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ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: REVEALING CONTEXTUAL PECULIARITIES AND ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS THROUGH STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract. The youth unemployment crisis in South Africa has continued to escalate from 60% between age of 15–34-year-olds, despite all efforts put in place by the government. In this regard, entrepreneurship education has become a priority for the government at all levels. The objective of this study is to investigate entrepreneurial education in South Africa, identify its peculiarities, and formulate recommendations. The literature on ecosystem development and entrepreneurial education theory was combined in the literature review. The study revealed that there are four transformative elements: the shift in paradigm, shift from theoretical learning to experiential learning models (Stellenbosch University's IGNITE programme and Centennial Schools' NextGen Founders); collaborative ecosystem emergence (KwaZulu-Natal universities' networked approach generating employment and jobs for students, integration of digital and the industrial revolution skills growth and national policy coordination through the draft National Entrepreneurship Strategy. It was also found that the adoption of theory-based learning leads to producing half-baked graduates who have inadequate innovation skills, the gap between institutions and the historical advantages and disadvantages, cultural barriers which look at entrepreneurship as the last choice or career to pursue in school, and outcome misalignment with market demands, compounded by data coordination failures. This paper presents a novel analytical framework for understanding the trend-tension dynamic in entrepreneurial education within developing-economy contexts. Also, policymakers, educational leaders, and entrepreneurship educators should enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurial education by reducing financial constraint environments.

Keywords: entrepreneurial education; peculiarities; constraints; South Africa

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1. Background

The South African government is facing a serious economic crisis, yet it is becoming harder for the country to recognise the significance of entrepreneurial education to economic progress. Youth unemployment among the 15–34 age group is expected to rise dramatically from 38.2% in 2018 to 60.8% in 2024, according to Mpako and Ndoma (2025). This demonstrates the existing job paradigm's catastrophic inability to accommodate the country's growing youth population. Resolving this issue so quickly is necessary, considering the reality. The most practical choice is the small, medium, and micro-enterprise (SMME) sector, which is the mainstay of the economy in South Africa, contributing to creating jobs for employment of 80% of the labour force of the nation and contributing more than R5 trillion to the GDP each year (Mgweba & Lungisa, 2024). However, there is a disturbing inconsistency; despite being Africa's largest economy and one of its most attractive places for entrepreneurship, the country has recorded the highest SMME failure rate in Africa, with 80% of enterprises failing within their first

quarter of operation in five years. A country that cannot sustain the SMME sector, which safeguards its economy, is in an organisational structure conflict, and no amount of entrepreneurial ambition can compensate for systemic failure.

In this regard, policymakers and universities have begun treating entrepreneurship education as a key strategy, rather than an afterthought. Back in 2025, the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training put it plainly: entrepreneurship has moved to the forefront and is now a top priority for universities (Universities South Africa, 2025). The new National Entrepreneurship Strategy, which the Cabinet cleared for publication in September 2025, goes even further. According to Bizcommunity (2025), schools are now treating entrepreneurship as a practical career that enables students to create jobs for themselves and society rather than an option or last resort.

However, the path from policy intent to educational practice is fraught with challenges. A comprehensive review of entrepreneurship education literature, analysing 55 studies, found that despite "massive investment in resources, staff, and infrastructure, the entrepreneurship education outcomes are unfavourable; entrepreneur graduates are 'half-baked', lack innovative and creative skills, undertake 'copycat' businesses, and become job seekers rather than job creators" (Vorvornator & Midiniso, 2025). This sobering evaluation highlights the main point of this article: that improving entrepreneurial education in South Africa requires addressing the structural conflicts that compromise its efficacy, as well as recognising creative trends. Despite extensive research on entrepreneurship education, existing studies tend to focus more on other aspects of entrepreneurship, such as Kennedy et al. (2025), which focused on co-creative pedagogies: learning through uncertainty in higher education.

There is limited research that conceptualises these elements as **interconnected and mutually shaping phenomena**. Also, while previous studies have accounted for poor entrepreneurial outcomes among people in South Africa, they have not adequately illuminated the structural, institutional, and cultural tensions that underlie these failures. There are several gaps in multi-level, **context-sensitive analyses** that integrate policy frameworks, institutional ecosystems, and student-level outcomes in South Africa. This study addresses entrepreneurial education in South Africa, identifies peculiarities, and formulates recommendations not merely as constraints but as **drivers of innovation** within entrepreneurial education systems.

