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Unpacking the Entrepreneurship Education Conundrum: Lecturer Competency, Curriculum, and Pedagogy

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores the complex landscape of entrepreneurship education by focusing on lecturer competency, entrepreneurship curriculum, and pedagogy. This study addresses critical gaps in the current literature by investigating key questions: ideal instructional approaches for entrepreneurship, essential components of the curriculum, providers of entrepreneurial knowledge, and overarching strategies to foster entrepreneurship in higher education. Employing the Gioia methodology, this research adopted a qualitative inductive approach by collecting data from 14 participants actively engaged in entrepreneurship education and development across various South African universities. The findings highlight the diverse perspectives of academics and underscore the importance of collaborative and interactive teaching methods in preparing students for entrepreneurial challenges. This research contributes valuable insights to inform policy and practice in enhancing entrepreneurship education within South African higher education institutions (HEIs).

Keywords: entrepreneurship education; lecturer competency; curriculum; pedagogy; Gioia methodology

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1. Introduction

While entrepreneurship education gains popularity (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021), along with growing support from key stakeholders such as governments and educational institutions (Iwu & Opute, 2021; Küttim et al., 2014; Mwasalwiba, 2010), research has relatively neglected investigating lecturers and their views (Abd El Basset et al., 2024; Brush et al., 2024) on EE issues such as EE conceptualization, pedagogy, and role competencies within the context of South Africa. Entrepreneurship lecturers are key stakeholders whose views can help answer many EE questions. They impact decisions about the delivery and implementation of entrepreneurship education in universities and are also involved in mentoring, coaching, and finding external research collaboration opportunities (Nsanzumuhire & Groot, 2020; Nuel et al., 2021) to enhance student entrepreneurship education experiences. Academics also teach students to evaluate business opportunities, assess risks, analyze markets, and make informed decisions based on evidence and data (Ewim, 2023). They also engage in research that generates new insights into a discipline's processes, challenges, and best practices. Thus, neglecting their view will likely undermine efforts towards developing a holistic understanding of the many outstanding

issues in EE discourse. For example, the critical issue of the absence of academics and or teachers who teach entrepreneurship in higher education remains open to interrogation. Ongoing enquiries exist about students' entrepreneurship behavioral traits, attitudes, intentions, and success factors (Fragoso et al., 2019; Iwu & Opute, 2021; Solesvik, 2013). Other studies debate the necessity of embedding or not embedding entrepreneurship in the curriculum of business- and non-business-related disciplines at HEIs (Hynes, 1996; Tengeh et al., 2015; Thurik et al., 2023). EE has yet to develop unquestionable global theories, perspectives, and views. Fiet (2001) noted that there has been an explosion of different entrepreneurship theories that work against cumulatively building on those that relate to each other, thus frustrating efforts to develop robust, universally acceptable theories to guide EE.

Nonetheless, anecdotal studies in the literature engage entrepreneurship faculty with demonstrable limitations towards understanding lecturer competency, curriculum, and pedagogy issues in universities in developing contexts. Thani (2020) interviewed faculty members, academic leaders, and policymakers about entrepreneurship education implementation in the United Arab Emirates without necessarily applying a global context that would find direct relevance in South Africa and other countries. Likewise, Davey and Galan-Muros (2020) examined a substantial dataset comprising 10,836 responses from 33 countries in an empirical study investigating European academics, generating European-specific perspectives on their environment for academic entrepreneurship. Otache (2019) dealt with entrepreneurial lecturers' role in enhancing entrepreneurship education's effectiveness, albeit with a student cohort as participants. In their study, Seikkula-Leino et al. (2010) limited their question about the role of teachers in promoting entrepreneurship education to teachers at the basic, upper secondary and vocational educational levels, thus missing out on views of academics in university settings. Radipere (2012) also interviewed departmental section heads of entrepreneurship in selected South African universities investigating how entrepreneurship is taught, but that was before the intense integration of technology in teaching contexts.

Our study aims to fill some of the gaps in these earlier studies. Firstly, it gathers views from a critical yet often neglected stakeholder group—lecturers. Secondly, it adds an African EE knowledge set to the predominantly Western and American-dominated global discourse. Thirdly, it proposes a typology that can serve as a reference for developing EE in South African higher education institutions supporting the South African National Development Plan (2030). The National Development Plan (2030) positions entrepreneurship as a means to expand access to opportunities and employment, economic inclusion, education, and skills development, consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, specifically Goals #1, #4, and #8, designed to promote policies that stimulate entrepreneurship and, in turn, create jobs. Lastly, in our discussion, we critically reflect on context to dispel the generalizability of contemporary findings on curriculum, pedagogy, and lecturer attributes to resource-constrained EE teaching environments.

Thus, using an expert group of academics who teach entrepreneurship at several South African universities, we posed the following questions:

- What kind of instruction is ideal for entrepreneurship?
- What should be included in the curriculum for entrepreneurship education?
- Who ought to provide entrepreneurial knowledge?
- In general, what is needed to encourage entrepreneurship in higher education?

The necessity for entrepreneurship education is well documented in the existing literature. Teaching and learning entrepreneurship aims to transfer skills, knowledge, and technical expertise needed for students to graduate and take up entrepreneurship.

The ever-increasing unemployment rate among graduates and the youth, including the dwindling state of the economy, are some of the reasons for encouraging an entrepreneurial attitude across all educational levels.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education (EE) and Society

South Africa's economy, known for its high unemployment rate, has had several unfavorable effects that do not augur well for its economic growth and the peaceful coexistence of its diverse populations. One potential remedy for dealing with the issue which has been suggested is turning to entrepreneurship instead of holding onto the never-ending dream of formal employment. As indicated above, entrepreneurial intention studies have remained popular in economic and management sciences research. In these studies, students have remained the focal point. Therefore, this study distils lecturers' views regarding lecturer competency, entrepreneurship curriculum, and pedagogy.

Numerous academic fields, including business, engineering, design, social sciences, and many more, have connections to entrepreneurship. Interdisciplinary viewpoints from academics in other subjects can be brought to entrepreneurial education, encouraging cooperation and creativity among students with varied backgrounds and specializations. Most agree that entrepreneurship is essential to societal innovation, job creation, and economic prosperity (Pradhan et al., 2020; Si et al., 2021). Academics are vital in promoting an entrepreneurial culture that may drive economic development and prosperity by providing students with the knowledge, abilities, and mindset needed to succeed as entrepreneurs (Iwu & Opute, 2021).

Entrepreneurship can be used to address urgent societal issues like poverty, inequality, environmental sustainability, and healthcare access, according to the United Nations' call to governments worldwide to address these issues (SDGs 2015) (Apostolopoulos et al., 2018). Academics can encourage students to start enterprises with a beneficial social and environmental impact and make profits by incorporating social entrepreneurship and impact-driven activities into entrepreneurship instruction. Universities can also work with government agencies, nonprofits, business associations, and other stakeholders to improve entrepreneurial education programs that influence society (Iwu & Opute, 2021). This suggests universities may facilitate student engagement with the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem and provide resources, money, and support for their initiatives by utilizing their networks and connections.

Improving society through entrepreneurship may be influenced by entrepreneurship education. EE refers to "the teaching of skills and cultivation of talents that students need to start businesses, identify opportunities, manage risk, and innovate in their careers" (Torrance et al., 2013). According to Sambharya and Musteen (2014), those exposed to entrepreneurship education are likely to initiate and develop new ideas for sustainability and human capital development with the help of entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education offers several benefits, including increased exposure, early business knowledge, envisioning a prosperous future, increased personal growth and development, and quickly identifying issues based on newly acquired knowledge (Penaluna & Penaluna, 2020; Schachtebeck & Tselepis, 2023). Over ten years back, Sarma and Pais (2011) reported that entrepreneurial education, though contentious in setting and acceptance, was gaining traction in South Africa to gain knowledge, which may lead to self-employment. According to Friis et al. (2006), self-employment suggests that entrepreneurship education makes a start-up easier for the graduate.

