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Article

Shaping Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions into Actions: South African Lecturers' Views on Teaching Strategies and the Ideal Educator

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Abstract: For several decades, entrepreneurship education (EE) has been identified as vital for preparing students to succeed in a changing economic landscape. Specifically, EE shapes students' entrepreneurial intentions into actions. Considering the evolving expectations from graduates, this study explores South African entrepreneurship educators' perspectives regarding the ideal educator and effective teaching strategies to shape the development of students' entrepreneurial intentions. This empirical qualitative study examines data collected from 14 entrepreneurship educators across various South African public higher education institutions, collected using an open-ended questionnaire. Thematic analysis revealed a strong consensus on the importance of real-world experience teaching and the limited integration of online methodologies in EE. The results also emphasized the need for educators to embody entrepreneurial qualities, such as practical experience and a hands-on approach, to foster students' transition from intention to action. Despite the desire for more innovative, action-oriented teaching strategies, traditional teaching theory in entrepreneurship remains an essential modality in the EE framework. These findings suggest that effective EE practices should integrate experiential learning and innovative strategies while maintaining core theoretical foundations.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education; entrepreneurial intentions; teaching strategies; South Africa; pedagogical approaches; ideal educator; educator characteristics

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1. Introduction

Who should teach entrepreneurship and determining an ideal teaching strategy in different contexts are recurring thematic questions in EE studies (Radipere 2012), exemplified by a recent work by Hägg et al. (2024) titled 'Who is the entrepreneurial educator?'. This question arises amidst emerging consensus that entrepreneurship is teachable (Iwu et al. 2021; Mwasalwiba 2010) and the broader EE objectives to deliver EE that produces graduates who can either start a business (Otache et al. 2024) or find employment (Daskalou and Komninou 2016) in ways that contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDs are realizable if EE can move intentions to entrepreneurial action, particularly given literature reports that few EE students end up transforming into practicing entrepreneurs. Concerning EE educator attributes, several studies have found that faculty teaching entrepreneurship is not a homogeneous group (Brush et al. 2023; Levie 1999), with many drawn from various disciplines and specializations besides entrepreneurship (Brush et al. 2023). Moreover, entrepreneurship educators teach in diverse contexts using different methodologies to achieve specific objectives. Fayolle et al. (2006) stressed that EE varies

widely between countries and educational institutions across various dimensions, such as its objectives, target audiences, format, and pedagogical approaches. For example, in South Africa, Arasti et al. (2012) similarly argued that there is no universal pedagogical recipe (objectives, contents, and institutional contexts) for teaching entrepreneurship. Consequently, other scholars opine that as EE expands globally, the gap towards understanding how it can best be taught may be increasing (Ahmad et al. 2018; Lackéus et al. 2016), pointing towards the importance of context in EE.

An entrepreneurship educator is an individual who facilitates the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship principles, skills, and mindset within higher education institutions (Syed et al. 2024). Their mandate depends on context but generally dovetails towards introducing students to entrepreneurship, developing intentions, imparting business management skills, identifying opportunities, and starting, managing, and sustaining a business. In South Africa, EE is structured to increase the levels of entrepreneurship (Radipere 2012) as a panacea to unemployment problems (Iwu et al. 2018). However, owing to its perceived inefficiencies related to the teaching competencies of lecturers and teaching strategies, there have been calls to reconceptualize EE in South African universities (Ramchander 2019), which are the focus of this study.

Importantly, the literature further suggests that EE curricula objectives determine who should teach entrepreneurship and the appropriate teaching methods. Thus, the literature (Fayolle et al. 2006; Hägg et al. 2024) contends that EE approaches vary based on learning objectives and how the educator interprets and translates them into the teaching process. However, these studies are neither prescriptive nor precise on who must teach and how in all possible contexts.