2. Literature Review: Drivers of Entrepreneurial Education

Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurship education has changed in recent times, from a narrow focus on business plan development to a broader conceptualisation encompassing the entrepreneurial mindset, self-efficacy, and intention formation (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Mohamed et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2025; Azimi, & Saleh, 2025). According to Lackéus (2015), there are three distinguishable categories of Entrepreneurship education: education "about" entrepreneurship (theoretical content), education "for" entrepreneurship (skill development for venture creation), and education "through" entrepreneurship (experiential learning in which students learn by engaging in entrepreneurial processes). This typology provides a useful framework for analysing the pedagogical shifts observed in contemporary South African practice.

The concept of individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO) has gained prominence in understanding how education influences entrepreneurial outcomes. IEO encompasses five dimensions: risk-taking, innovativeness, proactiveness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness (Amaral et al., 2024). In many South African universities, students are found to be more interested in entrepreneurship education than students in Scottish universities (Amaral et al., 2024). Entrepreneurship education influences students' desire to pursue self-reliance and independence. In contrast, Scottish students show less interest in entrepreneurship education due to the different educational programmes available to them across different economic contexts.

Recent research in developing economies has emphasised the importance of cognitive and transversal skills in connecting entrepreneurship intention and education. Parker et al. (2025) report that Ghanaian university students lack knowledge of the effects of the entrepreneurial mindset and skills, which may be significantly associated with entrepreneurial content and intentions. According to Parker et al, entrepreneurship education guiding principles usually focus on developing good practices and pedagogies that enhance university students' cognitive and transversal skills.

Conceptual Framework

The authors developed an original research design to address the indicated research gap, as shown in Figure 1 below.

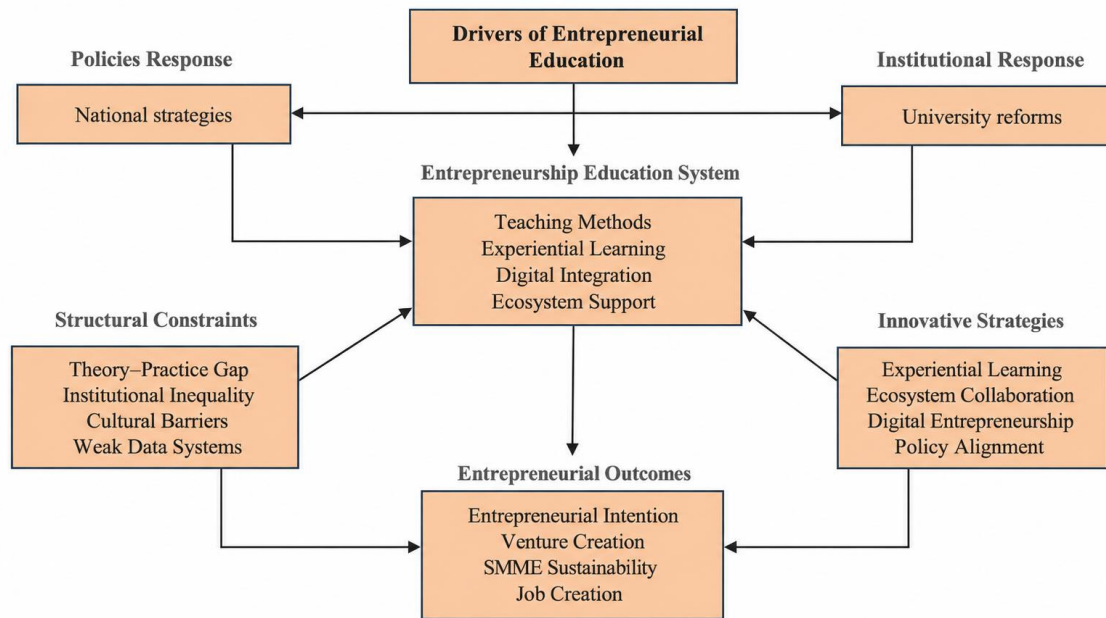


Figure 1. The scheme diagram for interaction between Entrepreneurial Education in South Africa: Revealing Contextual Peculiarities and Addressing Structural Constraints

This study uses a multi-level research design that views South African entrepreneurship education as a dynamic system influenced by institutional practices, policy responses, contextual factors, and structural limitations. According to the plan, entrepreneurship education acts as a mediator between national economic pressures and entrepreneurial results. This relationship is not deterministic or linear, though. New innovations strategies, such as experiential learning, digital integration, and collaborative ecosystems, coexist with structural constraints, including institutional capacity shortages, cultural perceptions, and curriculum misalignment. Moreover, how well these innovations address underlying structural tensions will determine the efficacy of entrepreneurship education. In the end, the paradigm connects these interactions to quantifiable outcomes such as venture development, entrepreneurial intention, and SMME sustainability.

