RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Cultivating Student Entrepreneurship through Community Engagement Initiatives: A Comprehensive Review in A South African Context

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Abstract

Present-day high unemployment rates make cultivating student entrepreneurship skills increasingly vital. As the job market landscape evolves towards innovation, creativity, and adaptability, traditional educational systems are being re-evaluated to better prepare students to adapt and thrive in potential career challenges. Community engagement initiatives are one promising avenue for fostering student entrepreneurship, providing students unique opportunities to apply theoretical class-taught content and their skills to real-world settings, contributing significantly to their communities. However, higher learning institutions grapple to properly develop entrepreneurship culture among students and adopt relevant pedagogies, typically depending on traditional teaching approaches, with some ignoring potential benefits of community engagement initiatives in fostering entrepreneurship culture. A comprehensive literature review established the key factors influencing student entrepreneurship efficacy through community engagement initiatives and understand the extent to which these initiatives contribute to cultivating students' entrepreneurial skills and mindsets. Community engagement initiatives were found to enhance these skills, including creativity, problem-solving, and leadership, while access to resources and a supportive ecosystem influenced student entrepreneurship efficacy. These initiatives transcend individual student development, with far-reaching, positive community impact and improvement of the institution's image. Further empirical research could devise targeted strategies, incorporating community engagement initiatives to cultivate student entrepreneurship into the university curriculum.

Keywords: students; entrepreneurship; community engagement projects; initiatives

Introduction

In an era characterised by high unemployment rates and a rapidly evolving job market, review is vital. As the employment landscape shifts towards championing innovation, creativity, and adaptability, traditional pedagogies are being re-evaluated to better prepare students for the career challenges they will encounter (Linton and Klinton, 2020). Conventional teaching methods are often insufficient to foster the entrepreneurial spirit required in today's dynamic environment, creating an urgent need to explore and implement alternative approaches that can effectively nurture entrepreneurial skills. One promising avenue for fostering entrepreneurship among students is through community engagement initiatives (Secundo *et al.,* 2021). These initiatives offer unique opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge and skills to real-world settings, thereby enhancing learning experience and contributing significantly to the communities (Galvão, Mendes and Marques, 2020). Despite the potential, higher education institutions (HEIs) often struggle to develop a robust entrepreneurial culture among students,

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primarily attributable to reliance on traditional pedagogies that may overlook the benefits of community engagement and similar approaches (Abou-Warda, 2021). These institutions face precarious challenges in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset among students, due to predominant use of traditional teaching approaches that often neglect the integration of community engagement initiatives, which yield better outcomes (Ndofirepi, 2020; Wardana *et al.,* 2020). This gap hinders the holistic development of students' entrepreneurial skills and limits their ability to adapt to modern job market demands (Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). Investigating the extent to which community engagement initiatives contribute to the development of students' entrepreneurial skills is, therefore, essential (Malhotra and Kiran, 2023; Sim, Usman, and Alam, 2021). Further to that, the research presents the potential to identify the key factors that influence their efficacy (Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020).

The significance of this research is positively characterised, as it addresses the urgent need to enhance entrepreneurial education by incorporating community engagement initiatives, which have been shown to enhance skills such as creativity, problem-solving, and leadership (Puni, Anlesinya, and Korsorku, 2021; Saeed *et al.,* 2021). Additionally, the research highlights the importance of resource access and a supportive ecosystem in fostering effective student entrepreneurship, providing valuable insights for educational institutions seeking to improve their curricular offerings (Ratten, 2021). Finally, the study underscores the broader impact of these initiatives, demonstrating the potential to positively influence not only individual students but also the wider community and the reputation of the institution (Acs *et al.*, 2022). Recent research has shown growing recognition for the role community engagement initiatives play in enhancing entrepreneurial skills among students (Malhotra and Kiran, 2023; Ramadani *et al.*, 2023; Sim *et al.*, 2021; Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). Nabi *et al.* (2022) argue such initiatives provide practical, hands-on experiences crucial for developing an entrepreneurial mindset. Additionally, Bae *et al.* (2021) assert traditional pedagogies often fail to engage students in meaningful ways, leading to a gap in acquiring essential entrepreneurial skills. When juxtaposing traditional pedagogies with community engagement initiatives, it is evident these initiatives can bridge this gap by offering experiential learning opportunities that align with modern job market needs. Moreover, the literature indicates success of these initiatives is significantly influenced by resource availability and the presence of a supportive ecosystem (Sim et al, 2021; Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020; Reyad, Badawi and Hamdan 2020). Further to the above assertion, Kuckertz *et al.* (2022) found students who participated in community-based projects demonstrated higher levels of entrepreneurial intention and capability. This finding suggests creating an environment conducive to entrepreneurship is crucial for maximising the benefits of community engagement initiatives.