Teaching Entrepreneurship

Moreover, the research shares diverse perspectives on confounding factors that inform EE and its prospects for success measured, among others, the transition from entrepreneurship intention development into action. These include claims that EE seeks to arm-twist teaching pedagogy to suit the innovative and creative mindset of students with an entrepreneurial mindset (Solomon 2008) and whether EE should focus on teaching entrepreneurship 'for' instead of 'about' entrepreneurship (Levie 1999). Edelman et al. (2008) asserted the presence of a gap between what is taught in entrepreneurship and the practices of entrepreneurs, highlighting a conflict between theory and practice. Lackeus (2015) also shares this view. Given this finding, Ratten and Jones (2021) deduced that EE focuses on bridging the theory–practice gap. In their study, Stenholm et al. (2021) challenged limiting EE to entrepreneurship educators, noting that non-entrepreneurship educators often help students develop entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, experiential learning, and financial literacy in their teaching domains. Therefore, there are direct and indirect means of imparting entrepreneurship skills and attributes. Jones (2019) also suggested viewing entrepreneurship as more of a daily practice than just a course, implying that teaching methodologies must incorporate the psychology of social engagement. It has also emerged that incompatible entrepreneurship definitions and differences in teaching approaches have complicated efforts to guide lecturers on effective EE (Fayolle and Gailly 2008). For example, different configurations of EE, such as 'learning to understand entrepreneurship, learning to become entrepreneurial, and learning to become an entrepreneur' (Seikkula-Leino et al. 2010, p. 119), call for differentiated teaching methodologies, curricula designs, and educator profiles.

The implosion of remote, distance education and digital technologies has added a new dimension to EE discourse, generating calls for realigning EE teaching frameworks and equipping educators with digital technology skills (Daskalou and Komninou 2016; Kraus et al. 2021). Thus, digital-oriented teaching methodologies are now central to emerging EE designs, with justifications that integrating technology in the classroom through virtual reality, online collaborative platforms (Mu and Zhao 2024), and digital marketplaces further enriches the learning experience. However, such calls for technology-based models ignore

their incongruence with technology-constrained learning environments in many developing countries and educators' readiness to embrace new technologies. For example, there are gaps in digital literacy among African students and educators, constraining the effective adoption of e-learning (Adeniyi et al. 2024). Research also found that resourcing limitations remain a significant challenge for higher education students and staff, both on- and off-campus (Kaliisa and Picard 2019) in Africa, rendering the effectiveness of technology-based learning idealistic.

Furthermore, as a heterogeneous domain (Fayolle 2013), EE lacks substantive approaches to various EE phenomena, including hybrid, refugee, social, digital, and old-age entrepreneurship. Thus, assumptions that generic EE premises serve well for all entrepreneurial dimensions can also be problematic, contributing to adverse entrepreneurship uptake outcomes. Research further asserts that EE is connected to the structure of society (Kurczewska et al. 2014). It derives relevance from contextual realities (Mwasalwiba 2010), suggesting that environmental factors such as modern-day digital availability provide a new reality of entrepreneurship mindset development approaches. Hence, Mosbah and Queiri (2024) propose a selective approach to EE in Education 5.0. Moreover, substantial literature reveals that EE curricula design is assumed to improve entrepreneurial competencies solely (Stenholm et al. 2021) and is focused on the ideal traditional entrepreneurship aspirant who is assumed to start a business for self-employment (Iwu et al. 2021), neglecting realities that can also occur in existing organizations (Shane and Venkataraman 2007) through for example hybrid entrepreneurship. This oversight also ignores realities that many EE students harbor employment-seeking rather than self-employment behavioral apparatus (Makwara et al. 2022), even when opportunities to practice entrepreneurship are available.

