12 groups of 5 students each. All interviews were transcribed and analysed through the application of Atlas.ti software. Participants' academic schedules were considered to avoid conflicts before their involvement in the interactive session. The study was grounded in an inductive paradigm and interpretivist methodology (Khatri, 2020). Consequently, an exploratory design was employed to identify emerging insights into the alignment of practical pedagogy for effective delivery of the entrepreneurship curriculum (Majid, 2018). Furthermore, the qualitative approach facilitated the integration of case study strategies to enrich the analysis (Maxwell, 2021).

3.1 Study sampling

The sample of the current study comprised 60 participants drawn from two selected universities in Cape Town, Western Cape Province, South Africa. Several criteria informed the selection process. To begin with, the sample included students who had been exposed to entrepreneurship education as well as those who had not, allowing for comparative insights. Additionally, participants were required to be in their third or fourth year of study to ensure adequate academic experience and exposure. Moreover, the chosen sample size was deemed sufficient to yield rich, comprehensive insights into how practical pedagogy can enhance the development of graduate entrepreneurs. Consequently, participants were organised into twelve focus groups, each consisting of five students, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Focus Groups by Category with Academic Year Labels



Source: Authors from data analysed

3.2 Study approval

The study received approval from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Research Ethics Committee. Ethical principles serve as a memorandum of understanding between the researcher and participants, ensuring their safety, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, while avoiding deception and upholding justice. In line with these principles, all participants signed a written informed consent, which was obtained in this study.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

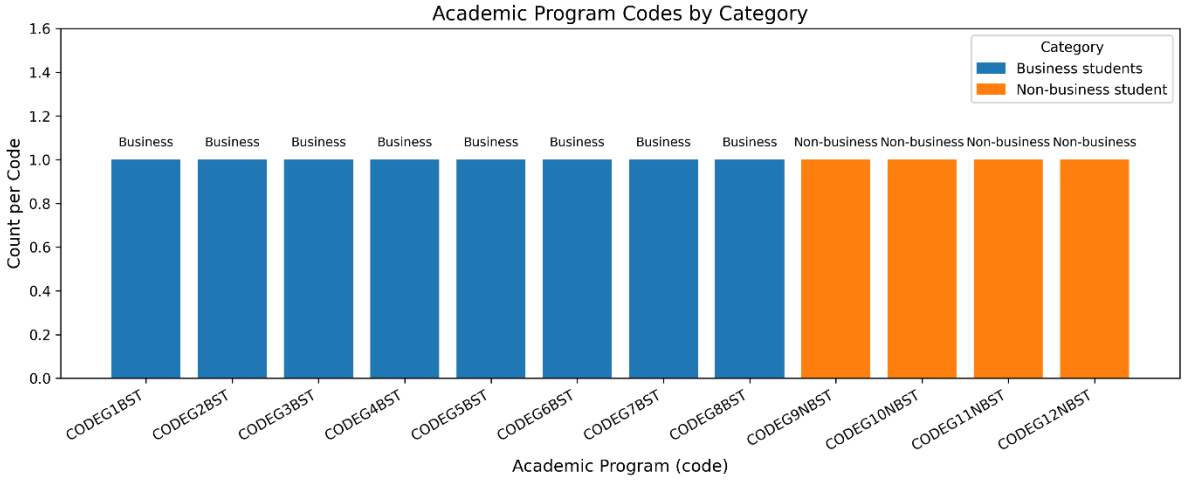
The study aimed to evaluate the structure and orientation of the pedagogical strategies adopted in entrepreneurship curriculum in South African higher education institutions to determine their alignment with the goal of developing graduate entrepreneurs. The subsequent section presents the analysis derived from the transcribed interviews.