Literature Review

Student entrepreneurship refers to the activities and processes whereby students identify and exploit opportunities to create value, often by establishing new ventures (Sim, *et al.*, 2021; Reyad *et al.*, 2020; Boldureanu *et al.*, 2020). It encompasses a range of behaviours and skills, including innovation, risk-taking, and strategic planning (Selwyn *et al.*, 2016). This entrepreneurial spirit is not confined to business students alone but spans various disciplines as institutions recognise the broad applicability of entrepreneurial skills (Smith, Brindle, and Papageorgiou, 2020). According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), today's job market is characterised by rapid technological advancements and economic fluctuations, where entrepreneurial skills are increasingly critical. Traditional career paths are being disrupted, and there is a growing need for individuals who can innovate and adapt quickly (WEF, 2021). Entrepreneurs drive job creation and economic growth, making entrepreneurship education vital for equipping students with the skills needed to thrive in a dynamic environment (Audretsch, 2020). Moreover, entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, resilience, and problem-solving are highly valued by employers across various sectors, despite these benefits, student entrepreneurs face significant challenges (Bacigalupo *et al.*, 2020).

Access to capital is reported by the Organization for Economic Development (OECD) as a primary obstacle, because students often lack the financial resources and credit history to secure funding (OECD, 2020). Additionally, balancing academic responsibilities with entrepreneurial ventures can be daunting, leading to high levels of stress and time management issues (Morris *et al.*, 2013). There is also a skills gap, where students may have theoretical knowledge but lack practical experience in running a business (Kuratko and Morris, 2018). To draw broader insights from these findings and avoid viewing them as isolated observations, it is important to synthesise the literature's core messages. Collectively, the reviewed studies underscore a shared understanding of student entrepreneurship as a multidimensional construct, shaped by both internal competencies and external conditions. The literature does more than list challenges or benefits; it reveals an ecosystem in which entrepreneurial success is contingent upon the integration of institutional support, skills development, and adaptability to evolving market demands. The findings

suggest addressing barriers such as funding, practical experience, and time constraints requires a comprehensive approach that aligns academic curricula with real-world entrepreneurial contexts. This synthesis moves beyond individual findings to highlight how institutions can foster environments that support sustainable student entrepreneurship across disciplines.

Community engagement initiatives are germane to cultivating student entrepreneurship. These initiatives involve partnerships between educational institutions and community organisations to address local issues, while providing students with practical learning experiences. These initiatives are designed to enhance students' educational experiences by linking academic content with real-world applications (Chen, 2016). Such programmes often include service-learning projects, community-based research, and internships with local businesses or non-profit organisations (Luckin, *et al.* 2016). Student entrepreneurs reap numerous benefits from community engagement initiatives, which provide opportunities to apply classroom knowledge in practical settings, thereby enhancing learning and retention (Malhotra and Kiran, 2023). These initiatives also assist students to develop essential entrepreneurial skills such as leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving (Sim, *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, engaging with the community can foster a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement among students (Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). Empirical studies have shown community engagement initiatives positively impact student entrepreneurship. For instance, a study by Malhotra and Kiran (2023) found students involved in community-based projects exhibited higher entrepreneurial intentions and capabilities. Similarly, research conducted by Reyad *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that experiential learning through community engagement significantly enhanced students' entrepreneurial skills and mindsets. These findings highlight the importance of practical, hands-on experiences in developing entrepreneurial competencies. Globally, community engagement initiatives are recognised as effective strategies for cultivating student entrepreneurship. In the United States, service-learning programmes have been integrated into entrepreneurship curricula to provide students with real-world experience (Bacigalupo *et al.*, 2020). Boldureanu *et al.* (2020) also embraced community engagement in their study, with initiatives such as the European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education promoting best practices and collaboration. In Asia, countries such as China and India are increasingly incorporating community engagement into their educational systems to foster innovation and entrepreneurship among students (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2020).

Implementing community engagement initiatives comes with challenges. One significant issue is the alignment of academic goals with community needs, which requires careful planning and coordination (Puni *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, sustaining long-term partnerships can be difficult, particularly when there are differences in expectations and resources between educational institutions and community organisations (Shah and Dwyer, 2021). Moreover, measuring the impact of these initiatives on student learning and community outcomes can be complex and resource-intensive (Hodges and Karanasios, 2021). In South Africa (SA), the importance of entrepreneurship education is underscored by high youth unemployment rates and the need for economic development (Sim *et al.*, 2021). Community engagement initiatives in South African universities aim to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application, providing students with the skills necessary to start and sustain their businesses (Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). However, challenges such as resource constraints and socioeconomic disparities can hinder the effective implementation of these initiatives (Malhotra and Kiran, 2023). Despite these challenges, successful examples such as the University of Cape Town's community engagement programmes demonstrate the potential for positive impact (Reyad *et al.*, 2020). The integration of community engagement initiatives into entrepreneurship education offers a promising avenue for developing essential entrepreneurial skills among students. While challenges associated with the development of an entrepreneurial mindset exist, the potential benefits for students, educational institutions, and communities make it a worthwhile endeavour. Further research and targeted strategies are required to enhance the efficacy and scalability of these initiatives, particularly in the South African context.

