International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Society
e-ISSN: 2682-8138 | Vol. 7, No. 1, 348-352, 2025
https://asianscholarsnetwork.com/asnet-journals

Research on the Teaching Model of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Courses in Higher Education Based on Experiential Teaching

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Received: 2 January 2025 | Accepted: 9 February 2025 | Published: 15 March 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55057/ijares.2025.7.1.33

Abstract: *The General Office of the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Further Supporting College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship in 2021, emphasizing the integration of innovation and entrepreneurship education into the entire process of talent cultivation. This initiative aims to deepen reforms in innovation and entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions, establishing a comprehensive system that integrates classroom teaching, self-directed learning, practical application, mentorship, and cultural guidance. The overarching goal is to enhance students' innovative spirit, entrepreneurial awareness, and capabilities in innovation and entrepreneurship. Based on field investigations and literature analysis, this study identifies key issues in innovation and entrepreneurship courses in higher education. These include monotonous teaching formats, a theoretical bias in course content, and weak connections between theory and practice. To address these challenges, this study explores the implementation of experiential teaching and proposes the "1+2+N" model. In this model, "1" represents a group of professional mentors; "2" denotes the dual teaching approaches of theory and practice; and "N" signifies the collaborative efforts of universities, enterprises, governments, and other stakeholders. As a significant application of experiential learning theory, experiential teaching is grounded in a robust epistemological framework. In practical application, it demands high levels of classroom guidance and control, offers significant flexibility, and requires substantial infrastructure and frequent student engagement in practical activities. By creating realistic or repeated experiential scenarios, this approach enables the presentation, reconstruction, and restoration of teaching content. It allows students to construct knowledge of innovation and entrepreneurship through firsthand experiences, thereby strengthening their innovative spirit, entrepreneurial mindset, and practical capabilities.*

Keywords: Innovation and entrepreneurship courses, Innovation-driven strategy, Experiential teaching

1. Introduction

In examining the development of innovation and entrepreneurship courses in higher education, Deng (2022) identifies the lack of proactive engagement among students as partly stemming from insufficient awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship. The cultivation of such awareness hinges on fostering innovative thinking and mindset. The primary goal of these courses is to enhance students' practical application abilities, necessitating a shift in teaching

objectives from being “knowledge-based” to emphasizing “knowledge construction and application.” Likewise, teaching methodologies should evolve from simple “knowledge delivery” to “methodology transmission” (Deng, 2022)

Yang Tirong highlights a disconnect between the theoretical frameworks of entrepreneurial education and their practical implementation (Center for China and Globalization, 2018). Despite universities in China leveraging practical platforms, entrepreneurship competitions, and training programs to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship practices, a notable obstacle remains the lack of adequate entrepreneurial guidance for students (Jin & Liu, 2017). Guo (2021) suggests that universities should adopt tailored course structures that transcend traditional lecture-based formats by incorporating more case-based teaching, practical platform-based learning, and virtual teaching methods. Furthermore, universities should promote interdisciplinary course structures to integrate general education with hands-on learning (Guo, 2021).

In their study of British universities, Hu & Zhou (2014) explored the case of Lincoln University, where the Lincoln Business School integrates entrepreneurial education with degree programs through a framework focused on personal development, skill enhancement, experiential learning, work-based learning, and career guidance. They also emphasize the importance of faculty training in entrepreneurship education. For China, they propose a gradual, step-by-step integration of entrepreneurship education into university teaching and management. Specific measures include encouraging student participation in entrepreneurship competitions and strengthening collaborations with external stakeholders, such as industry partners, to provide more practical opportunities for students (Hu & Zhou, 2014).

2. Overview of the Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Courses

The development of innovation and entrepreneurship education in China can be divided into three historical phases: the initial incubation phase (1917–1992), the growth phase (1993–2009), and the comprehensive expansion phase (2010 to present).

In 2015, the Implementation Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Higher Education Institutions outlined directives for reforming these courses. Universities were instructed to align professional education with the objectives of innovation and entrepreneurship education. By 2018, the Opinions on Promoting High-Quality Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Building an Upgraded Version of the "Double Creation" policy formally introduced measures to include innovation and entrepreneurship education and practice courses in mandatory university curricula. For the first time, the policy allowed entrepreneurial achievements to replace traditional thesis defense requirements, legitimizing and encouraging entrepreneurship among students.