The question often asked is how the intention to become entrepreneurial is shaped. In answering this question, several factors have been found to enable the intention to take up entrepreneurship. Some of these factors include entrepreneurship education (Iwu et al., 2021), social/family orientation (Bignotti & Le Roux, 2020), role modeling (Neneh, 2020), and the mix of capital, experience, and knowledge (Makinde et al., 2015). Most studies on entrepreneurship intention have focused on students, youth, and females. Studies have also examined the impact of entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial intentions (Neneh, 2020; Schachtebeck & Tselepis, 2023). In all these studies, the voices of the academics who teach entrepreneurship have been silent.

Promoting entrepreneurship in higher education through entrepreneurship education is essential to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, Africa Agenda 2063, and the National Development Plan of South Africa. However, realizing these goals will require understanding where to start teaching entrepreneurship, what the curriculum should look like, and how it should be taught. Given the aforementioned, this study contributes to the debate on the value of entrepreneurship education by introducing the missing link, i.e., the academics who are in one way or another connected with entrepreneurship development in South Africa's higher education.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977) owing to its perceived synergy with broader human capabilities, curriculum design, and pedagogy issues related to entrepreneurship education. Broadly, the SLT emphasizes the importance of environmental and cognitive factors, moderated by social interactions, in influencing human learning and behavior (Crittenden, 2005; McLeod, 2011). Crittenden (2005) asserted that this theory provides a foundation for learning and teaching within and across cross-functional cases. Thus, it provides a framework to interrogate appropriate teaching methods and who must teach entrepreneurship. The theory underscores that learning and behavioral change occur due to interactions between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences, imitation, and behavioral modeling (Sijabat, 2024). Classroom experiences are critical to successful learning in this frame, suggesting the importance of lecturer behaviors and skills. Moreover, curriculum design in entrepreneurship education should incorporate elements that facilitate observational learning and experiential activities, consistent with Bandura's assertion that observing, experimenting and mimicking leads to behavior change (Bandura, 1977).

In addition, this study adopted Shulman's Pedagogic Content Knowledge (PCK) model to understand and structure the knowledge base that underpins effective teaching EE. Shulman (1987) initially proposed this model in the context of teacher education to bridge the gap between subject content and pedagogical method. However, several studies (Motsoeneng & Qhosola, 2021; Ramchand, 2022; Ramsgaard & Blenker, 2022) have applied this model as a framework and tool to understand and help form the knowledge base for teaching. It has also been credited for connecting their knowledge of content and teaching methods (Ramchand, 2022). Thus, in this study, we utilized the PCK model to identify key elements that should be included in an entrepreneurial knowledge base in South Africa and proposed a typology connecting the four elements identified—the promotion of entrepreneurship in HE, teaching/delivery/facilitation in HE, curriculum adequacy HE, and lecturer competency HE. We therefore believe that this model is relevant for EE's focus on the intersection between entrepreneurship content and effective teaching methods (such as experiential learning, collaborative activities, and environmental factors).

Our study is, therefore, grounded on a constructivist view of social learning, which argues for social interactions and experiential learning in cultivating the next generation of entrepreneurs. As a social and academic activity, developing student entrepreneurship behaviors depends on who teaches them, how they are taught, what the spaces to experiment look like, and what the curriculum design is.

3. Materials and Methods

This study followed an interpretivism research philosophy. Using a qualitative methodology for analysis and comparison (Saunders et al., 2019) allowed for the application of an exploratory research framework (Galvão et al., 2020; Neergaard et al., 2020) to gain critical insights into what is relevant when it comes to teaching entrepreneurship, what should be included in the curriculum, who and how to teach it, and what needs to be done to encourage entrepreneurship in higher education. Through a narrative inquiry, data were gathered to investigate the participants' experiences (Blustein et al., 2013) and consequently to uncover meaning through participant reflections (Chinyamurindi, 2016).

This study utilized the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012) as the foundational approach, with Botha and Sibeko (2022) and Simba et al. (2023) providing guidance for conducting the methodology and analysis. According to Gioia et al. (2012), this approach can generate new concepts and grounded theories through rigorous inductive studies rather than relying solely on impressionistic methods. Given that entrepreneurship is influenced by social and contextual factors (Brush et al., 2009), the Gioia methodology was deemed particularly suitable for investigating the complexities of entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, Gioia (2020) argues that the method effectively ensures that research findings resonate with participants and scholars in entrepreneurship. To achieve this, Gioia (2020) emphasizes the importance of presenting both first-order (informant-centered) and second-order (theory-centered) data and findings. This process involves narrative analysis, as, presented later in the manuscript.

3.1. Sample

To conduct a narrative analysis, we sent a questionnaire with four open-ended questions to obtain texts for analysis. We identified likely participants through a common list of entrepreneurship academics in South African universities. This list was compiled by a research assistant attached to one of the authors. The list was part of a long Excel Spreadsheet of South African universities that offer entrepreneurship either as a module or as a program. We therefore selected 30 academics who teach or are involved in entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship research, or entrepreneurship-based community engagement. Ethical research principles were followed, including obtaining the ethics clearance from the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape, reference number, and Approval Code HS23/1/1. Out of 16 responses we received, one was blank, and the other one was a duplicate. Thus, these two were excluded. The 14 participants comprised a diverse group of academics and professionals in various roles—executive dean, senior lecturers, professors, entrepreneurship coordinators, technology transfer officers, entrepreneurship coaches, and department heads. This tactic aligns with Creswell's (2013) method, which advocates using participants who share the same traits as potential participants. Data were collected over five months using a non-probability convenience sampling technique (Cohen et al., 2011). Convenience sampling was selected because of its many applications, especially when dealing with time constraints. Its ease of use and low-effort requirements also make it possible to gather sizable data samples quickly. Because

this sample strategy was affordable and compatible with the academic nature of the project—which had a tight timeline—the researchers chose it (Bhardwaj, 2019). Choosing participants for convenience sampling entails doing so based on their accessibility, desire to participate, or other convenient characteristics for the researcher. Participants were chosen according to specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion. The inclusion criteria focused on academics actively involved in entrepreneurship education and development within South African universities, ensuring representation across various disciplines and seniority levels within entrepreneurship education. Prior to collecting data, participant consent was obtained. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 1. The participants' demographic characteristics.

#	Participant	Attribute
1	Executive Dean of a Business Faculty	More than two decades of entrepreneurship teaching, learning, research, and community engagement. MALE
2	Senior Lecturer	Facilitator Entrepreneurial Action Us (ENACTUS), students in entrepreneurship; 10 years of experience. FEMALE
3	Senior Lecturer	Coordinator, departmental advisory board, lecturing entrepreneurship and marketing for over 20 years. FEMALE
4	Professor/Head of the Department of Business Management	More than 10 years of teaching, research, and leading a department. MALE
5	Entrepreneurship Coordinator of a Faculty	12 years in this role. MALE
6	Technology Transfer Office of One of the Best 10 Universities in South Africa	Encouraging innovation, patents, and trademarks. MALE
7	Part-time Lecturer/full-time Entrepreneurship Coach	More than 10 years of experience. FEMALE
8	Retail/Tourism Entrepreneurship Lecturer	15 years of experience. FEMALE
9	Professor	Graduate supervision/lecturer. Two decades. MALE
10	Lecturer of Entrepreneurship in an Entrepreneurship Department	Eight years. FEMALE
11	Senior Lecturer	Coordinator, student entrepreneurship. 11 years. FEMALE
12	Associate Professor in Entrepreneurship and Innovation	Teaching and research in entrepreneurship. 8 years. MALE
13	Entrepreneurship Lecturer	Teaching modules in entrepreneurship. 5 years. MALE
14	Head of an Entrepreneurship Department	Six years teaching at university. MALE

Source: Authors' compilation.