Methodology

Through a comprehensive literature review, this research aims to illuminate the importance of promoting creativity, critical thinking collaboration and problem-solving skills. To reveal the study findings, a comprehensive review was used to synthesise and analyse existing studies. This approach provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in the field of student entrepreneurship, by identifying gaps or inconsistencies in the literature. The study generated insights for future research around student entrepreneurial endeavours through community engagement initiatives. This review was further favourable to answer the main research question: What are the key factors influencing the efficacy of student entrepreneurship through community engagement initiatives?

Additionally, the review enabled understanding the extent to which community engagement initiatives contribute to cultivating students' entrepreneurial skills and mindsets through community initiatives.

The review was achieved through a qualitative and abductive approach, which ensures a systematic content analysis procedure on extant literature in this area (Fourie, 2018). Before the review, search engines were used to retrieve relevant data from the SCOPUS database of peer-reviewed literature using the keywords "Project-Based Learning (PBL)";" Teaching-Learning and Assessments" and "South African higher education". A total of 1 186 articles were found through a comprehensive search of prominent journals and databases that cover high-index source studies. The criteria for inclusion in the analysis were defined in the review to identify appropriate papers. The following criteria for inclusion were considered:

- Papers related to the concepts of PBL, teaching-learning and assessments, and South African higher education.
- Peer-reviewed research articles.
- Documents must be conference proceedings or articles.
- Articles had to be written in the English language.

The following were considered as exclusion criteria:

- Papers not including PBL, teaching-learning and assessments, or South African higher education will be excluded.
- Research articles not peer-reviewed were excluded.
- Documents withdrawn and book chapters.
- Studies were excluded when they were not written in English.

In this research, we did not include book chapters, retracted articles, and editorial notes, because they cover different topics, have less rigorous peer-review methods, use diverse reporting approaches, and may have accessibility challenges. This decision was made to uphold superior standards and guarantee a smooth, uniform process for comparing and extracting information.
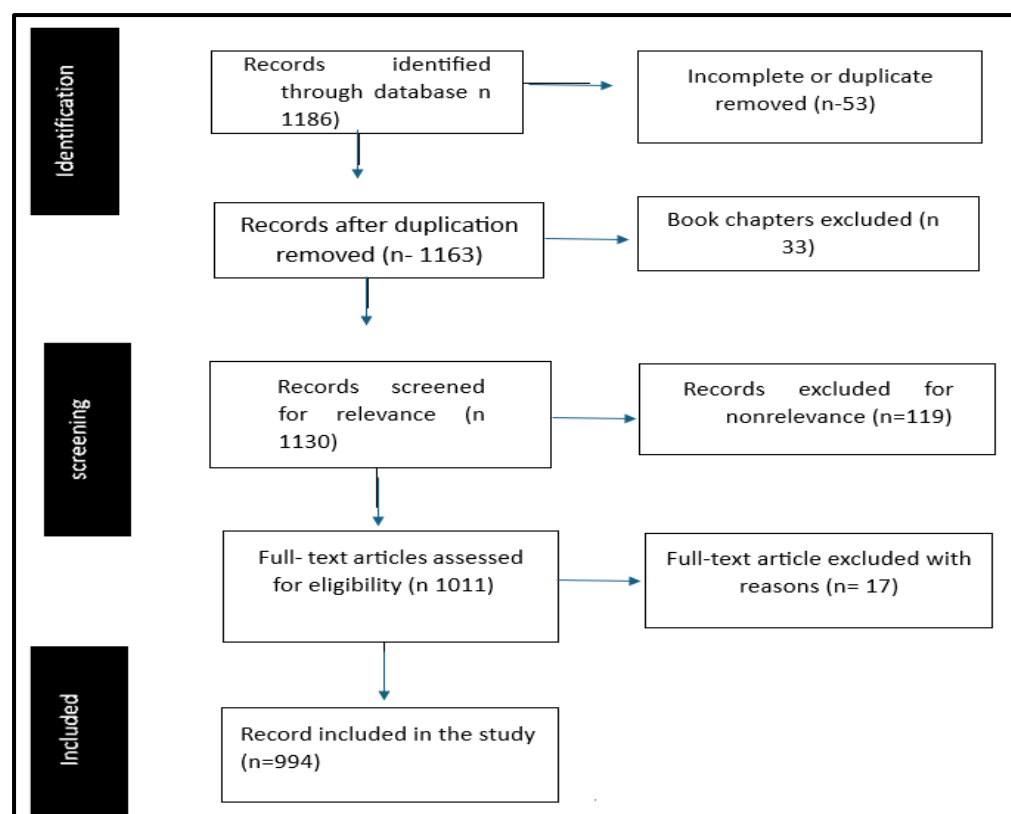

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

The PRISMA flow diagram above illustrates the number of papers retrieved using the identified key words during the search. The initial 1 186 publications from the search were acquired through keyword-based queries. After applying the defined exclusion criteria, the dataset was narrowed to 994 studies, spanning from the year 2020 to 2024. This rigorous filtering process ensured inclusion of only the most recent, relevant and credible studies, thereby enhancing the depth and trustworthiness of the review. The PRISMA flow diagram is provided to illustrate the step-by-step process leading to selection of the final 994 studies.