Policies response

National strategies and Government Framework

The South African economy has provided a compelling rationale for entrepreneurship education centres across the board and programmes in the various universities. The formal economy cannot absorb the growing number of young people graduating from higher institutions; hence, many are left to wander in the labour market each year. According to Bizcommunity (2025), over 60% of South African companies identify skills shortages as a key

barrier to business transformation by 2030. This phenomenon describes the mismatch between the educational skills required by South African employers and those needed by the government, which unemployed youths need to secure jobs for themselves or become job creators.

Entrepreneurship education addresses societal challenges beyond the country's economy. Due to South Africa's long history of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, authorities were compelled to implement entrepreneurship courses in colleges with the specific goal of "inculcating entrepreneurial skills regardless of racial background to solve social problems" (Vorvornator & Midiniso, 2025). This social dimension is particularly significant, given that many students from low-income families often do not have the opportunities to acquire desirable skills or professions due to a lack of financial resources that would otherwise facilitate such opportunities.

Institutional Response

University reforms and Curriculum

The concept of university-based entrepreneurship ecosystems (UBEE) has emerged as a framework for understanding the multifaceted support required for effective entrepreneurial education. According to Movahedi et al. (2025), there are six elements necessary for the functioning of a university-based entrepreneurship ecosystem: governance and policy; socio-cultural; support services; economic and financial; human capital; and university communication and networking. They found that socio-cultural factors were the most important and influential, serving as foundations for other ecosystem components. This finding has resonance in South Africa, where cultural perceptions of entrepreneurship remain a significant barrier. According to Mathew and Anjali (2025), entrepreneurship extends to an ecosystem that includes thinking about how universities could cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets in students who may not launch businesses right away but can apply entrepreneurial thinking within existing organisations. This study emphasises the real-world challenges students face when juggling their studies and business endeavours, as well as the role institutional support and faculty mentoring play in fostering entrepreneurial success.

Entrepreneurship Education System

Teaching Methods

Despite the existing literature on entrepreneurship education in South Africa, few studies investigate it, revealing contextual peculiarities and addressing structural constraints through strategic recommendations. Numerous studies discuss the value of entrepreneurial education in South Africa, including how it helps young people find employment, nurtures creativity, and strengthens communities. However, there is still a lot to learn about how institutions and the real world impede progress. Even though entrepreneurship programs are becoming increasingly popular, there is little concrete evidence that they have an impact on things like launching new companies, moulding entrepreneurial behaviour, or creating long-lasting ventures (Sathyanand et al., 2025). The literature seems disjointed, with studies concentrating more on objectives than measurable results, such as long-term effects or successful companies.

The literature review indicates that entrepreneurship education in South Africa is hampered by a few persistent structural issues. To begin with, there is little to no precise structure that dictates how students should learn about entrepreneurship. The curriculum simply does not fit together as it should; students are not very interested, and there is not enough practical experience (Nwachukwu et al., 2024; Mefi & Asoba, 2025a,b).

Lawmakers have attempted to remedy the situation by enacting new regulations and updating courses, but the outcomes have been inconsistent; although some institutions have improved, others have not, and many are overburdened and unable to keep up (Maka, 2024; Manchidi, 2025). What students learn in the classroom and what they need to execute in practical business circumstances still differ significantly. Students are not closing the gap, even with more recent teaching approaches such as mentoring, hands-on learning, and ecosystem-based education. Furthermore, according to Lose and Cheteni (2024), although these programmes boost students'

confidence to launch a business, the same issues still arise, such as low self-esteem, inadequate support systems, and more significant environmental obstacles (Lose & Cheteni, 2024). There is still a significant disconnect between what students are taught in the classroom and what they are required to execute in actual business settings. Students are not fully narrowing the gap, even with more recent teaching approaches like mentoring, hands-on learning, and ecosystem-based education. Additionally, studies reveal that although these programs boost students' confidence to launch a business, the same issues still arise, such as low self-esteem, inadequate support systems, and more significant environmental constraints (Lose & Cheteni, 2024).