3.2. Data Collection Method

The data collection method used in this study involved distributing a questionnaire with four open-ended questions to 30 selected academics. These questions were tailored to prompt in-depth responses from individuals engaged in entrepreneurship education and development at various South African universities. This approach aligns with recognized qualitative research principles to capture diverse perspectives on entrepreneurship education within HEIs.

3.3. Ensuring Data Quality and Accurate Reporting Methods

Stringent guidelines were carefully followed during data collection to guarantee data quality and correct reporting. Specifically designed for the qualitative study using the Gioia method to explore the entrepreneurship education conundrum in South Africa, these protocols aimed to maintain rigor and reliability in data collection and reporting. Initially, research questions were carefully developed to adhere to the research objectives and theoretical framework. The questions underwent a thorough expert review process, where experienced researchers and subject matter experts provided valuable feedback to enhance its clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in eliciting detailed data. This process ensures that the questions were set up properly to probe deeply into the participants' opinions. We also conducted a pilot study. It aimed to assess the quality of the questions and identify any barriers that would keep participants from giving thoughtful responses throughout the exercise (Majid et al., 2018). This pilot phase validated the questions' effectiveness in eliciting the desired responses and identifying potential ambiguities or shortcomings. Pilot participants' feedback was carefully considered to improve the four questions used for data gathering. As a result of this exercise, the questions were reviewed, and two experts recommended adding certain ideas to help respondents provide their replies. Consequently, we ended up with four questions, with one of the questions revised to read, "What should an ideal entrepreneurship education curriculum consist of?"

Moreover, implementing these rigorous protocols, including developing expert-reviewed questions and pilot testing, was instrumental in maintaining data quality and enabling accurate reporting in the qualitative study on unpacking the entrepreneurship education conundrum.

3.4. Maintaining the Research's Rigor

Several techniques were employed to maintain the rigor and quality of the research. Following the recommendations of Treharne and Riggs (2015), the researchers incorporated peer debriefing and member checking at each stage of the research process. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2020) outlined reflexivity, which is utilized to mitigate potential biases. To ensure the reliability of the study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were adhered to. Credibility was established by presenting a realistic portrayal of the results and the phenomenon under investigation. The depth of the data and findings enhances the potential transferability of the study to future research endeavors.

4. Results

4.1. Data Analysis

The researchers initiated the data analysis process by systematically reviewing the open-ended questionnaire. The review was performed to understand the entrepreneurship education conundrum in the South African Higher Education sector. This method assisted in deriving meaning from the data and interpreting the participant's stories (Osborn & Smith, 2008; Watson & McGowan, 2019). The qualitative data were managed

using NVivo 12 software, which helped with data coding and identifying comparable text in different responses (Gioia et al., 2012). This study's analytical approach follows the guidelines outlined by (Gioia et al., 2012). The method involves creating aggregate, second-order, and first-order dimensions or themes to systematically analyze qualitative data and identify significant connections, processes, and patterns (Magnani & Gioia, 2023; Nag et al., 2007).

The participants' responses were carefully reviewed and coded in the first-order analysis to identify recurring themes, concepts, and patterns (Gioia et al., 2000). Open coding was utilized initially in the coding phase to recognize and categorize meaningful data units with descriptive codes (Gioia et al., 2012; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). These codes captured the participants' perspectives on the challenges of entrepreneurship education.

Reading and categorizing the text data to extract important information units were part of identifying first-order dimensions. These dimensions captured the key quotes, ideas, concepts, or experiences that those participants shared regarding the most effective types of entrepreneurship instruction, the content of entrepreneurship curricula, the ideal instructors for entrepreneurship courses, and the necessary steps to promote entrepreneurship in higher education.

Related codes were grouped after the initial coding process to generate second-order themes. This approach entailed identifying relationships and commonalities among the codes and categorizing them based on their conceptual similarity. This method achieved a higher level of abstraction, capturing broader concepts that spanned multiple codes. The second-order themes provided a deeper understanding of the key concepts and patterns concerning the optimal forms of education for entrepreneurship, the content of entrepreneurship curricula, the providers of entrepreneurial knowledge, and the necessary steps to foster entrepreneurship in higher education. The analysis involved aggregating the second-order themes to develop higher-level aggregate themes (Gioia et al., 2012). This approach aimed to identify broader trends and overarching concepts that linked multiple second-order themes. By synthesizing and merging the second-order themes, the researchers revealed overarching ideas that captured the core of the participants' perspectives. The procedures outlined demonstrate identifying early concepts in the data and organizing them into categories through open coding (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Core themes are then established, which are further consolidated by analyzing similarities and differences in the central concerns (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 1994). The data analysis framework, incorporates theoretical dimensions aligned with Corley and Gioia's first- and second-order codes and categories (Corley & Gioia, 2004).

4.2. Question One: What Is the Best/Ideal Teaching Style for Entrepreneurship?

Four themes generated from question one are presented in Figure 1.