New Insights and Contributions

Cultivating student entrepreneurship through community engagement in higher education is essential for developing well-rounded, socially responsible entrepreneurs (Malhotra and Kiran, 2023; Sim *et al.*, 2021). This comprehensive review synthesises insights from various studies, emphasising the integration of practical experiences, cultural and regional adaptations, and the importance of support systems and inclusive initiatives (Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). Integrating successful entrepreneurial models into higher education curricula is crucial for fostering a holistic understanding of entrepreneurship, as Boldureanu, Boldureanu, and Bedrule-Grigoruta (2020) emphasised. This approach combines practical experiences with theoretical knowledge, enhancing students' overall learning. Spring and Aidoo (2022) further discuss the benefits of community engagement and service-learning initiatives, which not only cultivate entrepreneurial skills but also instil social responsibility and civic duty. Bazan *et al.* (2020) underscore the importance of university support systems, including mentorship and resources, in nurturing social entrepreneurial intentions. Furthermore, Salamzadeh, Azimi, and Kirby (2013) highlighted cultural and regional adaptation is also vital, showing that localised approaches in Iran's higher education system enhance the relevance and impact of entrepreneurial training.

To integrate community engagement into entrepreneurship education, existing curricula must be re-evaluated, requiring strategic planning and resource allocation, as noted by Favish and Ngcelwane (2013). In addition, policy frameworks and institutional support are deemed essential for mitigating youth unemployment and fostering sustainable economic growth (Vliruos, 2020). Inclusivity and accessibility are equally important, with Cherrington, Setati, and Johnson (2019) advocating for initiatives that extend entrepreneurial learning to underserved communities, promoting equitable access to education. Although these studies cover a broad range of factors influencing entrepreneurial education and community engagement, their synthesis reveals a coherent narrative accentuating the interplay between practical experience, institutional support, and contextual adaptation. Together, they illustrate that successful entrepreneurship education not only depends on curriculum content but also on embedding experiential learning within supportive environments tailored to local cultural and socio-economic realities. This integrated perspective highlights the necessity of aligning policy, pedagogy, and community collaboration, to nurture socially responsible entrepreneurs capable of addressing complex challenges. Hence, the literature collectively advocates for an all-inclusive, system-wide approach, rather than fragmented efforts. Strydom and Adams (2009) argue that curriculum development should adopt an interdisciplinary approach, enriching the learning experience and preparing students for multifaceted entrepreneurial challenges. Incorporating experiential learning models such as internships, projects, and community service is critical for effective entrepreneurship education (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2020), highlighting the success in enhancing student engagement and practical skills. Continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms are also necessary to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of educational programmes (Tshikovhi and Shambare, 2015).

Building strong partnerships with local communities enhances the relevance and impact of entrepreneurial initiatives. In this regard, Spring and Aidoo (2022) stress the benefits of collaborative projects that address community needs, while providing students with real-world challenges. Furthermore, implementing service-learning programmes that integrate academic learning with community service fosters entrepreneurial skills and social responsibility, as demonstrated by successful programmes in SA. Additionally, providing students with access to mentors and networking opportunities is crucial for entrepreneurial development (Bazan *et al.*, 2020). An analysis of student entrepreneurship and community engagement themes from Scopus data (2014-2024) allowed network visualisation of themes in student entrepreneurship and community engagement over the past decade (2014-2024), which is crucial for understanding the evolving landscape of these interconnected fields. By visually mapping the relationships and patterns within vast datasets, network visualisation provides valuable insights into how student-led entrepreneurial activities and community initiatives intersect, influence, and enhance one another.
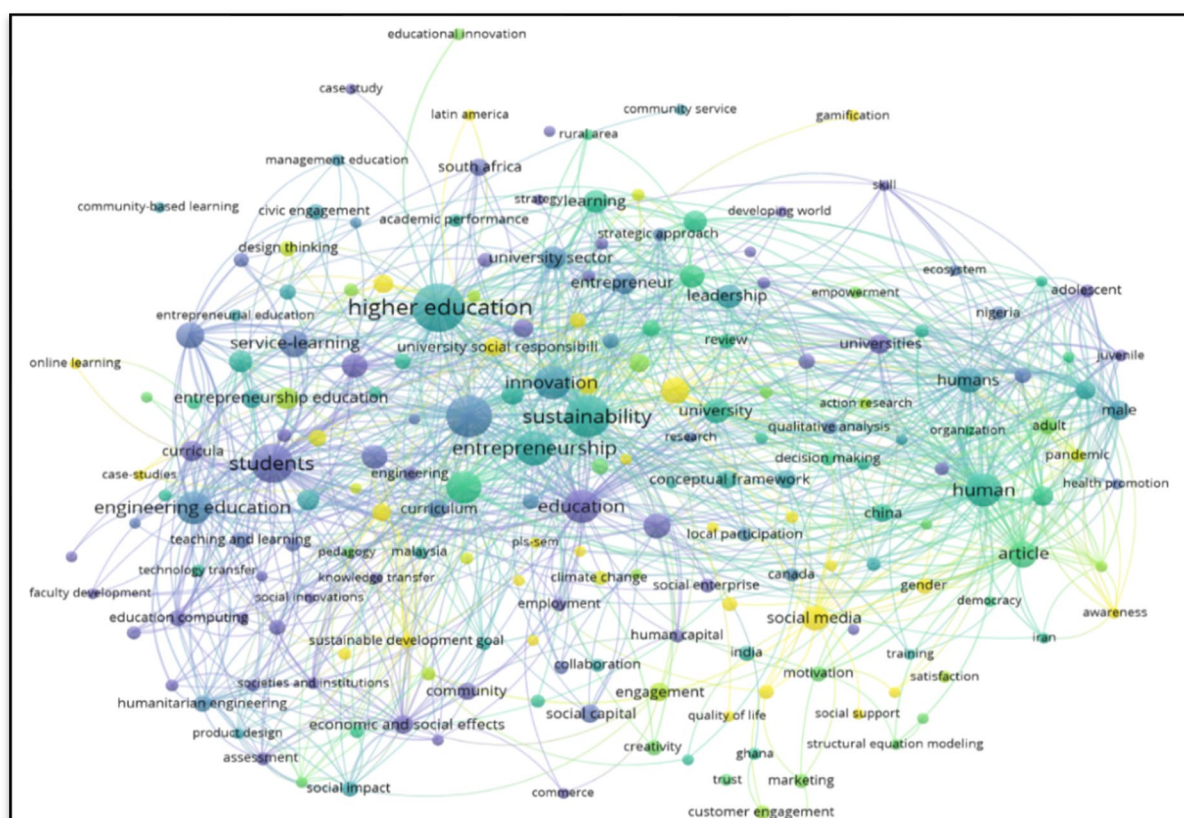
Figure 2: Network visualisation of themes in student entrepreneurship and community engagement (2014-2024)