4.1 Codes presentation

To maintain clarity and consistency in referencing, each of the twelve focus groups was assigned a unique code. The coding system was designed to differentiate participants enrolled in business programs from those in non-business programs. Specifically, codes CODEG1–8BST represent business students, while CODEG9–12NST denote non-business students. This segmentation facilitates systematic analysis and is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Academic Program Codes by Category



Source: Authors from analysed data

4.2 The results

4.2.1 Effective teaching framework

The inquiry explores whether practical pedagogy serves as a catalyst for aligning the entrepreneurship curriculum with the development of graduate entrepreneurs across the two selected universities, ensuring meaningful and impactful learning, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. Of the 12 groups, eight groups (66.7%) indicated that the pedagogical approach adopted in entrepreneurship education in South African higher education institutions lacks an effective teaching framework. Furthermore, three groups (25%)

reported that the current approach does not adequately prepare students for entrepreneurial activities. In contrast, one group (8.3%), representing a non-business program, indicated that they were unaware of how pedagogical methods are applied in the delivering of entrepreneurship curriculum.

> CODEG3BST: The pedagogical approach currently employed in entrepreneurship education overlooks the vital learning that equips us to become entrepreneurs, such as participation in entrepreneurship competition programs that foster entrepreneurial mindsets and intentions. The curriculum structure does not align with holistic learning that provides students with impactful hands-on experiences.
> CODEG1BST: The entrepreneurship learning approach offered to us does not adequately prepare students for entrepreneurial activities, including pitching ideas, fostering creativity, and developing innovative programs to assess market potential.
> CODEG12NBST: As non-business program students, we are unaware of the pedagogical approach used to deliver entrepreneurship learning.

Based on participants' feedback, there is significant misalignment between the pedagogical method and the intended skill development outcomes of the entrepreneurship curriculum. This statement aligns with the findings of Hoffman (2020) and Cui *et al.* (2021), who identified significant gaps in the pedagogical strategies employed in entrepreneurship curriculum. These shortcomings not only hinder the educational experience but also constrain the potential to develop graduate entrepreneurs who will emerge as innovative venture creators. In this study, all respondents expressed concern that the misalignment in teaching methods undermines efforts to nurture aspiring graduate entrepreneurs.

4.2.2 Theory and practical integration

The findings indicate that the pedagogical approach is a critical component in linking the entrepreneurship curriculum to effective skills acquisition. Of the 12 groups interviewed, 6 groups (50%) reported that the current pedagogical approach lacks adequate practical integration in the delivery of entrepreneurship education. Additionally, 4 groups (33.3%) reported that the entrepreneurship curriculum is predominantly theoretical in nature. In contrast, 2 groups (16.7%) from non-business programs indicated

not being exposed to either theoretical or practical forms of entrepreneurship learning. The absence of these elements in the delivery of entrepreneurship education hinders effective skill acquisition and limits graduates' capacity to identify opportunities that can lead to venture creation. In light of these findings, these respondents shared the following experiences:

> CODEG1BST: The entrepreneurship learning we received was predominantly grounded in theoretical concepts. This teaching method adheres to the syllabus, emphasising lectures and textbook content while offering limited opportunity for practical application, a critical element of effective entrepreneurship learning. Consequently, our ability to acquire practical, experience-based knowledge was significantly constrained.
> CODEG2BST: In all honesty, the learning provided in this module is unlikely to develop entrepreneurs capable of recognising opportunities that contribute to job creation. The instruction is predominantly theory-oriented, offering limited opportunities for experiential learning, which is essential for fostering active learning. This lack of practical exposure presents a significant challenge to the development of graduate entrepreneurs.
> CODEG9NBST: "Of course, the absence of experiential learning within the curriculum has limited students' ability to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions. Consider a scenario in which classroom learning is not applied in the real world; this significantly hinders students' willingness and capacity to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option.

Graduates from non-business programs expressed dissatisfaction with their lack of exposure to entrepreneurship learning:

> *CODEG11NBST: Our academic experience has not exposed us to any of the highlighted learning.*

Given the significant gap in the integration of practical learning within the entrepreneurship curriculum, graduates reported facing numerous challenges in their learning experience. This lack of experiential engagement was described as demotivating and discouraging them from considering entrepreneurship as a viable career path, as reflected in the following participants' report. Consistent with the study's findings, Iwu et al. (2020) argued that the inadequate integration of theoretical concepts and practical applications in entrepreneurship education undermines the development of cutting-edge approaches that instil the entrepreneurial mindset and competencies needed to address the

unemployment crisis. These insights highlight the need for a balanced approach in entrepreneurship education that combines theoretical concepts with practical, experience-based learning to develop graduate entrepreneurs effectively.