In addition, there appears to be a dearth of studies on entrepreneurship education, particularly in South Africa. Inequality, scarce resources, and long-standing historical concerns are mentioned by academics, but rather than delving deeply into them and making them important to their study, they are typically treated as side notes. Models and instructional frameworks that truly include these local circumstances into their design are hard to come by. Nobody seems to make the connection between more recent developments, such as innovation or experiential learning and more significant, long-standing issues like inequality or misaligned curricula. The overall picture of how entrepreneurship education takes shape in challenging situations feels inadequate because each piece of the puzzle is addressed separately.

In this regard, the present study addresses the literature gaps by a framework that sees trends and tensions as interconnected rather than separate. Entrepreneurship emerges as a direct reaction to the revealing contextual peculiarities and addressing structural constraints. This is due to dissatisfaction with theoretical practices that drive experiential learning programmes, and collaborative ecosystems emerge to address the lack of capacity among youth to become job creators rather than wait for jobs that are unavailable. This could also be attributed to the limited capacity of educational institutions to provide the education students need to excel. The question is whether these innovative strategies effectively address the underlying conflicts or merely shift them, which will determine their effectiveness.

Experiential Learning

Entrepreneurship education cannot be learned solely through theory. However, it is the most important development in South African entrepreneurial education (Fourways Review, 2025). Previously, traditional business education, which focuses on accounting, marketing, and administrative duties, was considered an important foundation for entrepreneurship, but it is not sufficient to make a good entrepreneur. Programmes that expose students to real-world business challenges have been developed in response to this recognition. According to Nazneen et al. (2024), experiential learning, self-efficacy, and individual innovativeness positively affect entrepreneurial attitude. This means that an entrepreneurial attitude positively affects students' entrepreneurial intention. According to Thomsen et al. (2021), experiential learning contributes to outcomes, including comprehension of the entrepreneurship content taught. This enhances entrepreneurial competencies and the intention to start a business (Motta & Galina, 2023; Taneja et al., 2024). This paper focuses on entrepreneurial competencies as an outcome of experiential learning. Entrepreneurial competencies are "skills, abilities, and attitudes, which, together with performance, lead to greater satisfaction in a professional job" (Silveyra et al., 2021, p. 3). According to Kozlinska et al. (2023), experiential learning demonstrates that entrepreneurial experience leads to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, greater knowledge, and improved attitudes.

Digital Integration and Ecosystem Support: Case Studies

Stellenbosch University's IGNITE initiative best illustrates this experiential approach. To "ignite the entrepreneurial spirit among both undergraduate and postgraduate students," the university-wide experiential learning and extracurricular program Spark was introduced in 2024 (Stellenbosch University, 2025). The programme provides free, online, self-paced learning focused on the Business Model Canvas (BMC). This strategic tool helps students "conceptualise and develop a business plan" by mapping "target customers, value proposition, revenue streams and operational structure."

What distinguishes IGNITE is its emphasis on practical application. Students create their own Business Model Canvas after completing classroom activities designed to deepen their understanding of entrepreneurship. Sabrina Matthee, the project organiser, tells. It ensures that students not only know about entrepreneurship but also understand it. However, also implement their ideas. Students would have developed a business strategy by the end of the semester, which they may work on alone or with collaborators (Stellenbosch University, 2025). The institution's dedication to recognising entrepreneurial success alongside academic achievement is demonstrated by the official acknowledgement on students' academic transcripts for those who complete the 24-hour programme.

Centennial Schools in Sunninghill has really shaken things up at the secondary level. They do not just dump business skills into the curriculum; they weave them into everything. Starting as early as Grade 8, students dive into entrepreneurship modules. Moreover, with NextGen Founders, kids from Grade 6 to 11 roll up their sleeves and run businesses right inside the school. It is not just about learning how money works; they are building the confidence to solve real problems, think critically, and be creative.

Ecosystem Support

A transformative trend is the emergence of collaborative entrepreneurship ecosystems; for example, in recent years, KwaZulu-Natal has improved, as several universities demonstrate that working as a team is effective for achieving results. They can control competition among themselves as they pursue students to succeed beyond what they achieved previously.

Every university in this KZN group is doing something different. One such example is Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), which is a "community-rooted innovator." They emphasise maintaining ties to the community and engaging students in practical tasks. The Economic Activation Officer of MUT, Mrs Ntombi Mthembu, described it this way: "We have moved away from teaching entrepreneurship in a lecture room. We want students to experience every step of building a venture." That is not just talk, either. MUT's Wadhvani Computer Laboratory runs a 14-week programme launched in November 2024, which guides students through practical business journeys rather than keeping them stuck in classrooms.