The data visualisation derived from Scopus, encompassing 1 186 documents published between 2014 and 2024, provides a comprehensive map of the interconnections among various themes related to student entrepreneurship and community engagement (Malhotra and Kiran, 2023; Sim and Rae, 2014). The search terms "student", "entrepreneurship", and "community engagement" yield a network where the predominant themes include "higher education", "sustainability", "innovation", "service-learning", "leadership", and "engineering education" (Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). These terms are central nodes, indicating their high frequency and relevance within the research corpus.

The analysis highlights the central role of "higher education" in fostering student entrepreneurship through community engagement, focusing on integrating entrepreneurial education into the curriculum (Barringer and Ireland, 2019). "Sustainability" and "innovation" are further significant themes, emphasising sustainable development goals and innovative approaches (Fourie, 2018). "Service-learning" is also crucial, promoting experiential learning that benefits students and communities by addressing real-world needs and fostering social justice (Fourie, 2018). Terms such as "leadership", "social media", and "engineering education" indicate a multidisciplinary approach, with an emphasis on leadership skills, modern business practices, and technological innovation (Wardana *et al.*, 2020). In addition, interconnected sub-themes, for instance, "curriculum", "teaching and learning", "social impact", and "economic and social effects", illustrate the broad impact of entrepreneurial education. Overall, the analysis underscores the importance of HEIs, sustainability, innovation, and a multidisciplinary approach in entrepreneurial education.

Insights and Trends in Entrepreneurial Education and Community Engagement

A curated selection of the articles that have played a pivotal role in shaping the foundation of this research are presented below in Table 1. These articles have been meticulously chosen for their relevance and significance in providing insights into the subject studied, and the date range was from 2020 to 2025.