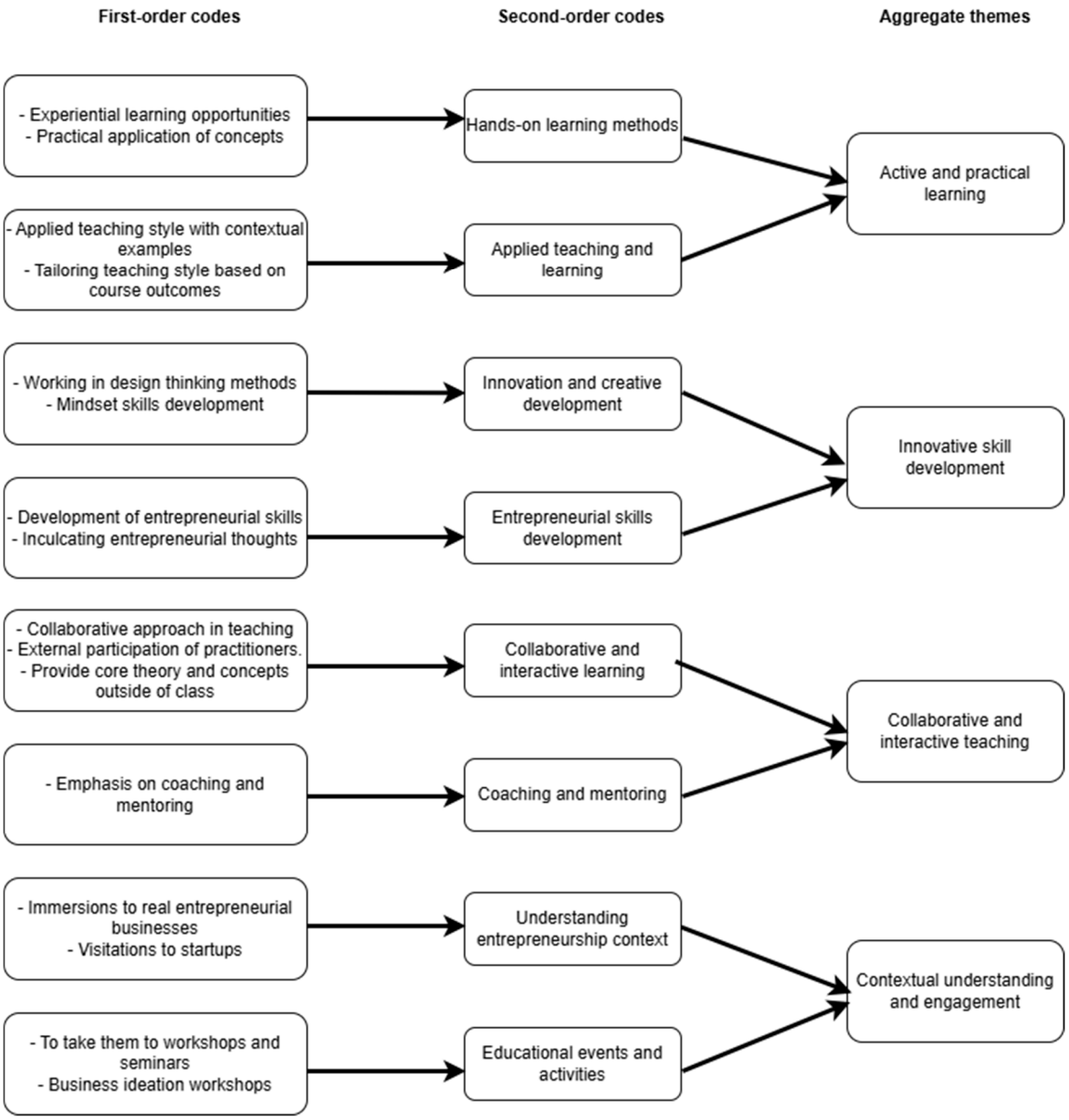

Figure 1. The kind of instruction ideal for entrepreneurship (source: the figure was created by the authors based on the responses).

4.2.1. Theme One: Active and Practical Learning

In entrepreneurship education, active and practical learning methods can assist students in developing critical skills such as problem solving, decision making, creativity, and collaboration in a context that mirrors the challenges and dynamics of real-world business environments. Students can better internalize knowledge and build confidence to establish and manage ventures by engaging with entrepreneurial concepts and practices. Participants emphasized that hands-on learning methods and applied teaching and learning strategies promote active and practical learning. A participant commented that:

> "Ideally, an applied teaching style should be adopted when teaching entrepreneurship. By that, I mean that the theory taught in class should be backed by contextual examples." [Respondent 1]

These methods encourage students to engage with real-world scenarios, practical activities, and contextual examples, thus fostering a deep understanding of entrepreneurship through experiential learning. As such,

> "The practical activities in this case would include simulations, role-playing, case studies, and real-world projects which would enable learners to put theoretical concepts into practice." [Respondent 12]

It follows that:

> "Therefore, entrepreneurship education should incorporate hands-on experiences, such as case studies, simulations, and experiential learning opportunities, to enable students to apply theoretical concepts in real-world contexts" [Respondent 2], and teaching methods must simulate "students starting businesses as part of experiential learning coursework." [Respondent 5]

4.2.2. Theme Two: Innovative Skill Development

Respondents emphasized the importance of innovative skill development through innovation, creativity, and the development of essential entrepreneurial skills when teaching entrepreneurship. They highlighted the importance of creating learning environments that encourage experimentation, problem solving, and risk taking. Additionally, they recommended using practical teaching strategies such as business simulations, case studies, and interactions with real-world entrepreneurs to enhance students' entrepreneurial capabilities. Overall, participants believed integrating these elements into the curriculum could help prepare students to deal with challenges and utilize entrepreneurial opportunities. This perspective is revealed through comments such as:

> "By simulating entrepreneurial environments and encouraging experimentation, education institutions can instill an entrepreneurial mindset characterized by a willingness to take calculated risks and embrace failure as a learning opportunity." [Respondent 2]

Innovative skills development also encouraged students to think creatively, engage in design thinking processes, and participate in ideation workshops to cultivate a mindset toward entrepreneurial success. This process must be complemented by:

> "…encouraging them to start their businesses by developing business plans as part of the education program and to take them to workshops and seminars." [Respondent 4]

Moreover, respondents believe it is vital to adopt teaching styles that facilitate the following:

> "Working in groups in design thinking methods to identify entrepreneurship ideas and make proposals for establishment/enhancement of business operations." [Respondent 9]

Innovative skills development also requires that:

> "Entrepreneurship students should be taught in a collaborative manner that allows them to develop a creative license in the business ideation process without being worried about being wrong." [Respondent 3]

4.2.3. Theme Three: Collaborative and Interactive Teaching

Collaborative and interactive teaching underscores the participants' belief in the effectiveness of collaborative and interactive approaches when teaching entrepreneurship. They highlighted the benefits of inviting external practitioners, using flipped classrooms, and a

presenter-driven approach to foster a collaborative mindset among students. Participants emphasized that interactive teaching methods, such as debates, role-plays, and interactive workshops, enhance student engagement and simulate real-world entrepreneurial dynamics. They stated that:

> "External practitioners, who are hands-on in business activities, can also be invited as guest teachers to engage students regarding entrepreneurial activities." [Respondent 1] to enhance collaborative and interactive learning experiences

This theme was supported by another participant, who stated the following:

> "Lessons can also be delivered utilizing flipped classrooms [which] provide core theory and concepts outside class through readings, videos, or online modules. Class time becomes a space for interactive activities, discussions, and applying theory to practical scenarios." [Respondent 7]

Enabling facilitator-guided learning and interactive activities promotes student engagement, knowledge sharing, and access to coaching and mentoring. Based on their experiences as practicing academics, our sample further emphasized that:

> "In today's higher education environment, it would be highly beneficial to adopt a teaching methodology that prioritizes a presenter-driven approach with a strong emphasis on coaching and mentoring." [Respondent 8]

4.2.4. Theme Four: Contextual Understanding and Engagement

This theme underscores the importance of context and engagement in entrepreneurship. Respondents believe ideal ways of teaching entrepreneurship must promote contextual understanding and engagement through strategies. This view is summarized in the following comments:

> "…encouraging them to start their businesses by developing business plans as part of the education program and to take them to workshops and seminars." [Respondent 4]

Another participant elucidated that:

> "In-class teaching, immersions to real entrepreneurial businesses, ideation seminars/workshops where students will showcase their ideas and be judged by the experts/investors/academics." [Respondent 13]

A teaching method is ideal, as mentioned by one respondent, if it:

> "Allows students to learn from real-world examples and engage in collaborative problem-solving." [Respondent 5]

And complemented by:

> "visitations to start-ups for interviews, exchanges and engagements to open the eyes of the students about the opportunities, challenges and experiences of other entrepreneurs." [Respondent 9]

Respondents, therefore, emphasize that teaching entrepreneurship must involve understanding it in various contexts. This involves clarifying the type of entrepreneurship taught, engaging with real entrepreneurial businesses through immersions and visitations, and participating in educational events like seminars and workshops to enhance learning and engagement with the subject matter.

4.3. Question Two: What Should an Ideal Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum Consist of?

Four themes generated from question two are presented in Figure 2.