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) showcases the potential of scale and infrastructure. Since 2018, DUT's Innobiz Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation has raised awareness of entrepreneurship among over 25,000 of its 38,000 students, trained 15,000 students through various programmes, and 500 businesses. However, these businesses are still running strong, generating more than R150 million in turnover and creating 3,000 jobs altogether (Universities South Africa, 2025). DUT put over R15 million toward seed funding, showing they are serious about backing students with real financial support, not just training.

Structural Constraints in Entrepreneurship Education in South Africa

Structural constraints are universal hindrances that affect institutions, policies, and society, which limit the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. These constraints are the following.

The Theory-Practice Divide

The disagreement between theoretical instruction and practical competency continues despite efforts to promote experiential learning. The main issue, according to Vorvornator and Midiniso (2025), a poor curriculum creates confusion about labour market demands. Despite significant investment, entrepreneurship education is not making any headway, as many graduates lack the knowledge and creative, innovative abilities. This curricular inadequacy reflects a deeper pedagogical tension. While traditional business studies provide foundational knowledge, they often fail to develop the "resilience needed to adapt to an evolving landscape" (North-West University, 2025). In a similar view, Martin Manmohan from the Bhive Enterprise Development Centre (North-West University) states that the teaching theory in several educational institutions lacks practical entrepreneurship training, such as financial literacy, business planning, and digital marketing." Furthermore, students need support with soft skills

like negotiation, leadership, and resilience, which are often underdeveloped" (North-West University, 2025). This issue is exacerbated by the fragmentation of entrepreneurial education in the current curriculum. Instead of being a stand-alone subject with a specific pedagogical focus, entrepreneurship is currently integrated into existing courses such as Life Skills and Economic Management Sciences in South African schools. According to the Department of Basic Education (2025), 96% of instructors identify a lack of training as a major barrier to the successful implementation of entrepreneurship education, highlighting a crucial leverage point.

Institutional Capacity and Equity Gaps

The disparity in South African universities' ability to provide quality entrepreneurial education is a second significant source of conflict. "Leadership incompetence in delivering curriculum content, mismanagement, and embezzlement, resulting in a lack of funds to provide practical entrepreneurship skills," according to Vorvornator and Midiniso (2025). These governance failures are particularly acute in historically disadvantaged universities, where environments are "also not conducive to entrepreneurial learning. The distinction between well-resourced and under-resourced institutions is striking. While DUT has provided over R15 million in seed funding and established comprehensive incubation infrastructure across numerous locations (Universities South Africa, 2025), historically disadvantaged universities face basic resource constraints. UNIZULU noted that only three of their four faculties actively participate in entrepreneurship activities with ongoing engagement in the educational sector. This could have negative implications for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Several graduates lack personal savings or collateral to secure loans, as Manmohan noted. In South Africa, many financial institutions favour loans to seasoned business owners over novices launching new ventures (North-West University, 2025). Students from historically underprivileged universities must contend with both low personal resources and a lack of institutional assistance.

Cultural Limitations

Cultural attitudes towards business lead to misunderstandings among people. Several individuals see entrepreneurship as a last resort rather than a first choice, despite its contribution to job creation and employment, helping lower the country's high unemployment rate (North-West University, 2025). Families often "push graduates towards 'safe' careers" and in poorer communities, others see entrepreneurship as unstable or unsuitable. The result is "a paradox: at a time when the economy urgently needs new ventures, the very people best positioned to create them hesitate to take the leap.

This perceptual challenge extends to students' engagement with entrepreneurial education. In line with the directives from the Department of Higher Education, South Africa, many universities now offer entrepreneurship education programmes (Tumpa et al., 2022). For example, although North-West University designed a curriculum that boosts bootcamps and mentorship programmes, including "peer-led resilience circles" and "'fail-forward' workshops where failure is treated as a learning opportunity," Manmohan reports that "participation is low, because entrepreneurship is not yet seen as a key activity by students". According to North-West University (2025), the cultural barrier is accompanied by other factors, such as psychological factors. "Most of our students lack confidence, or in some cases, they are overconfident. Both need careful guidance," says Manmohan. "Fear of the unknown also holds back, as they simply have little exposure to entrepreneurship" (North-West University, 2025). The theory has provided focus for this result by illustrating that socio-cultural factors are the most important and influential in forming successful university entrepreneurship ecosystems (Movahedi et al., 2025).