Table 1: Selected articles consulted in the study

Author(s)	Focus/Title	Findings
Almeida (2021)	Systematic Review on Academic Entrepreneurship Indicators	This study explores academic entrepreneurship indicators used by universities to understand their development and support for entrepreneurship processes
Arthur, Agyapong, and Annan (2021)	Fostering Entrepreneurial Intentions among University Students in Ghana	This paper proposes a framework highlighting entrepreneurial competencies, social support, and business opportunities as essential factors for enhancing entrepreneurial intentions among university students
Bazan *et al.* (2020)	Systematic Review of University's Support Systems on Social Entrepreneurial Intentions	The review emphasises the positive impact of a supportive university environment on students' intentions to engage in social entrepreneurship. It identifies key factors such as social support, empathy, and regional influences.
Boldureanu *et al.* (2021)	Entrepreneurship Education through Successful Entrepreneurial Models in Higher Education Institutions	The study found exposure to successful entrepreneurial role models in education positively influences students' entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions. It emphasises the importance of tailored programmes for different student groups (business vs. non-business)
Chambers and Crumb (2023)	Using Rural University-School-Partnerships for the Higher Education We Need	This paper highlights the benefits of rural university-school-community collaborations in addressing local challenges and enhancing educational outcomes
Cherrington *et al.* (2019)	University-School Community Engagement in Rural Schools	This research explores the impact of university-school partnerships on community engagement in rural South African schools, emphasising the role of educational initiatives in fostering entrepreneurship and social development among students.
Chinaire, Maposa, and Dlamini (2021)	Factors Influencing Social Entrepreneurial Intentions of Students at a University in South Africa	The study found a significant positive relationship between empathy, moral obligation, self-efficacy, social support, and students' social entrepreneurial intentions.
Chittum, Jones, and O'Reilly (2022)	The Effects of Community-Based and Civic Engagement in Higher Education	This research synthesis highlights the positive impact of community-based and civic engagement on student outcomes, emphasising the importance of high-impact practices in higher education
Dube (2024)	Challenges and Opportunities Facing Higher Education in South Africa	The study examines the complex challenges and opportunities in South African higher education, emphasising the need for strategic reforms to address governance and socio-economic obstacles
Boldureanu *et al.* (2020)	Entrepreneurship Education through Successful Entrepreneurial Models	The study found that exposure to successful entrepreneurial role models in education positively influences students' entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions. It emphasises the importance of tailored programmes for different student groups (business vs. non-business).
Johnson (2020)	Community Engagement: Barriers and Drivers in South African Higher Education	The article identifies barriers and drivers to community engagement in South African universities, emphasising the need for better conceptualisation and integration of community engagement within university structures
Olalekan (2024)	Evaluating the Impact of Experiential Learning on Entrepreneurial Intentions among University Students in Emerging Markets	This study found structured and immersive learning activities, such as internships and industrial work experience schemes, significantly influence entrepreneurial intentions among students.
Parekh and Attuel-Mendès (2021)	Social Entrepreneurship Finance: The Gaps in an Innovative Discipline	This paper explores the financing challenges in social entrepreneurship education and suggests integrating financial communication skills and contractual knowledge into the curriculum.
Pimpa (2021)	Overcoming Gender Gaps in Entrepreneurship Education and Training	This research examines gender issues in entrepreneurship training, highlighting the need for

		gender-sensitive approaches and technology and innovation integration for female entrepreneurs.
Schimperna, Vandekerckhove, and Hesse (2022)	Student Entrepreneurship in Universities: The State-of-the-Art	The study highlights the role of universities in fostering student entrepreneurship through innovative strategies and support systems.
Vliruos (2020)	Improving Student Entrepreneurship Support at South African Universities	The project aims to mitigate youth unemployment by improving support for student entrepreneurship, emphasising best practices and development tools. It involves collaboration between Nelson Mandela University, the University of Pretoria, and Ghent University in Belgium.
Wargo *et al.* (2021)	Leadership for Rural School District Improvement: The Case of One Statewide Research Practice Partnership	The case study explores the development of research-practice partnerships between rural school districts and universities, highlighting the complexities and benefits of such collaborations

Table 1 provides the synthesis of the description of the studies selected regarding entrepreneurial education and civic engagement in higher education, highlighting their principal focus and conclusions. Literature under consideration illustrates the complexity of the entrepreneurship education nature and points towards convergence with social engagement, as well as institutional and pedagogical innovation. Several studies (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2021; Boldureanu *et al.*, 2020) verify exposure to effective entrepreneurial role models does raise students' entrepreneurial intentions. These findings are in line with Arthur *et al.* (2021), who propose a model that includes entrepreneurial competencies, social support, and business opportunities as predictors of entrepreneurial intention among university students. However, while role models provide inspirational value, evidence from Lv, Zhang, and Chen (2021) shows formal entrepreneurship education, for example, business plan competitions and practice support, has a more direct effect on entrepreneurial competencies. University support systems are critical in shaping students' social entrepreneurial intentions, according to Bazan *et al.* (2020) and Chinaire *et al.* (2021). From their studies, these authors identify social support, empathy, and self-efficacy as predictors of student engagement in social entrepreneurship. Salamzadeh *et al.* (2013), however, identify major gaps in social entrepreneurship education, particularly the lack of contextual support and integrated learning frameworks. Similarly, Parekh and Attuel-Mendès (2021) highlight financial literacy education gaps in social entrepreneurship courses, which can restrict the practical application of entrepreneurial ventures.

Community engagement is at the heart of entrepreneurship education, particularly in social justice and citizenship construction (Spring and Aidoo, 2022; Mann and Bowen, 2021). Chittum *et al.* (2022) also highlight the importance of civic engagement, demonstrating its positive impact on student outcomes. In the South African context, rural university-school partnerships have been central to bridging education and entrepreneurial deficits (Cherrington *et al.*, 2019; Chambers and Crumb, 2023). These initiatives result in local economic development and entrepreneurial mindsets among marginalised groups. Notwithstanding the potential, several barriers hinder successful community engagement in higher education. Favish and Ngcelwane (2013) and Johnson (2020) both emphasise the importance of enhanced conceptualisation and structural integration of community engagement in universities. Funding shortages, ineffective executive leadership, and academic curricula incommensurability with community requirements are perennial concerns. These are compounded by the complexities of South African higher education governance, as noted by Dube (2024), which require strategic reforms to enhance institutional responsiveness to socio-economic challenges.