In 2019, the Opinions on Deepening Undergraduate Education and Teaching Reform to Improve Talent Cultivation Quality emphasized the importance of integrating innovation and entrepreneurship education with professional curricula and called for the development of a uniquely Chinese framework for such education. It advocated for restructuring course offerings and enriching course content with resources to support innovation and entrepreneurship education.

In 2021, the General Office of the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Further Supporting College Students’ Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which advocated for

integrating innovation and entrepreneurship education throughout the talent cultivation process. It proposed deepening reforms in higher education to create a comprehensive education system encompassing classroom learning, independent study, practical application, mentorship, and cultural guidance. This policy also emphasized strengthening faculty training in innovation and entrepreneurship education, reforming teaching methods and assessment systems, and encouraging educators to incorporate the latest academic advancements and practical experiences into their teaching (The General Office of the State Council, 2021).

China's higher education institutions have made remarkable progress in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, exploring diverse approaches to curriculum development. By December 2019, 200 universities had been designated as demonstration institutions for innovation and entrepreneurship education reform, collectively offering more than 28,000 courses in this domain. However, challenges remain.

3. Current Challenges in Innovation and Entrepreneurship Courses

3.1 Monotonous Teaching Methods

Innovation and entrepreneurship courses can be categorized into knowledge-based, competency-oriented, and hands-on courses. Surveys reveal that most offerings focus on knowledge and competency development, with limited emphasis on practical application. Specifically, courses on innovation awareness account for 19.49% of offerings, entrepreneurship knowledge for 55.2%, entrepreneurship competency for 17.9%, and practical operations for only 7.5% (Guo, 2021).

3.2 Overemphasis on Theoretical Content

Among the nearly 200 innovation and entrepreneurship courses offered by demonstration universities, representative topics include technological innovation, design thinking, innovation methodologies, commercialization of creativity, business planning, financial management, tax planning, labor regulations, business negotiations, marketing, risk management, and entrepreneurship-related laws and policies. These courses are primarily theoretical, with limited integration of hands-on experiences.

3.3 Weak Linkages Between Theory and Practice

Innovation and entrepreneurship education in China often prioritizes theoretical knowledge while practical activities, such as entrepreneurship competitions and business incubation projects (e.g., the "Internet+" Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition), lack effective integration with theoretical frameworks. The progression from "ideas and creativity" to "motivation and intent," and finally to "capabilities and practice," is insufficiently supported. This highlights the need for an experiential teaching model to bridge this gap.

4. Development Pathways for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Courses

4.1 Overview of Experiential Teaching

Experiential teaching leverages students' cognitive characteristics and learning processes by creating real or simulated scenarios to present, reconstruct, and contextualize educational content. Through firsthand experiences, students construct knowledge, develop competencies, and internalize values, ultimately achieving holistic personal growth (Xing et al., 2016). As an activity-based teaching approach, experiential teaching integrates classroom instruction with practical activities, enabling students to observe, analyze, and reflect in an immersive

environment. It not only reinforces knowledge but also transforms it into practical skills, ideation, and behavior, enriching traditional teaching methodologies (Zu, 2024).

4.2 The "1+2+N" Teaching Model

"1": A Team of Professional Mentors

This approach replaces traditional lecture-based teaching with diverse methodologies, such as case-based learning, platform-based learning, and virtual instruction. Prominent entrepreneurs and business leaders can serve as guest lecturers or mentors to enhance real-world relevance.

"2": Dual Approaches of Theory and Practice

Universities should establish dedicated practice platforms, such as innovation and entrepreneurship clubs, laboratories, and training centers, to support hands-on learning. For instance, Sichuan International Studies University has designated a building for integrated education-industry initiatives, featuring dedicated classrooms and entrepreneurial spaces while maintaining strong partnerships with businesses to create on-campus operational centers for practical engagement.

"N": Collaborative Efforts Among Universities, Enterprises, and Governments

Experiential teaching in innovation and entrepreneurship education aims to seamlessly integrate theory with practice. Universities should maintain high standards for theoretical instruction while partnering with enterprises and governments to organize competitions, provide practice platforms, and incorporate practical outcomes into course assessments. This fosters a holistic integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application.

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Acknowledgement

Research Project of Sichuan International Studies University Chengdu College - KN23LBO01

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