

# Creating value through entrepreneurial learning and education

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## Introduction

As we guide our synergistic attention to the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (United Nations 2023), we are reminded of the significant role and contribution of entrepreneurship. Not just as a means of job creation, increasing economic growth, or igniting innovation, but as a transformative force that has the potential to reshape societies, particularly in emerging economies such as South Africa. It is, however, no secret that entrepreneurial activity often lags in these regions. One significant reason is a gap in celebrating entrepreneurial education particularly the value of entrepreneurial learning which is an essential combination of acquiring the necessary entrepreneurial knowledge and improving business performance continuously.

The purpose of the special issue on *Entrepreneurial learning* is to share collaborative research between two South African and three Norwegian Universities, on entrepreneurship education and in particular entrepreneurial learning of students. Therefore, this forms part of an INTPART project on student exchange, whereby funding was provided by the Norwegian government to work with South African Universities on this special issue. Specifically, we concentrate on the internationalisation, contextual challenges and solutions by creation of value through entrepreneurial learning. The seven articles published in this special issue are categorised according to the following three themes: (1) Teaching methods: Didactics in entrepreneurial education and learning; (2) Internationalisation: Cross cultural entrepreneurial learning; (3) Academic entrepreneurship: Value creation through learning.

## Entrepreneurial learning and education

The development of entrepreneurial education has differed between global regions. The United States of America (US) can be seen as the pioneer in entrepreneurial education, with university programmes introduced as early as the 1940s at Harvard Business School and New York University (Dana 1992; Landström et al. 2022). In contrast, Europe (i.e. Norway) experienced a delay in the emergence of entrepreneurial education, with more general development in the 1980s (Landström et al. 2022).

As reported by Tselepis and Nieuwenhuizen (2023), by the late 1990s, when South African tertiary education institutions started to research and develop entrepreneurship programmes, it was available in more than 1600 universities in the US. In South Africa, the first entrepreneurship programmes and modules were introduced at Technikons (now 'universities of technology') in 1997, and at universities in the early 2000s. The importance, relevance, and inclusion of entrepreneurship education have grown significantly since the early 2000s, when most universities started offering complete entrepreneurship programmes, modules, short courses, and/or commercialisation services, or a combination of these. Today, many academics are involved in research, developing curricula, teaching material, textbooks, teaching, and in creating life-giving platforms involving communities and other dynamic entrepreneurship education initiatives.

Entrepreneurial education, as a formalised approach to learning, aims to systematically impart entrepreneurship competencies. It typically includes a curriculum that covers various aspects of entrepreneurship, such as business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and organisational behaviour (Macpherson et al. 2022). Differences in focus may also be observed,

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with the US emphasising new venture creation and self-employment, while Europe had a broader perspective on 'enterprising education' covering various aspects related to small business and enterprising behaviour (Hägg & Gabrielsson 2020; Lackéus 2015). This broader perspective applies to the Norwegian entrepreneurial education tradition.

However, entrepreneurship education may spur students to become employers rather than employees, and encourage them to develop their creativity skills, self-confidence, independence, and to formulate innovative solutions to complex problems (Tselepis & Nieuwenhuizen 2023). In South Africa, and other developing countries where unemployment is a systemic socioeconomic challenge (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer 2022), this approach to entrepreneurial education is dominant.

The scholarly community for entrepreneurial education started to come together in the 1990s through joint seminars and conferences, leading to the establishment of a distinct research field (Håkansson & Gabrielsson 2020). Over the last two decades, entrepreneurial education has become more established, and research in the field has increased significantly (Landström et al. 2022).

Over the past 30 years, there has been a heightened interest in entrepreneurial learning (eds. Rae & Wang 2015). The emphasis has evolved from viewing entrepreneurship as a distinct set of skills and traits defining entrepreneurs to recognising how entrepreneurs concurrently develop themselves and their ventures. In essence, scholars now consider entrepreneurship learning as a practical achievement, departing from a traditional cognitive learning approach (Minniti & Bygrave 2001, Nogueira 2019). This shift underscores the importance of the situated, contextual, and social aspects of learning, and reshapes our understanding of entrepreneurship education (Macpherson et al. 2022).

Embracing a practice-based perspective necessitates a reconsideration of entrepreneurship education. It appears that experiential learning (Kolb 1984) lies at the heart of this notion of learning. A viewpoint suggesting that, even in the early stages of idea formulation, social relationships and activities crucial for budding entrepreneurs can be fostered within networks or communities of entrepreneurship practice. While acknowledging that entrepreneurial learning can occur in organised settings, the focus shifts away from traditional classrooms – often claiming that traditional teaching methods in business schools are 'passive' (Higgins & Elliot 2010). Instead, a practice-based approach advocates for an emphasis on practical activities and social development to expand networks and cultivate the social capital of potential entrepreneurs. This may involve alternative approaches such as utilising incubators for early-stage entrepreneurs or forming communities of entrepreneurs for mutual support in their day-to-day practices. Thus, experiential learning and education can be seen as leaning on progressive pedagogy

(McLellan & Dewey 1914) and social constructivist pedagogy (Vygotsky 1978).