Outcome Misalignment and Data Coordination Failures

The ultimate tension in entrepreneurial education concerns outcomes. Despite the significant intervention, Vorvornator and Midiniso (2025) state that "entrepreneur graduates are 'half-baked', lack innovative and creative skills, undertake 'copycat' businesses, and become job seekers rather than job creators." They "contribute to existing unemployment, inequality, and poverty" rather than alleviating these challenges. This failure is coming from the poor mismatch between what education can provide and what the labour market can take from the pool

of unemployed youths. Challenges hamper the accuracy and coordination of the killing system's data. At the same time, the Skills Development Act (SDA) provides an institutional framework that affects the system, especially the data challenge. According to Bizcommunity (2025), there are intricacies of educational agencies, such as Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which make the process difficult and affect poor employers. Due to the lack of a systematic, empirical approach to labour market research, the system has limited visibility and is unable to meet industry needs.

Innovative strategies

Experiential Learning

UKZN takes a research-driven path that connects its academic strengths with real-world commercial projects. They have rolled out some impressive stuff, including an AI chatbot that resolves legal issues in African health research, a high-tech rocket from their aerospace team, and fresh advances in solar manufacturing. As Professor Thea van der Westhuizen explained, "The approach at UKZN is practice and research-based. The combination of two approaches of academic entrepreneurship and extracurricular entrepreneurship, making students grow in an ensemble, in a parallel way" (Universities South Africa, 2025).

The University of Zululand (UNIZULU) brings a distinctive focus on indigenous knowledge and rural innovation. Working with the departments of Consumer Sciences and Botany, they are developing products from traditional plants and creating Zulu herbs for various health applications. "We are tapping into indigenous plants that are all around us to build our business," said Professor Makhosazana Vezi-Magigaba. She pointed out how traditional knowledge is not just old wisdom. It sparks fresh business ideas and opportunities.

Ecosystem Collaboration

Several universities, such as Nelson Mandela University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and Walter Sisulu University, formed the Business Incubation Web Association (BIWA), which has since grown to seven universities and tackles the difficulties of commercialising research outputs through technology transfer (Nelson Mandela University, 2025). Stella Tembisa Ndabeni, Minister of Small Business Development, commended the initiative's emphasis on "bridging the gap between scientific innovation and real-world application". The program's emphasis on "bridging the gap between scientific innovation and real-world application" was commended by Stella Tembisa Ndabeni, Minister of Small Business Development.

Digital Entrepreneurship

The integration of digital skills into entrepreneurial education represents a third significant trend. Similarly, Stephen et al. (2022) report that only 52% of businesspeople in South Africa have access to digital technology to sell their products and services. This is contributing to the lower rating among developing economies (Fourways Review, 2025). School-level entrepreneurship programmes include several digital facilities, such as AI and coding, to address the digital skills deficit. The South African government's 2025 plan for Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) explicitly addresses this gap, with sessions exploring "how artificial intelligence tools can enhance research and innovation" and examining "opportunities arising from the Fourth Industrial Revolution" (University of South Africa, 2025). This focus reflects recognition that students who are unable to leverage technology to build and scale enterprises would struggle to compete globally (Rozputnia et al., 2025).

Policy Alignment

The development of coordinated policy frameworks for entrepreneurial education in South Africa represents a fourth creative trend. The draft National Entrepreneurship Strategy is a big step toward a methodical rather than disjointed approach. The National Development Plan (NDP), the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) and the National Integrated Small Enterprises Development (NISED) plans are strategies designed to align with and add value to other major national plans (Bizcommunity, 2025).

The Department of Basic Education has been pursuing a Sector Plan for Entrepreneurship Education in Schools: 2030, and its E3 (Entrepreneurship, Employability and Education) initiative, launched in 2018, has been piloting project-based learning methodologies in schools to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset among learners. By 2030, the ambitious goal of the E3 effort is to ensure that all students acquire the skills, knowledge, and solution-focused attitudes needed to complete school, pursue higher education, find work, or launch their own businesses (Department of Basic Education, 2025).