4.2.3 Professional guidance

Professional guidance is an essential component to integrate into entrepreneurship curriculum and pedagogy as it provides support, advice, and expert insights that help students navigate real-world challenges. However, in entrepreneurship pedagogical methods, all participants (100%) reported the absence of professional guidance in their curriculum during the learning process. This gap was perceived to limit graduates' readiness for entrepreneurial practice, leading to missed opportunities, poor decisions, and ineffective resource management.

> CODEG4BST: As final-year students, we observed a complete absence of mentorship within the entrepreneurship curriculum.
> CODEG6BST: As graduates who have participated in entrepreneurship education at this institution, we were not exposed to mentorship, an element that could offer valuable coaching and essential business-related knowledge as part of our curriculum.
> CODEG9NBST: Participants indicated that mentorship is not embedded into the entrepreneurship curriculum, despite being an elective module at my institution. The report further emphasised the importance of mentorship, noting that graduates require guidance from experts with practical experience in the business world.

This study reveals that mentorship is not integrated into the entrepreneurship curriculum, thereby restricting graduates from receiving expert coaching and hampering the development of future entrepreneurs. These findings align with Johnston (2019), who emphasised that mentorship should be incorporated into the entrepreneurship curriculum to enhance learning effectiveness and develop practice-ready entrepreneurs.

4.2.4 Career development void

While the career development void, conceptualised as work-integrated learning, encompasses the integration of academic studies with practical workplace experience, such as internships, apprenticeships, field placements, and industrial attachments, these opportunities offer a range of significant benefits. Among the 12 groups, 10 groups (83.3%) of the participants indicated a career development gap as they had never participated in industrial training while undertaking entrepreneurship education. The remaining 2 groups (16.7%) reported that this form of experiential entrepreneurial learning is entirely absent from the entrepreneurship education curriculum in South Africa. These findings align with the literature of Lackéus (2020), which asserts that insufficient career development opportunities significantly disconnect classroom learning from workplace experience.

> CODEG3BST: …internship is not currently included in our entrepreneurship curriculum. We believe integrating internship programs into the entrepreneurship curriculum would provide students with invaluable hands-on experience, immersing them in dynamic real-world environments where they can actively participate and better understand the entrepreneurial process.
>
> CODEG5BST: …….Our curriculum does not include internships that allow graduates to apply theoretical knowledge directly in real-world business context while receiving guidance from experienced professionals.
>
> CODEG12NBST: We did not have the opportunity to participate in entrepreneurship education or any internship programs designed to develop entrepreneurial skills and experience.

Given the above, the absence of work-integrated programs prevents graduates from acquiring the relevant industry skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to launch ventures that can contribute meaningfully to the economy. Consequently, Drewery *et al*. (2020) emphasised that integrating work-integrated programs into the entrepreneurship curriculum is essential.

4.3 Discussion

The effectiveness of an entrepreneurship curriculum is largely determined by the pedagogical approach employed in its delivery (Iwu *et al.,* 2024). The feedback revealed that most participants emphasised the absence of a practical pedagogical framework for delivery entrepreneurship education in South Africa. This absence of an effective pedagogical approach hinders innovative learning that prepares graduates to confidently become career entrepreneurs and make informed value-adding decisions (Polbitsyn, Kliuev, Bagirova, Iashin & Kakouris, 2021). The study's findings align with Ncube's (2022) report, which emphasises that the absence of practical pedagogy restricts innovative learning within entrepreneurship education. Similarly, Bell & Bell (2020) asserted that designing an effective pedagogical structure for delivering entrepreneurship education is essential for equipping graduates with the requisite entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and competencies.