## Overview of contributions

The articles included in this special issue are all examples of how entrepreneurship education may escape the traditional classroom setting, apply experiential learning, and still constitute a formalised approach to learning. Furthermore, the contents of this special issue showcase a collaborative effort, labelled the INTPART-project, between South African and Norwegian universities. The five universities taking part in this project include: (1) Stellenbosch University; (2) University of Pretoria; (3) Western Norway University of Applied Sciences; (4) Norwegian University of Life Sciences; and (5) Nord University, all of which are recognised for their expertise in entrepreneurial education and research.

The INTPART-project aims to enhance research and education in Norway and South Africa, by establishing long-term collaborations with prominent academic groups and institutions within the two countries. The focus has been on developing exemplary entrepreneurship education by integrating research, educational practices, and industry collaboration. It is a joint effort that constitutes a comprehensive approach, involving thematic workshops, student mobility activities, including Summer Schools, and the expansion of existing research collaborations. The articles included in this special issue are a result of a workshop series on entrepreneurial learning and education, on locations in both South Africa and Norway, running from September 2022 through June 2023.

Contributions have been grouped in three categories: (1) Teaching methods: Didactics in entrepreneurial education and learning; (2) Internationalisation: Cross cultural entrepreneurial learning; (3) Academic entrepreneurship: Value creation through learning. The thematic focus on teaching methods, internationalisation, and the role of academic entrepreneurship contributes to advancing the understanding of entrepreneurship education and its impact on societal and economic development. Findings provide valuable empirical insights, theoretical foundations, and practical implications for educators and policymakers involved in entrepreneurial education.

### Teaching methods: Didactics in entrepreneurial education and learning

#### Article 1: Designing internships: Student demographics and student motivation, by Bjørn W. Åmo

Addressing the demand for business education to align with practical relevance, this study explores students' motivations for internships, considering demographic and academic differences. Shifting focus from educators to students' perspectives, the research utilises self-determination theory, emphasising intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for student engagement.

Conducted in a Norwegian business school, the research integrates student perspectives into the study. A quantitative course explores 'Students and internships', employing a comprehensive survey with 172 respondents. Demographic variables and motivational factors influence internship preferences.

The study contributes to improving entrepreneurship educational offerings by incorporating the perspective of students. By investigating what students seek from internships, the findings emphasise the need for tailored internship programmes to cater to individual student expectations.

**Article 2: Addressing global challenges with compassion – The role of entrepreneurship education, by Marta Lindvert**

This study explores the alignment between entrepreneurial education and the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Entrepreneurs are presented as crucial change agents, utilising their problem-solving skills to address global challenges.

The article establishes a theoretical foundation by exploring the intricate connection between compassion and entrepreneurship, focussing on social and sustainable aspects. The educational framework prioritises experiential, real-world teaching, emphasising compassion's role in entrepreneurship education.

Results reveal three consistent patterns: learning from experiences, compassion, and entrepreneurial motivation. Practical exposure and collaboration equip students to identify opportunities, while compassion emerges from interactions with the local community, fostering a transformative shift in motivations. The study illuminates how experiential learning fosters compassion, empathy, and a profound understanding of global challenges, offering valuable insights for entrepreneurship education in addressing urgent global issues through sustainable entrepreneurial avenues.

**Internationalisation: Cross cultural entrepreneurial learning**

**Article 3: Students' entrepreneurial learning through an internship abroad: A cross-cultural experience, by Inger B. Pettersen, Elin Kubberød, Elma van der Lingen, and Adolph C. Neethling**

This article investigates South African students' personal learning possibilities and outcomes in entrepreneurship exchange programmes in Bergen, Norway. Integrating experiential learning theory, entrepreneurship education, and cross-cultural learning theory, the study explores students' cross-cultural experiences during internships abroad.

Internships, viewed as experiential learning, provide opportunities to practise theories, develop skills, build networks, and enhance employability. The study emphasises the transformative nature of cross-cultural learning, enhancing personal growth and entrepreneurial behaviours.

The research adopts a longitudinal study design, utilising students' reflections over a 3-month internship period. The study seeks to contribute theoretical and empirical knowledge to the understanding of cross-cultural learning in entrepreneurship education, providing valuable insights into students' personal growth and development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

**Article 4: Formation of friendship and advice ties through action learning: A case study from a multi-cultural entrepreneurship camp by Kai-Ying Chan, Elma van der Lingen and Maryse M.H. Chappin**

Investigating small businesses' role in driving economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa, this study focusses on entrepreneurship camps as a strategy to address youth unemployment. A 2-week Entrepreneurship Summer and/or Winter School involving 35 Master's students from Norwegian and South African universities is examined to understand social network formation in a multicultural context and its correlation with personality traits.