Student entrepreneurship support structures are evolving to address such challenges. Barringer and Ireland (2019) and Schimperna *et al.* (2022) emphasise the need for universities to enable student entrepreneurship through new initiatives, best practices, and institutional collaborations. Global collaborations, as in Vliruos (2020), offer lessons on how SA can develop its support infrastructure for student entrepreneurship. Gender disparities in entrepreneurial training are, moreover, an area that requires interventions of a particular nature. Pimpa (2021) suggests gender-sensitive approaches in entrepreneurship training, with specific emphasis on technology and innovation in empowering women entrepreneurs. Bridgstock (2019) refers to the increasing entrepreneurial activities among South African women but cautions that structural barriers remain to limit their success. Experiential and practice-based learning methods are increasingly being recognised as potent pedagogical means for entrepreneurship training. Strydom and Adams (2009) and Olalekan (2024) illustrate the transformative impact of

experiential learning exercises, including internships and industrial work experience schemes, on entrepreneurial intentions of students. These findings support the need for universities to adopt unconventional but effective teaching methods to enhance entrepreneurial outcomes. Together, these papers highlight the significance of customised education programmes, institutional support infrastructure, and holistic community outreach efforts in entrepreneurship development in higher education. Bridging the current barriers through strategic reforms and creative pedagogies can make a significant difference in the contribution of HEIs towards promoting sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems.

While the reviewed literature encompasses diverse perspectives and empirical findings, a more integrated synthesis reveals recurring themes that transcend individual studies. These works collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurship education as an interplay between role models, formal curricula, and university support systems, all converging towards fostering social and civic engagement. The convergence of pedagogical innovation, institutional responsiveness, and contextualised community involvement emerges as a critical nexus for enhancing entrepreneurial intentions and outcomes. Moreover, persistent gaps such as gender disparities, financial literacy, and structural barriers highlight the need for cohesive, systemic approaches rather than isolated interventions. Thus, the literature not only catalogues existing insights but also points towards an interconnected framework necessary for sustainable entrepreneurship development in higher education.

Framework for Cultivating Student Entrepreneurship through Community Engagement Initiatives

The framework for fostering student entrepreneurship through community engagement is robustly supported by existing literature, highlighting the critical interplay between key components. The research underscores the importance of student engagement, community partnerships, incubation programmes, and continuous evaluation, forming a comprehensive approach that effectively cultivates entrepreneurial skills and innovation. Research by Bridgstock (2019) underscores the importance of student engagement in entrepreneurship education programmes, demonstrating that active participation significantly enhances entrepreneurial skills development. This notion aligns with the framework's focus on student engagement facilitated by entrepreneurship education and mentorship programmes. Studies such as those by the OECD (2020), furthermore, emphasise the pivotal role of community partnerships in providing practical experiences and resources, enriching the learning environment, and bridging the gap between theory and practice. These partnerships support the framework's community partnerships component, which enhances both educational and entrepreneurial endeavours. Additionally, literature from Herrington, Kew, and Mwanga (2017) illustrates how student entrepreneur initiatives empower young leaders and foster innovation within communities, supporting the framework's emphasis on Incubation and Acceleration programmes and networking opportunities. The importance of continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms, as presented by OECD (2020), is also critical to the framework's impact assessment component, ensuring initiatives are effectively contributing to student entrepreneurship and are continuously improved based on feedback.

Finally, the mentorship role in providing guidance and real-world insights, highlighted in various studies, supports the framework's integration of mentorship programmes as a key element working in tandem with education and community support. This comprehensive approach ensures a robust ecosystem for cultivating student entrepreneurship through sustained community engagement. Figure 3 illustrates a comprehensive framework for cultivating student entrepreneurship through community engagement initiatives, highlighting the interconnected nature of various components.
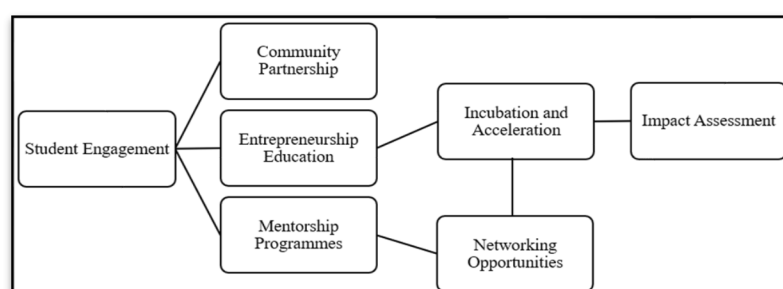
Figure 3: Proposed framework for cultivating student entrepreneurship through community engagement initiatives