When evaluating an impactful and effective pedagogical approach, the integration of theoretical and practical learning methods is crucial; their absence hinders experiential learning, which is central to entrepreneurship education and vital for entrepreneurial development (Klapper & Tegtmeier, 2010). While the majority of participants lamented that the entrepreneurship education they received was predominantly theoretical, thereby limiting the engaging learning experience needed to empower graduates to become venture creators. These findings align with Kassean et al. (2015) and Colombelli, Panelli, and Serraino (2022), who emphasised that theory-only approaches in entrepreneurship education are inadequate for fostering effective learning and cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset and intention. Therefore, incorporating a theory–practice approach to entrepreneurship education provides essential experiential learning opportunities and deploys effective pedagogical strategies that better position graduates to pursue entrepreneurship as a viable career path (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021; Shambare & Donga, 2019).

Furthermore, recognising the importance of effective pedagogical strategies, mentorship plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial intention and mindset among graduate entrepreneurs (Johnston, 2019). All participants in this study confirmed the absence of mentorship in the delivery of entrepreneurship education, noting that this gap

deprived students of valuable developmental guidance. This finding aligns with Lunsford *et al.* (2017), who demonstrate that the lack of mentorship in entrepreneurship education limits graduates' opportunities to learn from experienced experts. Therefore, Iwu *et al.* (2020) emphasise the urgent need to integrate mentorship into entrepreneurship education, fostering mentor–mentee relationships that cultivate entrepreneurial intention.

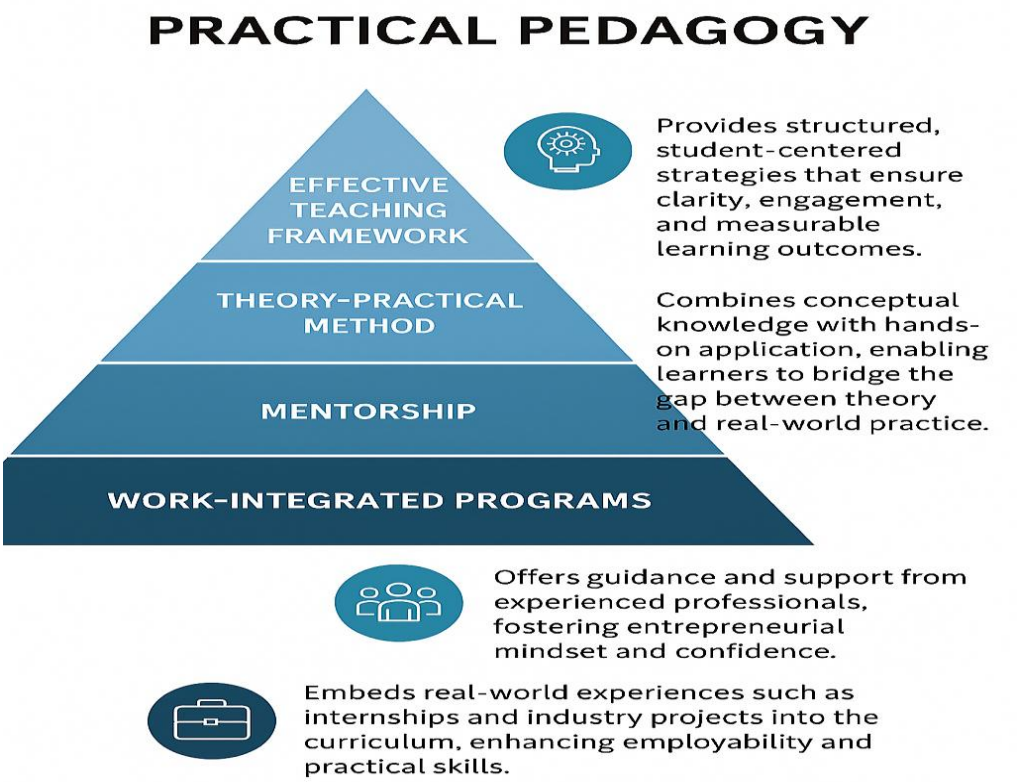
Finally, a work-integrated program was identified and emphasised, with the majority of participants indicating that the delivery of entrepreneurship education failed to recognise the significance of industrial training. The students further emphasised that the inability to apply what had been learned in real business environments negatively affected their entrepreneurial intention and interest (Pietersen & Malatjie, 2012). The finding aligns with Huda (2020), who underscores that work-integrated programs play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic learning and practical application. Such programs not only foster experiential learning but also equip graduates with the skills, competencies, and confidence needed to transition effectively into the world of work. By integrating real-world experiences into the curriculum, these programs enhance employability and strengthen graduates' readiness for both entrepreneurial and professional challenges.