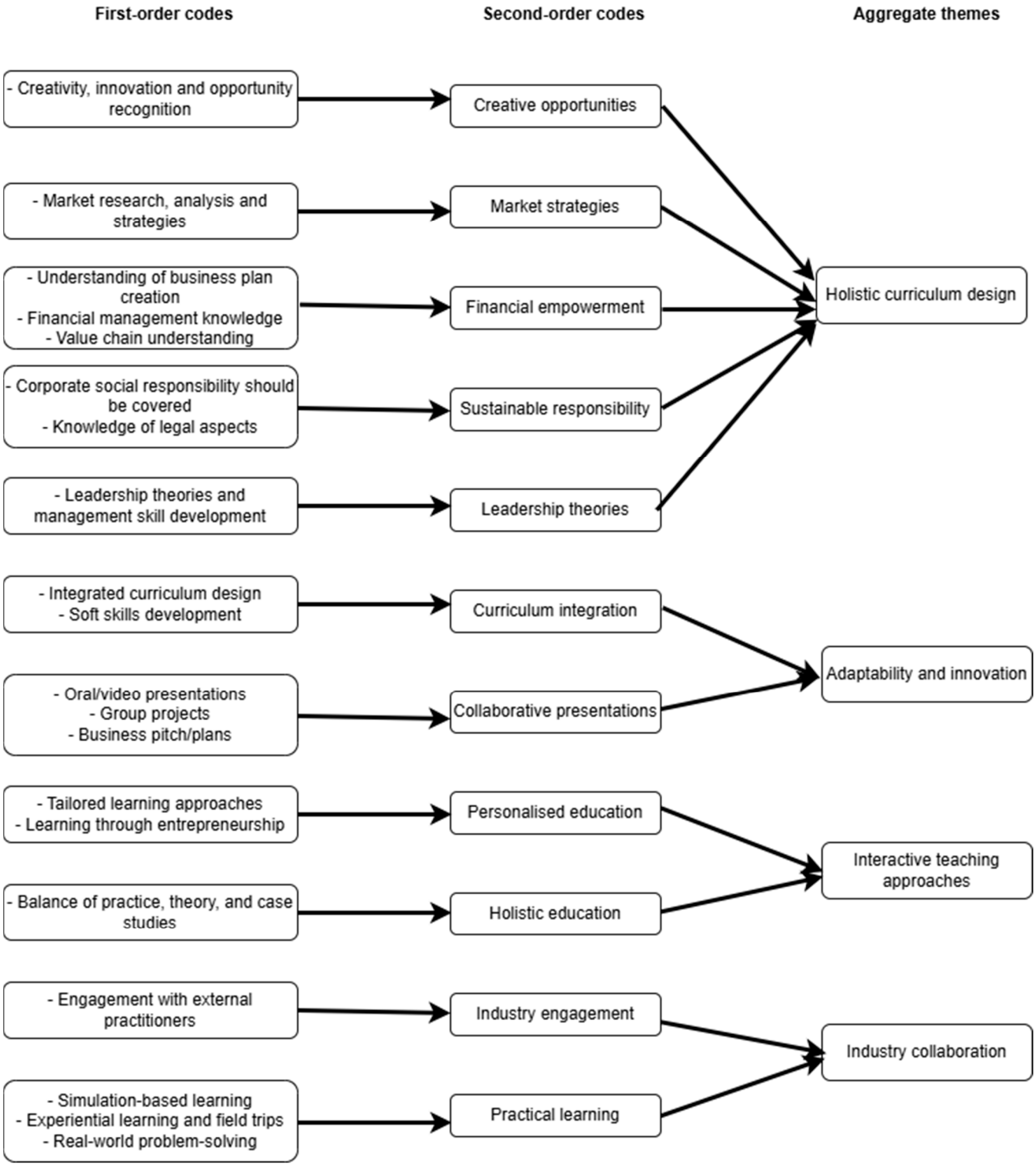

Figure 2. The ideal entrepreneurship education curriculum themes (source: the figure was created by the authors based on the participants).

4.3.1. Theme One: Holistic Curriculum Design

Respondents suggested designing a holistic curriculum with learning outcomes that speak to creativity, innovation and opportunity market research, business plan formation and financial management, and social responsibility and leadership theories. For example, one respondent highlighted this:

> "Ideally, entrepreneurship education curriculum should consist of a road map to guide the students towards entrepreneurial idea generation. So, themes like creativity and innovation should feature prominently in the curriculum." [Respondent 1]

It must also be geared towards:

> "... developing an entrepreneurial mindset through practical means such as reflective practice, experiential learning opportunities not just in 3rd year." [Respondent 3]

The curriculum must also include:

> "Entrepreneurship theory [that] explains entrepreneurial behavior, processes, and outcomes, providing a framework for identifying opportunities..." [Respondent 8]

A desirable curriculum thus includes a comprehensive blend of theory, practice, and real-world applications across various aspects of entrepreneurship.

4.3.2. Theme Two: Adaptability and Innovation

Given the dynamism of entrepreneurship, the sample indicated that an ideal entrepreneurship education curriculum must be adaptive and innovative. As mentioned by one participant, the focus must be on curriculum integration and collaborative presentations where

> "The practical application of knowledge, such as drafting business plans and engaging in simulation exercises, is emphasized to better prepare students for entrepreneurial endeavors..." [Respondent 2]

Another participant is of the view the curriculum must also allow for:

> "Real life; business pitch; business plans; and group projects—groups assist an entrepreneur to grow his/her business; [and] oral/video presentations of business plans." [Respondent 6]

The participants thus encourage a flexible and innovative approach to curriculum development, incorporating diverse learning methods and addressing contemporary business needs.

4.3.3. Theme Three: Interactive Teaching Approaches

The data showed that the ideal curriculum must advocate for integrated, experiential, and student-centered teaching methodologies that bridge academic knowledge with practical skills. One participant stated that:

> "To enhance entrepreneurship education, an integrated approach to curriculum design is suggested. This entails incorporating modules on business start-up, cognitive skill development, and soft skills." [Respondent 2]

Another participant also identified using case studies as an example of an interactive teaching approach suited for teaching entrepreneurship:

> "Case studies provide students with scenarios to think about real-world problems and find solutions to them." [Respondent 8]

An interactive teaching approach requires balancing practice, theory, and case studies. One respondent stated:

> "On our theoretical basis, we need to create an environment, a learning environment that allows practice and learning. For that reason, we need to consider

entrepreneur, learning through entrepreneurship where we ensure all learning practice is incorporated." [Respondent 14]

4.3.4. Theme Four: Industry Collaboration

Participants discussed the need for a curriculum focusing on industry integration, external insights, and hands-on experiences to prepare students for real entrepreneurial challenges. As one participant stated, this could be achieved through:

"Simulation—use on digital platforms for simulation such as SimVenture, Harvard Business or any other." [Respondent 3]

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that industry collaboration can be achieved by providing opportunities for:

"Business Visits: Organize field trips to established businesses and start-ups. Students can observe operations, ask questions, and gain a deeper understanding of different industries." [Respondent 7]

Views from another participant are that industry collaborations can also be facilitated:

"…additionally, arranging networking events for students who are interested in starting their businesses can be an invaluable resource as it allows them to connect with like-minded individuals, learn from experienced entrepreneurs, and gain valuable insights into the industry." [Respondent 8]

Therefore, as academics, the respondents saw the value of developing a curriculum that bridges the gap between institutional experiences and external networks in industry.

4.4. Question Three: Who Should Teach Entrepreneurship?

Two themes generated from question three are presented in Figure 3.