The above theoretical, empirical, and speculative contentions confound structural questions about the effective EE teaching practices universities grapple with, particularly regarding who must teach and how EE must be taught. As centers of education, higher education institutions are tempted to amalgamate entrepreneurship as any other additional program among many they offer without regard to its peculiarities. Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006) argued that a typical university environment is unlikely to include many entrepreneurial components, with its conventional teaching methods that may hinder the development of essential entrepreneurial attitudes and skills. Therefore, universities must adopt methodologies that activate entrepreneurship traits (Heinonen and Poikkijoki 2006), student behaviors, and entrepreneurial actions. In light of this possibility, this study extends entrepreneurship educator characteristics and discourse on teaching strategies by gathering views from HEI practitioners in South Africa to fill a knowledge gap that continues to exist in EE. Turner and Gianiodis (2018) stressed that, notwithstanding a broader work of research, there are unresolved questions about what content should be taught, how it should be taught, who is qualified to teach it, and which students should be the focus. Similarly, Morris (2014) noted that while there is commendable progress in EE, contesting findings persist regarding what works effectively in EE. In line with these views, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Who should teach entrepreneurship?
2. What is the ideal teaching strategy for entrepreneurship?

In answering these questions, practitioners can thereafter reflect on the impact of existing EE frameworks on transforming intentions into entrepreneurial action, perceptions towards organizing entrepreneurial projects, and the importance of educator-designed teaching methodologies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

One of the peculiar features of EE is the absence of a cohesive theoretical framework (Kuratko 2005; Mwasalwiba 2010), resulting in a lack of 'sufficient theoretical rigor to arrive at a consensus on fundamental questions' (Fiet 2000, p. 4) demonstrated by how researchers

rely on a broad spectrum of theoretical alternatives when investigating related questions. When studying EE issues, researchers have applied experiential learning theory, human capital theory, theory of planned behavior, and social cognitive theory (Otache et al. 2024). Arising out of this trend, a multidimensional theoretical framework may be suitable for a study that seeks to answer more than one question. Following this line of argument, this study adopted human capital theory and experiential learning theory as lenses to interrogate who should teach entrepreneurship and the ideal teaching strategy. The human capital theory posits that education influences the marginal productivity of labor (Marginson 2019), suggesting that entrepreneurship educators' efficiency and effectiveness in influencing students' entrepreneurship mindsets depend on their theoretical and practical skills. Thus, this study believes that educators' qualifications, practical entrepreneurial experience, and theory impact the quality and effectiveness of EE. It also locates EE and educators' relevance towards imparting and developing human capital capabilities such as entrepreneurship knowledge, intentions competencies, opportunity identification, and experiences. Concurrently, according to the experiential learning theory, knowledge is created through a transformative experience (Kolb et al. 2014), which informs emerging thoughts in EE, emphasizing using teaching strategies such as simulations, real-life projects, and internships that combine theory and practice. In this regard, the role of teaching is to enable students to mirror the actual practice of entrepreneurs.

2.2. EE and Its Importance

There is a growing body of research on EE due to its increasing popularity as a means of influencing youths towards pursuing self-employment (Agarwal et al. 2020; Kassean et al. 2015) in a world of increasing youth unemployment and few formal job opportunities. EE has also made significant inroads into academia, particularly the higher education institutions (HEIs), which are seen as the final outlet for student training before joining the employment-seeking pool. EE has several differentiated definitions (Mwasalwiba 2010), and their shared view of EE can reconcile to introduce, sustain, and reinforce entrepreneurship-related behaviors. As a result, developing a capable infrastructure for effective teaching and developing students into entrepreneurs is increasingly becoming critical. Central to these infrastructure issues are determining who is best suited to teach entrepreneurship and how best to teach it. Several studies find that educators play a key role in realizing EE objectives (Ruskovaara and Pihkala 2013; Seikkula-Leino et al. 2010). EE effectiveness is closely linked to who teaches and the teaching methods employed. However, Ruskovaara and Pihkala (2013) discovered that the absence of definitive pedagogical guidelines for EE places the onus on integrating EE into their teaching and identifying the most effective and valuable practices.