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa view entrepreneurship as a solution to unemployment and poverty, leading to increased emphasis on entrepreneurship education. The study employs social network analysis, offering empirical insights into camp dynamics. The collaboration between Norwegian and South African universities contributes to a deeper understanding of these networks.

Scientifically, the study adds value by empirically investigating entrepreneurship camps, employing social network analysis. From a practical standpoint, the research aids cross-cultural adjustment for international students.

**Article 5: Sustainable entrepreneurship, identity, and context: A comparison of Norway and South Africa by Oda Camilla Rykkje, Øystein S. Høvig and Inger Beate Pettersen**

The theme of cross cultural learning is to explore what role context plays in forming sustainable entrepreneurs through their identity, by comparing Norwegian and South African sustainable entrepreneurs.

A qualitative method, following a life story approach was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Norwegian and South African sustainable entrepreneurs, using a combination of face-to-face and online interviews. A three-stage approach was used to analyse the data, firstly individual, secondly by country context, and lastly by comparing cross country.

The results revealed that the context where the sustainable entrepreneurs operate greatly influences their identity and how they view entrepreneurship, sustainability and their missions and goals with their ventures. Therefore, sustainable entrepreneurs' identity is profoundly impacted in the context they live, and different contexts influence their perception and action on sustainability and venture creation, where social aspects of sustainability may be more prominent in

an emerging economy compared to an advanced economy. South African sustainable entrepreneurs seem to have a stronger social mission compared to their Norwegian counterparts, who exhibit a strong ecological mission.

The study contributes to the literature by enhancing our understanding of the relationship between context and sustainable entrepreneurship from advanced and emerging economies. The findings provide practical guidance to educators and policy makers on how sustainable entrepreneurship can be incentivised.

### Academic entrepreneurship: Value creation through learning

**Article 6: Exploring the pathway of academic entrepreneurs: The case of Stellenbosch University, by Lee-Ann Louwrens, Goosain Solomon and Inger B. Pettersen**

This study delves into academic entrepreneurship at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, emphasising the global trend of monetising university-generated knowledge. It explores the Third Mission, academic entrepreneurship, and the Triple Helix model, identifying persistent challenges despite the presence of Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) and incubators in research-intensive universities.

Facilitating and inhibiting factors are explored, encompassing individual, institutional, and environmental aspects in pre-commercialisation and commercialisation phases. The study emphasises the pivotal role of TTOs in managing innovation transfer and fostering interfaces between universities and markets.

Thematic analysis of interviews reveals key themes: nature of research outputs, awareness of research commercialisation, support mechanisms (TTO and incubator), hindering factors, and willingness to partner with the university. Tension arises between academic traditions favouring publication and the growing pressure for commercialisation. Awareness is fostered through exposure, role models, prior entrepreneurship exposure, and networking. Technology Transfer Offices and incubators play a vital role, offering legal-oriented assistance.

The study explores the intricate dynamics of academic entrepreneurship at Stellenbosch University, providing insights into challenges and opportunities within the South African context.

**Article 7: The role of investors in developing academic spin offs: A qualitative study of investors' perceptions, pre-investment behaviour and visions for the biotech sector in South Africa by Øystein S. Høvig, Inger B. Pettersen, Adolph C. Neethling, Brandon Paschal and Randi E. Taxt**

In this article, the interaction and dynamic relationship between investors, academic entrepreneurs, and TTO executives in academic spin-off (academic spin-off: ASO) development are discussed. The research is empirical and conducted in the entrepreneurial ecosystem surrounding universities in the Western Cape area in South Africa.

In this qualitative study, 14 semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from investors from the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Western Cape area in South Africa. The study demonstrates a challenge of commercialising research-based inventions; the team and entrepreneur play an important role in commercialisation process; the investors can play a role in educating and coaching academic entrepreneurs and playing a brokering role in attracting venture capital funding.

The findings of the study highlight that the pre-investment behaviour of investors, in relationship with TTOs and academic entrepreneurs, may help mitigate assumed information asymmetries and uncertainty in ASO development. The research contributes to the literature by showing how investors' perception, pre-investment behaviour and vision shape the development of ASOs in a dynamic interaction with technology transfer executives and academic entrepreneurs.

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### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### Authors' contributions

F.S. conceptualised the first draft of the editorial, and edited co-author contributions. M.B. added the themes and developed the editorial further. M.N.M. added description of South African entrepreneurial education history. H.S. added description of Norwegian entrepreneurial education history.

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

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