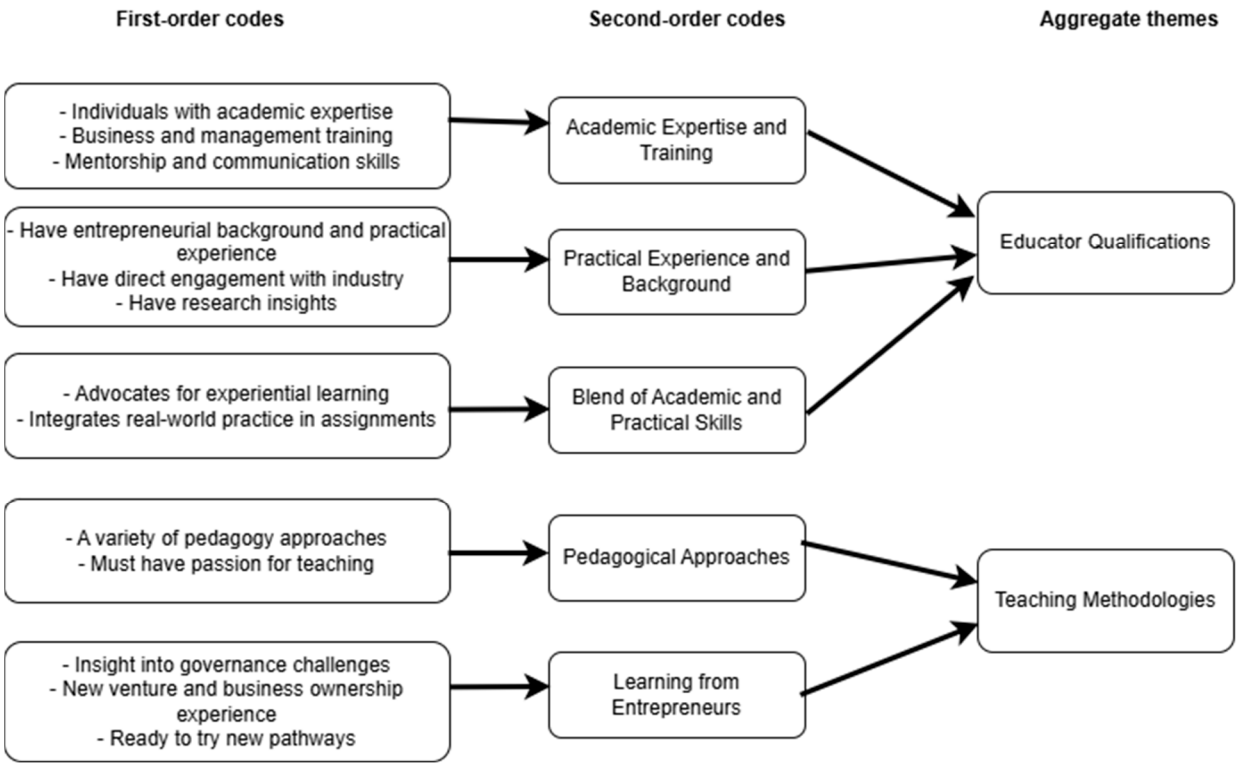

Figure 3. The kind of people who should teach entrepreneurship (source: the figure was created by the authors based on the participants).

4.4.1. Theme One: Lecturer Qualifications

It emerged from the responses that individuals teaching entrepreneurship must have strong academic backgrounds, practical experience in entrepreneurship, and the ability to blend theory with real-world applications. These attributes, as stated by one participant, are desirable because:

> "Academics with general management training can also handle entrepreneurship, as general management does touch on entrepreneurial activities as well." [Respondent 1]

and that:

> "Effective teaching of entrepreneurship necessitates instructors with practical experience and a personal entrepreneurial background." [Respondent 2]

Thus, as confirmed by another participant, having a:
"Mix of academic experts, as well as industry experts (entrepreneurs themselves)" [Respondent 5] can be considered better placed to teach entrepreneurship students.

The respondents believe that practitioners should teach entrepreneurship. For example, one participant stated that:

> "Someone who has had an experience of starting or running a real-life business of their own, no matter how small. Thus, they teach from experience and practice, not just theory." [Respondent 6]

Furthering the notion of practice and experience, another respondent said:

> "Mentoring students and offering personalized guidance helps them refine ideas and navigate challenges." [Respondent 7]

4.4.2. Theme Two: Teaching Methodologies

Regarding who must teach entrepreneurship, the views included adopting an interactive methodology that can transfer practical knowledge to students:

> "I believe entrepreneurial coaching as a pedagogy should be explored specifically for teaching undergraduate entrepreneurship students." [Respondent 3]

Appropriate methodologies also capitalize on past experiences and behavioral attributes. For example, one participant emphasized that:

> "It is ideal for entrepreneurship teachers to have experience in business ownership, a family business background or be part of a new venture set-up organization. This will allow students to learn from their first-hand experiences." [Respondent 8]

Relatedly, one participant highlighted the need for:

> "Passion and communication skills—Enthusiasm for entrepreneurship is contagious. So, effectively communicating complex concepts and inspiring students is key." [Respondent 7]

Respondents thus underscore the importance of engaging pedagogical approaches, a passion for teaching entrepreneurship, and incorporating insights from successful entrepreneurs into teaching practices.

4.5. Question Four: What Is Required to Promote the Growth of Entrepreneurship in Higher Education?

Three themes generated from question one are presented in Figure 4.

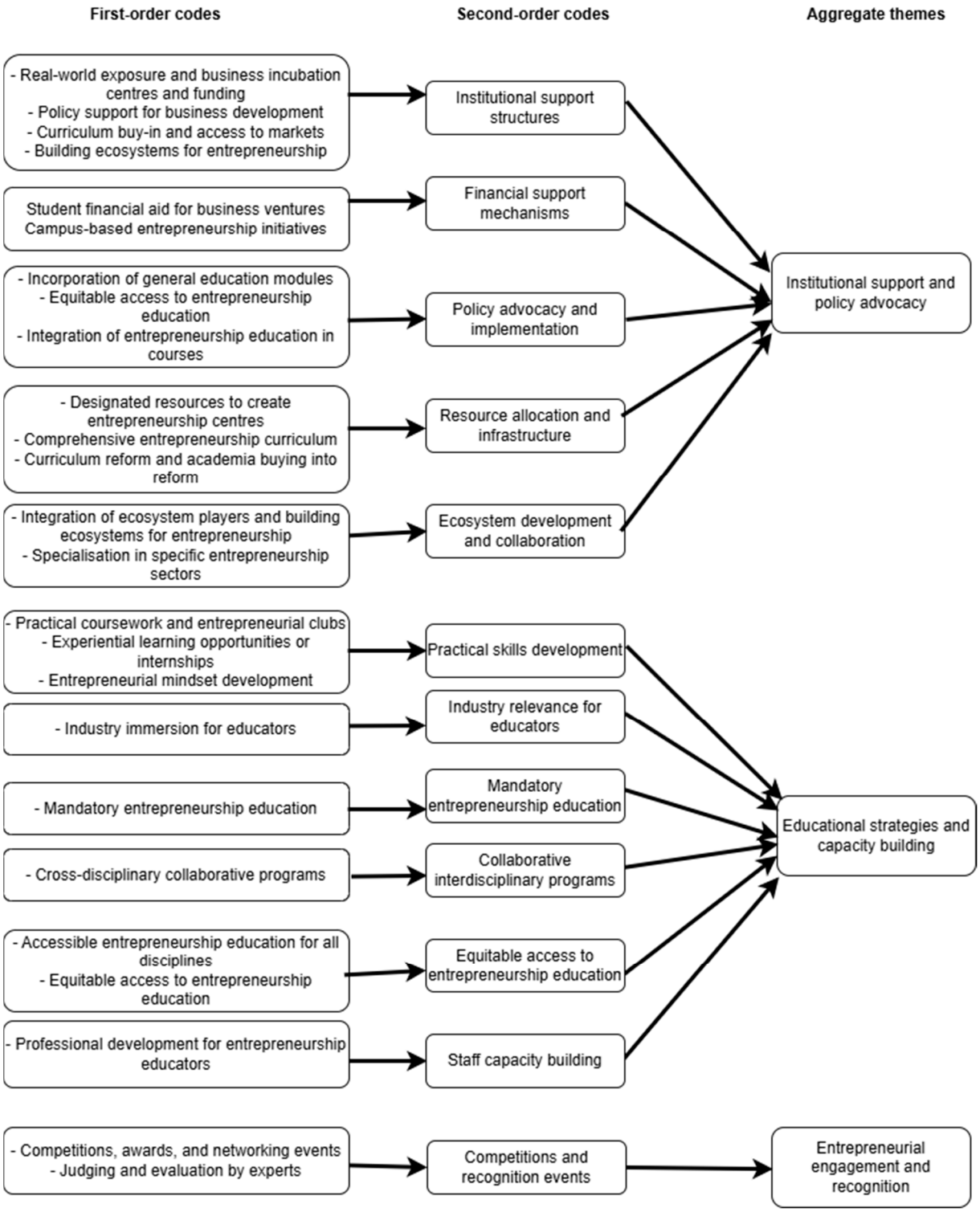

Figure 4. What can be done to improve entrepreneurship education (source: the figure is created by the authors based on the participants).