2.3. Educator Characteristics and Teaching Strategies for Entrepreneurship

The literature posits that one critical challenge to EE's success is the shortage of qualified lecturers for entrepreneurship (Agbonlahor 2016; Otache 2019). It is not yet clear which attributes make the best EE educator. Moreover, entrepreneurship educators vary in perspective and background (Cascavilla et al. 2022; Hindle 2007) even as they possess the required expertise in pedagogy, theoretical frameworks, and the ability to design and deliver structured EE curricula. Thus, while credited with developing critical thinking and analytical skills necessary for entrepreneurial success (Neck and Corbett 2018), critics worry about academics' lack of practical experience essential to imparting real-world entrepreneurial skills. The argument is that they cannot bridge the gap between academic content and the practical realities of entrepreneurship (Pittaway and Edwards 2012). Other views suggest using practitioners such as successful entrepreneurs and business professionals who can bring a wealth of practical experience to EE. However, this too can be problematic as it idolizes individuals whose views of EE differ from the philosophies underpinning existing EE curricula provided by institutions. Thus, the assumption that practical experience predisposes one to become an effective EE educator ignores the possibility that

some practice-based educators can harbor contradictory perceptions that entrepreneurs are born and cannot be taught.

Nonetheless, practitioners are believed to promote experiential learning (Kolb 2014), which means they can close the gap between theory and practice (Rasmussen and Sørheim 2006). Still, exclusive reliance on either academics or practitioners is likely to mask their respective limitations; hence, there are suggestions for embracing hybrid models involving collaboration between academics and practitioners. Fayolle and Gailly (2008) argued that hybrid models provided a teaching framework combining theoretical knowledge and practical application. As a result, students can gain cognitive skills to analyze business opportunities and practical skills to execute their ideas. In context, the existing discourse suggests no one-size-fits-all answer to the question of who should teach entrepreneurship. A combination of academics, practitioners, and interdisciplinary experts will likely provide the most effective entrepreneurial education. While academics offer essential theoretical knowledge and pedagogical expertise, practitioners bring valuable real-world experience. A hybrid model that integrates these strengths, possibly within an interdisciplinary framework, appears to be the most comprehensive approach to teaching entrepreneurship.

Regarding teaching approaches, there are still uncertainties about effective techniques for entrepreneurship educators (Brockhaus et al. 2001), and the understanding of how to teach entrepreneurship remains relatively limited (Kirby 2004). Nani (2014) pointed out that no universally agreeable teaching method for entrepreneurship exists. Ratten and Jones (2021) cite literature indicating a lack of consensus on the best approach for teaching entrepreneurship. Arasti et al. (2012) argue that training institutions' content, objectives, and challenges influence the ideal teaching method. Nonetheless, emerging discourse regarding teaching strategies inherently focuses on contrasts between a 'traditional' and an 'entrepreneurial' way of teaching (Lackeus 2015) based on innovative, experiential, and interdisciplinary techniques that include simulations, case studies, internships, and project-based learning; guest speakers, role models, and social persuasion (He et al. 2024; Kraus et al. 2021; Lima et al. 2015; Samašonok et al. 2020). The literature reveals an emerging trend where traditional EE teaching ways are beginning to be replaced by new methods (Alberti et al. 2004). Scholars argue that these 'entrepreneurial' methods replicate real-world entrepreneurial activities and decision-making processes, enhancing students' practical skills and confidence (Samašonok et al. 2020). However, there is a paucity of evidence validating their effect on crucial dimensions, such as learning outcomes, motivation, and entrepreneurial intent (Mason and Arshed 2013), and transition to entrepreneurial action.