4.4 The study's synopsis

Figure 3 below illustrates practical pedagogy, a catalyst to entrepreneurship curriculum alignment as identified in this study.

Figure 3

Practical Pedagogy



Source: Authors

5 CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that most participants perceived the pedagogical strategies framework employed in delivering entrepreneurship education as inadequate, primarily due to the absence of a structured, student-centred approach that ensures clarity, engagement, and measurable learning outcomes, elements essential for achieving meaningful educational learning. Similarly, the delivery method remains predominantly theoretical and lacks the integration of conceptual knowledge with hands-on application, a combination necessary for bridging the gap between theory and real-world practice. Furthermore, there is a lack of learning opportunities that provide

guidance and support from experienced professionals, an essential component for fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and building confidence. Additionally, work-integrated programs that embed real-world experiences, such as internships or industry projects, designed to expose students to practical industrial settings, are notably absent. In order to deliver effective entrepreneurship education, practical pedagogy should be structured around an approach that ensures clear, student-centred teaching and integrates theoretical and practical components to empower students to pursue entrepreneurial intentions. Furthermore, incorporating mentor–mentee relationships alongside work-integrated programs is essential for fostering experiential learning that develops core competencies and cultivates an entrepreneurial mindset.

5.2 Limitations of the study

As with any scholarly investigation, this study has certain limitations, which in turn underscore valuable opportunities for future research. A framework has been proposed in this study for aligning teaching methods to promote entrepreneurial intention. From the researcher's perspective, the framework provides a general solution for contemporary entrepreneurship education. However, the implementation of the outcome does not provide a comprehensive solution to the teaching methods that inspire graduates to pursue entrepreneurial intentions.

5.3 Way forward

The findings of this study underscore that an effective teaching framework and a theory-practice method, essential for experiential learning, are lacking. It highlights its effectiveness in developing practical skills, such as creativity and idea generation, through project- and case-based activities. This approach also enhances problem-solving skills and balances classroom instruction with out-of-classroom experiences. Hence, the study recommends the urgent need to structure pedagogy to ensure meaningful, practical engagement and interactive learning.

Mentorship, which is professional guidance, is imperative for nurturing and promoting entrepreneurial intention; however, it is lacking in the delivery of

entrepreneurship education in South Africa, depriving students of the opportunity to learn from experienced professionals. Therefore, the study recommends integrating mentorship into the entrepreneurship pedagogy to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset among aspiring graduates, as stated below:

- Entrepreneurial experts who have established successful businesses should be part of the practical instruction team.
- Integrate as part of the entrepreneurship curriculum
- It can be a replacement for tutorial programs for entrepreneurial graduates.

Work-integrated programs are essential, as they enable students to apply classroom learning to real-world business environments during their studies. The study recommends incorporating internships into entrepreneurship education as a valuable learning experience. It is to be structured in the following manner during their four-year program:

- The first work-integrated program should be structured for three months, starting in the second year after the second semester, and can be named "Experiential Education Scheme (EES)". Within the context of this study, EES posits a planned approach in which learners engage in real-world, hands-on activities and is primarily designed to provide students with direct experience. Hence, Pietersen and Malatjie (2012) and Rothman and Sisman (2016) supported this nature of experiential learning.
- The second stage of the work-integrated program should be structured to last 6 months, commencing in the first semester of the fourth year, and can be referred to as an internship. Internship, in our context, refers to a short-term, structured work experience primarily designed for students or recent graduates to gain exposure to a professional environment. Therefore, Huda (2020) and Ismail (2018) concur with this definition.

Therefore, integrating these strategic interventions into national education policy frameworks would yield significant benefits for students' entrepreneurial development in South Africa.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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