4.5.1. Theme One: Institutional Support and Policy Advocacy

It is important to establish robust institutional support structures, including specialized entrepreneurship centers, financial mechanisms, and policy frameworks to promote entrepreneurship in higher education. One participant mentioned this:

"Establish entrepreneurial clubs and incubators on campuses." [Respondent 6]

Other views by another participant are that:

> "Students need to get full exposure to the real business world, and memoranda of understanding need to be forged with this entity to motivate students to venture into businesses." [Respondent 1]

Availability and access to resources are also critical for supporting practical entrepreneurship in higher education, as indicated by another participant:

> "Furthermore, students with access to student financial aid should be allowed to start businesses as well as when they need to so that financial aid can also be useful outside the norms." [Respondent 4]

These initiatives can, however, succeed with stronger entrepreneurship policy advocacy, as indicated here:

> "Policy more clearly directed at SME development, entrepreneurship at the school level (basic education), increased funding for postgraduate studies, a requirement for WIL." [Respondent 5]

That also supports views from another participant who highlights that:

> "Providing access to entrepreneurship education and training for all students, regardless of their discipline, is crucial. This will ensure that every student in higher education has an equal chance to become a future entrepreneur. It all starts within the realm of higher education." [Respondent 8]

Such policies must aim to address the realities that:

> "... most universities on the continent and in South Africa do not have an adequate ecosystem and enabling ecosystem to embed their entrepreneurship curriculum. So, while a complete revamp of the entrepreneurship curriculum is required in South Africa and the case of Africa, the ecosystem needs to be built as well." [Respondent 14]

4.5.2. Theme Two: Educational Strategies and Capacity Building

Promoting entrepreneurship education depends on developing effective educational strategies such as practical skill development, mandatory entrepreneurship education, collaborative interdisciplinary programs, and equitable access to entrepreneurship education. Effective educational strategies must:

> "Incorporate practical learning, soft skills, assimilation programs." [Respondent 2]

And also promote:

> "Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration (Interdisciplinary Projects)—Encourage collaboration between business schools, engineering departments, and other disciplines to offer programs that cater to diverse entrepreneurial ventures. Entrepreneurship is lucrative in all disciplines." [Respondent 7]

Therefore, to strengthen the capacity for cross-disciplinary appeal and teaching:

> "Entrepreneurship module should be compulsory for all students, especially in their second year. Incorporate more practical coursework." [Respondent 6]

However, there is a need for internal capacity building for educators to support student learning experiences effectively in institutions. Hence, we must make moves towards:

> "Offering professional development programs and training sessions to lecturers would enable them to acquire the expertise and abilities necessary to proficiently instruct entrepreneurship and guide student entrepreneurs." [Respondent 12]

Respondents, therefore, underscored the importance of developing effective educational strategies and capacity building to nurture entrepreneurial mindsets among students.

4.5.3. Theme Three: Entrepreneurial Engagement and Recognition

There must be opportunities for entrepreneurial engagement and recognition through competitions and awards:

> "Competitions and Awards—Host business plan competitions, pitch events, and hackathons to ignite student creativity, encourage innovation, and showcase student ventures. Networking Opportunities—Facilitate connections between students, alum entrepreneurs, investors, and government departments. This provides valuable mentorship and access to funding and other opportunities." [Respondent 7]

and networking events:

> "Offering practical opportunities such as internships, start-up competitions, and incubator programs would enable learners to put theoretical principles into practice in real-life situations." [Respondent 12]

and interactive platforms for students to showcase their entrepreneurial ideas and innovations:

> "...in-class teaching, immersions to real entrepreneurial businesses, ideation seminars/workshops where students will showcase their ideas and be judged by the experts/investors/academics." [Respondent 13]

Respondents believed that providing an environment of entrepreneurial engagement and recognition can foster a culture of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship among their student body.

5. Discussion

This qualitative study explored the ideal instructional approaches for entrepreneurship, the curriculum's essential components, entrepreneurial knowledge providers, and overarching strategies to foster entrepreneurship in South African higher education. It gathered views from 14 participants involved in entrepreneurship education and development. Broadly, this study's results concur with previous authors' findings (Lyu et al., 2024; Nzembayie et al., 2024; Rodrigues, 2023), and we build on these to argue that such similarities may exist in principle. Still, given variances in environmental and contextual conditions within EE, our findings are distinguishable in practice. Primarily, this study underscored the importance of active, practical learning methods such as simulations, role-playing, case studies, and real-world projects. This echoes previous research by Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004), who argued that practical, hands-on experiences are crucial for developing entrepreneurial skills and mindsets among students (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008).

Similarly, integrating creativity, innovation, and practical business skills within the curriculum aligns with recommendations from Neck and Greene (2010), underscoring the holistic approach necessary for effective entrepreneurship education (Wilson et al., 2007). However, we argue that neither the infrastructure nor the industrial base and ecosystem connections exist, including business incubators and university projects that can entrench simulations, role-playing, case studies, and real-world projects in South African EE curricula. While these make sense in developed countries, their operationalization in developing contexts is idealistic and hardly practicable.

Therefore, our study further argues that neither theory nor practice is sufficient to actuate sustainable entrepreneurial behaviors among students independently. Consequently, we recommend developing an integrated entrepreneurship education curriculum that balances theory and practice. This result aligns with studies by Neck and Greene (2010), who

highlighted the importance of lecturers having business experience in providing students with real-world insights (Wilson et al., 2007). However, we add that there are limitations to emphasizing entrepreneurial experience as a skill set sufficient to teach entrepreneurship students. Effective lecturers must also possess industrial and technical skills, considering that entrepreneurship has a multidisciplinary appeal to other fields such as engineering and sciences. The ability to articulate entrepreneurship concepts grounded in a discipline-specific context is no longer persuasive but necessary, given its infiltration into all university course domains. Furthermore, the support for interactive and student-centered teaching approaches is consistent with Hannon's (2005) suggestions, which highlighted the value of experiential and collaborative learning strategies in teaching entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Again, cost constraints are associated with proposals for hiring better instructors, creating new labs, funding incubators, and reorganizing EE frameworks, which can inhibit proposed transformations.

Participants underlined the necessity for strong institutional support mechanisms, such as entrepreneurship centers and industrial partnerships, to promote entrepreneurship within HEIs. In that sense, we note Lorz et al.'s (2013) earlier views about the role of supportive ecosystems in fostering entrepreneurial activities within universities. Building supportive ecosystems and infrastructure is vital for developing student entrepreneurs. However, our study revealed the contextual realities that the South African entrepreneurship space is deficient in enabling an ecosystem to embed entrepreneurship curriculum and practice. Consequently, we argue that there is a need to divert student attention from idealistic concepts that emphasize ecosystems in situations where such do not exist. Rather, academics must relate students to the world that awaits them as entrepreneurs, consistent with the literature's (Fiet, 2001; Mwasalwiba, 2010) consensus that practicing entrepreneurship is context-defined and specific. Additionally, Honig's (2004) research suggests that organizing competitions, awards, and networking events can significantly improve students' entrepreneurial aspirations and talents. This supports the proposal to create these possibilities (Mueller & Thomas, 2001).