Others (Bell and Bell 2020; Kakouris and Liargovas 2021) contend that an effective pedagogical framework for EE must comprise didactic methods (lectures, provision of selected readings, textbooks, and seminars) to provide new information, skills-building methods (case studies, group discussions, brainstorming) to enhance existing and develop new skills, and discovery methods (learning by doing) to improve learning through discovery and experiential learning (Hynes 1996). In the digital era, integrating technology in the classroom through computer simulations, virtual reality, online collaborative platforms, and digital marketplaces further enriches the learning experience and prepares students for the technological advancements in the entrepreneurial landscape (Gan et al. 2015; Huang et al. 2022). These theoretical literature findings reveal complexities emerging from how scholars frame the desirable attributes that produce successful entrepreneurs, from creativity and risk-taking to strategic planning, financial management, and intuition.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants' Description and Sampling

This qualitative study gathered data from 14 faculty members, as shown in Table 1, from different South African HEIs who offer entrepreneurship as a module or manage a program in entrepreneurship. These are faculty in various roles, including the executive dean, senior lecturers, professors, entrepreneurship coordinators, technology transfer officers, entrepreneurship coaches, and department heads. This sample of 14 participants

is consistent with Creswell (1998), who suggested 5–25 interviews and justified using Kuzel (1992), who recommended six to eight interviews for a homogeneous sample as in this study. However, the reality within qualitative research is that no universal rule dictates the maximum and minimum number of interviews for one qualitative research study (Bekele and Ago 2022). This study's sample homogeneity among the participants is perceived through faculty belongingness, teaching, and support in EE. A purposeful sampling approach was used to reach out to the participants, and an open-ended interview questionnaire was distributed for data collection. Purposeful sampling was chosen as it guarantees that a selection of respondents is most likely to yield appropriate and useful information (Kelly 2014). It also enables one to study only the population of specific interest (Andrade 2021), in this case, academics, and gather their views regarding who must teach and how to teach entrepreneurship in HEIs. Due to its qualitative nature, the study also adopted an interpretive paradigm, which Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) confirm, enabling the researcher to understand study findings as participants' subjective experiences.

Table 1. The participants' demographic characteristics.

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

Source: Authors' compilation.

3.2. Questionnaire Design

However, before data collection, the questionnaire was designed and pretested. An initial draft questionnaire was sent to an expert panel with EE academic specializations at some participant universities. This practice aligns with Creswell (2013), who advocates for using reviewers with homogeneous traits as target participants. After finalization,

the questionnaire was emailed to 30 selected faculty members from public universities, both male and female, who teach or are involved in EE and research. Only sixteen completed questionnaires were received, and two were excluded during data analysis. Thus, 14 responses, six females and eight males, proceeded to the analysis stage, the results of which are reported in this study.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected responses were analyzed following a thematic data analysis approach. Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 297) define thematic analysis as a 'method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data'. The researcher also approached the analysis cognizant that where qualitative data emerge from purpose sampling-based research, participant homogeneous experiences concerning the research domain will likely expedite data saturation reach (Guest et al. 2006). Thus, fewer research interviews are required. The current study focused on identifying and reporting themes related to who must teach entrepreneurship and how it must be taught in HEIs. Hence, Dawadi (2020) stressed that thematic analysis is a search for themes that can capture the narratives in the data sets. When applying this approach, the researchers followed its key steps as recommended by the literature: familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Clarke and Braun 2017; Vaismoradi et al. 2013). Firstly, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times and making notes. The next step involved creating codes by identifying key phrases, concepts, or ideas reflecting participants' views on who should teach entrepreneurship and how it can be taught. These codes were then collated into ideas that formed themes relevant to the research questions. The researchers reviewed these themes by revisiting the original data to confirm if they are supported by the evidence and accurately reflect participant views. The researchers then finalized the theme and compiled the report.

4. Findings

4.1. Key Data Concepts

Table 2 shows the key phrases and ideas used by the respondents to express views about who must teach entrepreneurship and the desirable teaching approaches.

Table 2. Responses from participants.