Central to this framework is student engagement, which serves as the focal point driven by entrepreneurship education and mentorship programmes (Arthur *et al.*, 2021; Lv *et al.*, 2021). By providing courses, workshops, and practical training, students acquire essential entrepreneurial skills (Strydom and Adams, 2009; Olalekan, 2024). Mentorship programmes offer guidance from experienced entrepreneurs, enriching the learning experience and offering real-world insights (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2021). The synergy between entrepreneurship education and mentorship programmes ensures students are not only theoretically equipped but also practically prepared to embark on entrepreneurial ventures (Boldureanu *et al.*, 2020). Community partnerships play a pivotal role in this ecosystem by providing resources, opportunities, and real-world experience, thereby enhancing both student engagement and entrepreneurship education (Chittum *et al.*, 2022; Mann and Bowen, 2021). The incubation and acceleration programmes, which offer support systems for startup development, are bolstered by these partnerships and mentorship opportunities, creating a vigorous environment for student startups to flourish (Schimperna *et al.*, 2022; Vliruos, 2020). Networking opportunities facilitate connections among students, mentors, and community partners, fostering a collaborative and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem (Chinaire *et al.*, 2021). Finally, impact assessment is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives and providing feedback to continuously improve the framework (Favish and Ngcelwane, 2013; Johnson, 2021). This cyclical process ensures all components are aligned towards achieving the goal of cultivating student entrepreneurship through sustained community engagement.

Community engagement programmes play a crucial role in developing students' entrepreneurial competencies and attitudes through exposure to real-life experience, building networks, and fostering practical problem-solving ability (Brown and Harris, 2022; Lee, Kim, and Park, 2023). Such programmes expose students to settings where they can implement theoretical concepts, interact with community stakeholders, and recognise business opportunities (Martinez and Patel, 2021). Such interactions usually lead to heightened creativity, adaptability, and resilience— entrepreneurial traits of substance (Nguyen and Walker, 2023). Furthermore, student entrepreneurship through community engagement effectiveness is contingent upon factors such as mentorship quality, autonomy level for students, resource availability, and curriculum relevance of community projects (Rodriguez, Evans, and Morgan, 2022). Successful mentoring provides guidance and industry expertise, while autonomy facilitates initiative-taking and creativity (Singh and Ahmed, 2023; Swartz *et al.,* 2018). In addition, idea execution requires material resources, including finance and access to entrepreneurial networks (Taylor, Benson, and Green, 2021). Last, incorporating community projects into coursework allows students to build a better connection between learning and entrepreneurial action and enhance academic and professional development (Williams, Adams, and Carter 2023).

This range of evidence, while diverse in focus, points toward a shared understanding of how community engagement can be most impactful when its key elements are effectively aligned. Together, the literature converges on a central insight: community engagement serves as a powerful educational strategy when embedded in a supportive, well-structured academic framework. Rather than viewing mentorship, autonomy, resources, and curriculum relevance as isolated factors, the studies collectively suggest these elements function interdependently to shape students' entrepreneurial development. When aligned effectively, they create immersive environments where theory meets practice, enhancing not only entrepreneurial competencies but also students' confidence, creativity, and civic responsibility. This holistic synthesis underscores the value of integrated programme design over fragmented interventions.

Conclusion

The in-depth examination clarifies the complex connection between community involvement and student entrepreneurship in higher education. The study also emphasises how incorporating community participation into entrepreneurship education improves learning outcomes and cultivates inventive and socially conscious entrepreneurial attitudes in students. The synthesis of various studies highlights key factors influencing the efficacy of student entrepreneurship through community engagement initiatives. The following elements are included in this synthesis: student autonomy, which promotes initiative and creativity; the quality of mentorship, which offers critical direction and insights into the industry; and the availability of resources, such as funding and entrepreneurial networks, which are essential for project implementation and sustainability. Moreover, the incorporation of community initiatives within the academic programme strengthens the link between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, enhancing students' comprehension and fostering their entrepreneurial spirit. While establishing solid community partnerships guarantees the relevance and efficacy of entrepreneurial endeavours,

it also provides possibilities for real-world problem-solving and practical experiences. The full network visualisation of student entrepreneurship and community engagement topics over the past ten years shows how these factors, together, help to cultivate students' entrepreneurial talents and mindsets. Furthermore, the literature-backed framework for encouraging student entrepreneurship through community involvement programmes emphasises the vital interactions between these elements, guaranteeing a strong ecosystem for producing well-rounded, socially conscious businesspeople. Students who work in communities not only learn by doing; they also make a positive impact on social and economic development. This helps to address the primary study question and supports the strategic reassessment of the current curriculum to include these essential components.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: This study adopts an interdisciplinary lens by drawing from entrepreneurship education, community development, psychology, curriculum studies, and public policy. It investigates how community engagement initiatives can foster student entrepreneurship within South African higher education, addressing both pedagogical strategies and institutional challenges. By examining the intersection of experiential learning, entrepreneurial mindset development, and systemic support structures, the study offers a holistic perspective on embedding entrepreneurship into university curricula to enhance student adaptability and community impact.

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