Furthermore, this research offered sophisticated perspectives on entrepreneurship education bolstered by discoveries from earlier researchers. This study advances entrepreneurial education in South African HEIs by incorporating real-world learning experiences, supporting lecturer credentials, and lobbying for supportive institutional frameworks. These observations are essential for shaping practice and legislation to develop future entrepreneurial leaders who can successfully handle business difficulties in the real world.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

6.1. Conclusions

This study investigated the role that entrepreneurial education plays in preparing students for the practical challenges of entrepreneurship based on the views of academics. By advocating for a curriculum that integrates theoretical knowledge and practical experience, educational institutions can enhance students' problem-solving, decision-making, and creative skills, essential for entrepreneurial success. The importance of qualified lecturers who balance academic expertise with real-world experience is also emphasized, encouraging institutions to invest in faculty development programs. Moreover, adopting interactive, student-centered teaching methods, such as flipped classrooms and case studies, can significantly boost engagement and learning outcomes.

6.2. Academic Implications

The academic implications of enhancing entrepreneurial education are significant, as indicated by the findings. Educational institutions can improve student readiness for practical entrepreneurial challenges by integrating practical, hands-on learning experiences into their curricula. This approach ensures that students gain problem-solving skills as theoretical knowledge is applied practically, making decisions and fostering creativity. This study also emphasizes the importance of lecturer qualifications, suggesting a mix of academic expertise and practical experience among entrepreneurship instructors. This recognition urges educational institutions to invest in programs supporting lecturers in advancing their careers and providing them with the tools to guide and mentor aspiring entrepreneurs effectively. Lastly, this study promotes interactive and student-centered teaching methodologies, encouraging academics to innovate in their teaching approaches. Implementing strategies like flipped classrooms, case studies, and experiential learning activities can enhance student engagement and deepen their understanding of entrepreneurial concepts.

6.3. Policy Implications

This study's recommendations for policy center on developing an atmosphere in higher education that supports entrepreneurship. Policymakers can utilize the results to advocate for establishing incubators and entrepreneurship centers on college campuses. These organizations are essential in assisting faculty and student entrepreneurs by offering resources, networking opportunities, and mentorship. Furthermore, supportive policy frameworks are vital to promote entrepreneurship education and industry partnerships. Policies that encourage internships, business visits, and funding for student start-ups help bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application, equipping students for entrepreneurial success. This study also recommends integrating entrepreneurship education across disciplines to ensure all students have equitable access to entrepreneurial learning opportunities, regardless of their academic background.

6.4. Practical Implications

Putting this study's recommendations into practice can greatly improve students' readiness for starting their businesses. Students are allowed to apply their academic knowledge in practical settings through activities such as business simulations and real-world projects. These strategies can assist schools in fostering entrepreneurial traits in students, such as initiative, resiliency, and leadership. This study underscores the significance of industry engagement through initiatives like competitions, awards, and networking events. These opportunities offer students mentorship, feedback, and potential funding sources, enriching their entrepreneurial journey. Cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets and skills in academic institutions contributes to regional economic development. Graduates with entrepreneurial capabilities are better positioned to innovate, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth in their communities.

6.5. A Typology of the South African University Entrepreneurship

We conclude our study by proposing a typology of the South African university entrepreneurship curricula. Using Shulman's (1987) PCK framework, we interpret it as representing an amalgam of content and pedagogy in a South African context. Thus, this typology serves as a heuristic tool for crystallizing the main concepts that emerged from the four main questions which guided this study. These questions are listed as follows:

- What kind of instruction is ideal for entrepreneurship?
- What should be included in the curriculum for entrepreneurship education?

- Who ought to provide entrepreneurial knowledge?
- In general, what is needed to encourage entrepreneurship in higher education?

Figure 5 below presents entrepreneurship education and development typology in South African higher education. It reveals a synergy of institutional promotional activities, teaching strategies, curriculum design, and lecturer competency as core ingredients to an effective practical entrepreneurship education framework. Thus, based on this study, higher education needs an environment that encourages entrepreneurship; has competent lecturers, an acceptable teaching/facilitation style, and an adequate curriculum; and helps students develop entrepreneurial abilities.

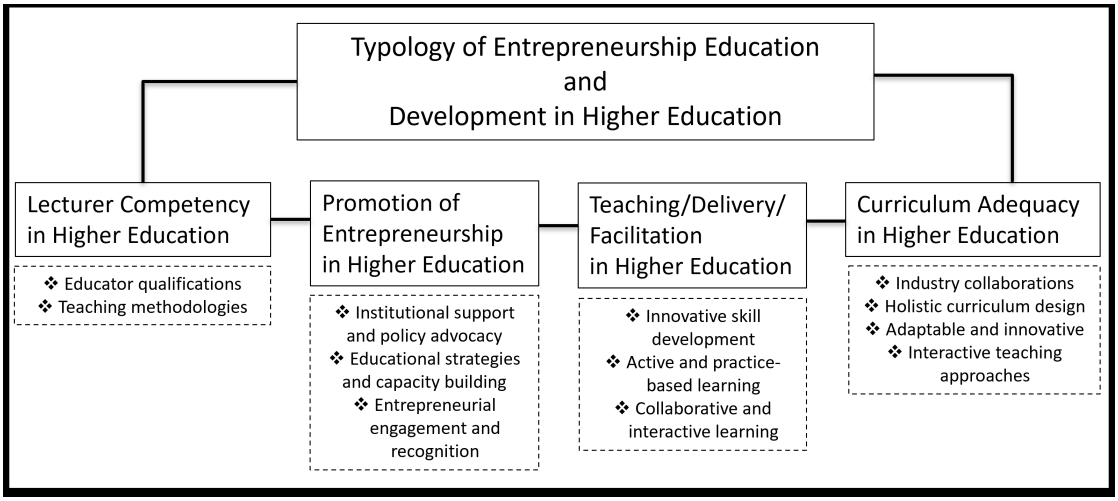

Figure 5. A typology of South African university entrepreneurship education (source: the figure was created by the authors based on the generated results).

Promoting entrepreneurship education requires a supportive institutional context defined by good policies, capacity-building initiatives, and activism. Academia demands a knowledgeable lecturer who can motivate and support students in their entrepreneurial pursuits while imparting curriculum content. A knowledgeable instructor considers students' unique backgrounds and learning styles, encouraging classroom variation and innovation. The lecturer's capability for the theory and practice of entrepreneurship and giving students examples from real-world situations for effective mentoring is equally valued.

The case of providing real-world situational examples is enhanced through an appropriate teaching/facilitation style, which should involve methods that stimulate critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving, all of which are necessary for starting a business. Case studies, group projects, simulations, and experiential learning can be useful in this case. These facilitation styles must be incorporated into the curriculum in a multidisciplinary form that speaks to other programs and themes.

Enabling the above permits an intentional, active entrepreneurship promotion strategy within the university. Universities should stage regular activities such as pitch competitions, network gatherings, guest speaker sessions, and setting up start-ups for students and academics to promote the adoption of practical knowledge. Regularly reviewing programs to identify current developments and entrepreneurial best practices will bode well for universities as their curriculum benefits from society's scrutiny. The community's involvement (professional and public) in the review of programs reflects a cross-disciplinary collaboration that can result in modules that speak to the needs of society. The utility of society also empowers the university by linking them to skilled instructors who can act as mentors and provide advice and encouragement to students who are considering pursuing

entrepreneurship. Mentorship programs assist students in overcoming obstacles in their entrepreneurial path by bridging the gap between theory and practice.

An ecosystem strong enough to support the effective development of entrepreneurial abilities in students is created by incorporating lecturer competency, appropriate teaching styles, curricular adequacy, and the promotion of entrepreneurship in higher education. With this all-encompassing approach, they are more equipped to succeed in the fast-paced, cut-throat world of entrepreneurship.

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