Participant	Key Concepts: Educator Characteristics	Key Concepts: Ideal Entrepreneurship Teaching Strategy
1	Academics with general management training.	Applied teaching style: the theory taught in class should be backed by contextual examples, case studies, and guest lecturers.
2	Educators with entrepreneurial ventures of their own, instructors with practical experience and a personal entrepreneurial background.	Case studies, simulations, and experiential learning opportunities.
3	A combination, perhaps people with industry experience or an entrepreneur, all with the requisite academic qualification.	Collaborative manner.
4	Those who possess a formal university qualification and those who have business experience in the form of having started their businesses.	Workshops and seminars.
5	A mix of academic experts and industry experts (entrepreneurs themselves).	Experiential learning; Case Studies and Group Discussions; Individual and Group Projects; Operating Theatre Classroom.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Participant	Key Concepts: Educator Characteristics	Key Concepts: Ideal Entrepreneurship Teaching Strategy
6	Someone who has had an experience of starting or running a real-life business of their own	Combination of theory and practice through experiential learning
7	External practitioners: Invite successful entrepreneurs and business owners.	Experiential Learning; Flipped Classroom- online modules; participate in entrepreneurship competitions.
8	Entrepreneurship educators should have experience in business ownership.	There is no best teaching style, coaching, or mentoring.
9	Teaching should never be left solely in the hands of pure academics; it should include practicing entrepreneurs and innovators from informal SMEs and corporates.	Blended methods of online, face-to-face and Work integrated learning; Visitations to startups; Working in groups in design thinking methods.
10	Experienced entrepreneurs, industry experts, entrepreneurship educators, and mentors.	Experiential learning infused with interactive activities.
11	Results-driven, dynamic, curious, and success-oriented leaders.	Case studies and practical application of concepts.
12	Seasoned entrepreneurs and academic experts.	Experiential learning: simulations, role-playing, case studies, and real-world projects.
13	Industry experts and entrepreneurs should be invited as guest speakers.	In-class teaching; seminars/workshops.
14	Taught by practitioners, entrepreneur academics might be able to teach the theory.	Facilitation of theoretical learning; case study and simulation; business coaching.

Source: Authors' compilation.

Academics included in this study presented mixed opinions about who can best teach entrepreneurship and the appropriate teaching strategies. They drew these views based on their experiences and beliefs about EE curriculum design and a focus on entrepreneurship mindset development and practice. Broadly, they hold a progressive view towards practice-oriented framing of the EE teaching architecture, although their responses show less orientation towards embracing technology-based technology when teaching entrepreneurship. These views are summarized under the themes developed from the data in Table 2 above.

4.2. Question One: Who Should Teach Entrepreneurship?

4.2.1. Educator Attributes

The dataset shows a demonstrable consensus on real-world experience, with participants emphasizing practical entrepreneurship experience as a key aspect of effective teaching. Participants suggested combining academic theorists and practicing entrepreneurs, including industry experts and guest speakers, to teach entrepreneurship. In that way, the role of qualified educators, while still essential, is supported by the presence of these experienced professionals. Mentors and entrepreneurship educators with teaching expertise and industry experience are also considered ideal facilitators of EE. This preference for external involvement underscores the need for a dynamic and practical approach to teaching entrepreneurship, where theoretical knowledge is complemented by direct industry insights, allowing students to learn from real-world successes and challenges.

Specifically, 50% of the participants preferred a combination of those who teach theory and those with a practical background. They used phrases such as

> *"Teaching should never be left solely in the hands of pure academics; it should include practicing entrepreneurs and innovators from informal SMEs and corporates"* (Participant 9)

To reject the idea of relying only on academics, which is a model approach in many institutions. This shift suggests the sampled cohort believed that teaching entrepreneurship requires

> *"a mix of academic experts, as well as industry experts (entrepreneurs themselves)"*. (Participant 5)

Mastery in theoretical and practical aspects enhances the educators' capabilities to reconcile theory and practice and embrace strategies such as storytelling, reflections, and demonstrations in the teaching process.

4.2.2. Question Two: What Is the Ideal Teaching Strategy for Entrepreneurship?

In answering the second question, three themes emerged from the respondents: in-class theory, action learning strategies, and online strategies.