Entrepreneurial Outcomes

Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurship education (EE) occupies a particularly critical space in the development strategies of emerging market countries where entrepreneurs and small businesses are required to drive economic growth and job creation (Price & Ronnie, 2021). In South Africa, universities of technology (UoT), which provide vocation-focused tertiary education, are considered vital vehicles of EE. Contextual peculiarities are the unique national, institutional, economic, and socio-cultural conditions that shape how entrepreneurship education (EE) operates in South Africa. Context is a crucial element of EE research for gaining understanding into when, why, and how entrepreneurship appears, and who is implicated. Price and Ronnie (2021) therefore argue that studies could explore ‘how context factors influence the nature and extent of entrepreneurship and not how entrepreneurship impacts its contexts’. In addition, few studies have examined the background of a supportive context for entrepreneurship (Bergmann et al., 2018). Further, most EE research focuses on entrepreneurship skills-building within a narrow context: the business school. This omission is predominantly in South Africa, where other tertiary institutions, such as universities of technology (UoTs) and comprehensive universities, constitute the majority, necessitating further study (Ramchander, 2019). In particular, the basic philosophy of the university provides vocation-focused tertiary education, combined with its broader accessibility, in terms of cost and years of study, compared with traditional universities, makes it a critical site for EE research in the South African context. The following are peculiarities of entrepreneurship education in South Africa.

Need for Venture Creation

South Africa’s EE is strongly shaped by extreme youth unemployment, where graduates are expected to become job creators rather than job seekers. Youth unemployment remains structurally high, especially among ages 15-34, forcing universities to reposition entrepreneurship as a survival and development strategy (Price & Ronnie, 2021). Piperopoulos and Dimov (2015) found that courses with a more theoretical focus led to higher self-efficacy among students but lower entrepreneurial intention, whilst courses with a greater practical focus resulted in both higher self-efficacy and higher entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, the preferred methods of teaching entrepreneurship include experiential learning (Botha & Bignotti, 2016), new venture simulations (Buchnik et al., 2018; Costin et al., 2018), and mentoring (Buchnik et al., 2018).

SMME Sustainability

Driven by an entrepreneurial spirit to create and achieve, small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) stimulate competition, improve productivity, and catalyse economic development and job creation (Erasmus, Strydom & Rudansky-Kloppers 2013). For any country, ‘accelerating entrepreneurial activities has always been the hallmark of achieving socio-economic development and goals for growth’ (Ghafar, 2020, p. 218). To underscore its national importance, the coordination, development, and promotion of entrepreneurship is under the umbrella of the South African Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), established in 2014, to strengthen the SMME sector as part of its strategy to enhance growth and alleviate poverty through job creation (DSBD 2020). Yet, South Africa has struggled to create programmes that effectively inspire, train, and prepare people to become entrepreneurs.

Job Creation with the help of the Curriculum

The educators in their study displayed autonomy and largely influenced the curriculum design of the entrepreneurship courses. Ruskovaara et al. (2015) agree that when teachers are involved in planning EE in schools or in the entrepreneurship curricula more generally, it yields positive results, including increased teacher commitment. Another EE study that included educators as a variable found that educators' role was not just to teach the course, but also to build students' confidence by fostering creativity, curiosity, and analytical ability (Costin et al., 2018).

3. Navigating through Entrepreneurial Peculiarities

Entrepreneurship education often emerges in direct response to tensions. Entrepreneurship education often emerges in direct response to tensions. Experiential learning provides people with the capacity to adapt to ecosystems, overcome institutional gaps, integrate digital technology to address skills misalignment, and for policy organisations to respond to fragmentation. However, the success of these innovations depends on whether they adequately address the underlying tensions or merely discard them. According to KZN, the most effective way for organisations to handle this dynamic is through KZN's collaborative ecology. To create a whole greater than the sum of its parts, the four universities have integrated their distinctive strengths: DUT's infrastructure, MUT's community connections, UKZN's research capabilities, and UNIZULU's indigenous knowledge (Universities South Africa, 2025). This collaborative model demonstrates that the equity gap between institutions can be partially addressed through ecosystem approaches that enable resource sharing and complementary experience. However, the model also reveals constant challenges that youth face. According to UNIZULU (2025), only three faculties are involved in entrepreneurship activities, indicating that the institutionalisation remains a challenge within successful collaborations.

Limitations of Entrepreneurship

The innovation in entrepreneurship education is constrained due to the absence of complementary procedural and structural reforms. Even though experiential learning enables practical capabilities beyond what theoretical learning alone can provide, its impact is limited when broader institutional conditions remain unchanged. Similarly, digital innovation contributes to the development of entrepreneurial skills, yet it does not sufficiently challenge entrenched cultural perceptions that frame entrepreneurship as a last-resort career option. In the same vein, improved policy coordination may enhance alignment among government actors, but it does not adequately address persistent deficiencies in labour market data infrastructure, which are critical for informed decision-making. Further, Parker et al. (2025) demonstrate that entrepreneurial mindset and skills mediate the association between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions. This suggests that improvements in contextual delivery alone are insufficient; rather, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends on its capacity to nurture bigger cognitive and behavioural changes within a sympathetic institutional and socio-cultural context.