(i) Combination of In-Class Theory and Practice

While the teaching theory in entrepreneurship remains an essential modality in the EE framework, the need to balance it with real-world application is emphasized in this study. The respondents acknowledge it is critical to embrace in-class teaching in line with beliefs that entrepreneurship theory captures the framing of what entrepreneurship is and underlying behavioral attributes that define the authenticity of entrepreneurial interest among students. Theory-based teaching methodologies like lecturing can be effective as they can utilize action-based frameworks such as simulations, role-playing, and case studies to aid reflections and link theory to practice. As expressed by one of the participants:

> *"the theory that is taught in class should be backed by contextual examples"* (Participant 1)

To bridge the perceived disconnect between theory and entrepreneurial practice. Another respondent added that a desirable approach would be a

> *"combination of theory and practice through experiential learning"* (Participant 6)

and another participant added:

> *"in-class teaching; seminars/workshops"*. (Participant 13)

Embedded in these views is a recognition that in-class exercises are also well placed to introduce students to theories related to business management that entrepreneurship students require, from business planning, opportunity identification, risk assessment, and financial management. Moreover, face-to-face lecturing by educators and guest educators is part of the traditional teaching structure at many higher education institutions in South Africa. These universities offer entrepreneurship courses as part of formal programs designed to be taught in class. Additionally, teaching entrepreneurship has become a massification project that can best be served by mass-teaching in-class approaches instead of individualized approaches such as mentoring.

(ii) Experiential Learning and Action-Based Learning Strategies

We found that participant views support the transition towards innovative action learning strategies. Action learning means learner-centered teaching methods that use experience and experimentation as a medium to learn. They emphasized preferences for a

> *"collaborative manner"* (Participant 3)

of teaching based on implementing:

> *"experiential learning infused with interactive activities"* (Participant 10)

with another participant who mentioned:

> *"role-playing, case studies, and real-world projects"* (Participant 12)

as well as:

> case studies, simulations, and experiential learning opportunities (Participant 2).

Students actively engage with world problem-solving through these teaching methods, helping them develop practical entrepreneurial skills. In the process, they learn to be resilient, adaptable, collaborative, and teamwork-oriented. Broadly, the participants' key terms reflect a firm belief that experiential learning provides holistic learning opportunities for students to develop relevant entrepreneurship skills through self-discovery. These skills range from business planning, critical thinking, communication and negotiation, networking, leadership and teamwork, adaptability, and resilience. However, they also supported using action-based learning strategies with traditional lecturing approaches.

(iii) Online strategies

Only two participants suggested utilizing the following:

"flipped classroom- online" (Participant 7)

and

"blended methods of online, face-to-face" (Participant 9)

methods. Although COVID-19 drove momentum towards technology-based teaching models, the reality is that in South African universities, most educators may still rely on traditional teaching methods. This shift can also indicate a gap in adopting innovative, technology-enhanced pedagogies within the entrepreneurship teaching field, possibly due to limited resources, lack of digital literacy, or resistance to change in teaching practices. Furthermore, the responses highlight a potential under-utilization of innovative teaching approaches that could enhance learning flexibility and engagement. In their teaching context, participant feedback reflects limited exposure to digital platforms that offer students more dynamic and interactive learning experiences in EE.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study gathered the views about entrepreneurship educator characteristics and teaching strategies from 14 academics from South African universities who teach entrepreneurship. Their responses revealed mixed opinions about who can best teach entrepreneurship and the best way to teach it to encourage students to engage in entrepreneurial activity apart from the development of the intention to become entrepreneurs. Regarding educator teaching capabilities, they emphasized the importance of real-world experience and utilizing practicing entrepreneurs, including industry experts and guest speakers, to teach. The real-world insights from such educators can facilitate students' transition from entrepreneurial intentions to action. As such, the findings from this study concur with Daskalou and Komninou (2016) who argued that current thoughts in EE call for expansion by identifying 'by whom' entrepreneurial learning should be taught' to other individuals outside academia, such as practitioners. However, the practicability of utilizing practicing entrepreneurs, including industry experts and guest speakers in South African universities, can be challenging. The industry–university connection is not well developed to support a formalized teaching framework with industry experts at the center of teaching. Secondly, few big businesses emerged from entrepreneurship and thus possess entrepreneurship capital to share through their employees.