Implications for Theory

This study contributes to the theory of entrepreneurship education by advancing a dynamic framework that considers trends and tensions as interconnected rather than separate phenomena. This dynamic framework for entrepreneurship education suggests that by drawing attention to the gap between educational opportunities and society's demands, tensions are generative forces that promote innovation. The effectiveness of a trend depends on its context and how well it resolves the conflicts that gave rise to it. A trend's efficacy may vary depending on its context, which is an important consideration. No single invention can resolve the numerous interrelated conflicts that define the entrepreneurial education environment in emerging nations; systemic reform is necessary. The current ecosystem approach is expanded upon in this dynamic framework for entrepreneurial education (Movahedi et al., 2025; Mathew, 2025).

Implications for Practice

The results suggest the following for educational leaders: First, rather than being limited to elective add-ons, experiential education ought to be incorporated into the entire curriculum. The GNITE model is an effective illustration of how co-curricular activities can provide scalable, accessible entrepreneurship education; yet this calls for acknowledgement and participation (Stellenbosch University, 2025). Second, a collaborative ecosystem needs to be fostered. The ZN model is a powerful example of how a region can leverage limited resources to deliver specialised solutions that benefit both parties. However, this requires facilitation and a common goal (Universities South Africa, 2025). Third, teacher training needs to be prioritised. As 9 % of teachers report a lack of training as a major impediment to implementation (Department of Basic Education, 2025), teacher training programs are critical for successful implementation. Public-private partnerships can provide teachers with the training and support they need to succeed. Fourth, culture needs to be shifted. Storytelling about successful entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds can be a powerful way to shift culture and make entrepreneurship a viable career option for young people. "Students need to see these examples and realise entrepreneurship is possible" (North-West University, 2025).

4. Conclusion

Entrepreneurship education is at a crossroads in South Africa. The country's economic development relied on the success achieved in areas such as small-scale businesses and enterprises. However, the situation in South Africa has recorded a high number of failures. The emergency entrepreneurial education has become a strategic priority for governments, universities, and other private sectors to reduce youth unemployment and drive economic transformation.

The advancement of innovative skills investigated in this paper provides grounds for many higher institutions across the globe to develop strategies that can foster practical knowledge, thereby developing an entrepreneurship mindset, intentions, skills, and abilities in youths to become self-reliant and independent human beings who can contribute to the development of the country's economy. However, the challenges of addressing this remain significant. However, in curtailing these, it does not need force but a systematic change and adjustment in the school curriculum that prioritises practical knowledge, engagement with the appropriate partners such as captains of industry, role models in the society, mentors, funding agencies that will support emerging businesses, and cultural change that influences entrepreneurship from the first choice rather than seeing it as the last resort.

This study concludes that if the government of South Africa intends to reduce youth unemployment, diversify its economy, and unlock growth, it should change the mindset that sees entrepreneurship as a fallback option when the first choice is not working. The government might help by providing venues for financial institutions to build networks, acquire useful skills, and foster a culture that values creativity and resilience. The government cannot approach entrepreneurship education as an afterthought in South Africa's present youth unemployment crisis.

5. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Government of South Africa should ensure that there is advancement of innovative skills to provide grounds for many higher institutions across the globe to develop strategies that can foster practical knowledge, thereby developing an entrepreneurship mindset, intentions, skills, and abilities in youths to become self-reliant and independent human beings who can contribute to the development of the country's economy.
2. To reduce youth unemployment, there must be diversification of the South African economy, and to unlock growth, it should change the mindset that sees entrepreneurship as a fallback option when the first choice is not working.

3. The government should provide good policies that will help youths and individuals to access loans through financial institutions to create networks, acquire useful skills, and promote a change in culture that values creativity and resiliency. The government cannot approach entrepreneurship education as an afterthought in South Africa's present youth unemployment crisis.

Limitations and Future Research

However, this research has several limitations. Firstly, the research has mainly relied on secondary sources. Therefore, future research should focus on empirical studies to examine the trend-tension dynamic in specific contexts. Secondly, the research has mainly concentrated on South Africa. Therefore, future research should focus on comparative studies across other developing economies in Africa. Last year, the research mainly concentrated on a specific period. Therefore, future research should focus on longitudinal studies to examine the trend-tension dynamic over time.

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