Moreover, research reveals the prevalence of a survivalist and nascent entrepreneurship culture, bringing into question the alignment between university EE curricula and practitioner experiences. Whether experience alone, without pedagogic skills, is enough is also a practical issue in abeyance, as several studies call for practitioner-based teaching models. Nonetheless, attempts to embrace teaching staff to include practitioners from industry provide opportunities to strengthen connections between academia, business, and society (Lackeus 2015).

It also emerged that sampled educators affirmed the importance of teaching entrepreneurship theory to students through traditional methods, such as lecturing. They also recognized the need to support theoretical teaching approaches with contextual examples and action-based methods such as simulations, role-playing, real-world projects, and case

studies. Thus, students are given a chance to experience some activities demonstrating action apart from the development of intention among students. As such, their preferences reckon that theory remains critical for developing students' cognitive capabilities to make entrepreneurial decisions (Fiet 2000), while the experiential teaching methods mimicked the practical world of entrepreneurship. In summary, as researchers continue to explore better ways to teach entrepreneurship, consensus is building toward reforming theoretical teaching methods to those based on experiential strategies. As this tide towards experiential learning increases, it has opened up to extremist views where the necessity of the educator is even becoming contested (Barr and Tagg 1995) in favor of learning environments and activities which are 'learner-centered and learner-controlled' (Daskalou and Komninou 2016) and facilitative of 'learning by doing' (Neck and Corbett 2018). We, therefore, regard the endorsements of action-learning strategies by educators in this study as consistent with global perceptions about best practices for teaching entrepreneurship.

As many (for example, Leal Filho et al. 2022; Montiel et al. 2021) have pointed out, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a road map for solving critical global concerns and promoting sustainable development. In this context, respondents suggested that policies that stimulate entrepreneurship and, as a result, employment creation should be promoted to help achieve SDG4. Furthermore, we saw an increasing preference for real-world entrepreneurial experience, incorporating engaged entrepreneurs and guest speakers in addition to traditional theoretical approaches. It is critical that entrepreneurship educators address this need by encouraging theory-driven practices that improve EE teaching processes. Furthermore, while it becomes more normal to welcome practicing entrepreneurs and guest speakers into academia, their contributions still require theoretical confirmation, particularly regarding their impact on entrepreneurship behavioral development.

Our study also found that few educators endorsed teaching entrepreneurship using online strategies. Several reasons may be behind this trend, including the possibility that a low number of African scholars are familiar with online teaching (Mutisya and Makokha 2016) and the limited e-learning infrastructure available in the sampled universities. Moreover, these trends suggest that educators still favor face-to-face instruction, believing it is more effective in engaging students in EE. Our study thus underscores the limited integration of online methodologies in EE.

In our view, the study findings paint an emerging transitionary path from traditional EE teaching frameworks defined by positive EE intentions development on an individual level and less actuation (Iwu et al. 2021; Makwara et al. 2022) towards an action-oriented (Rasmussen and Sørheim 2006) 'business generation model' linked to resource bases in the business context and beyond (Laukkanen 2000) and succeeds in making students follow through intentions with actions. The business generation model calls for a fusion of viable business concepts, entrepreneurial actors, resources, and a munificent environment" (Rasmussen and Sørheim 2006) consistent with the growing importance of ecosystem-oriented EE framework defined by university, industry, and society integration as mirrored by the respondents. We, therefore, postulate that there are real prospects for successful EE programs that go beyond intentions to actions as each country experiences economic and industrial growth. The rationale is that access to viable business contexts, networks, and working teams depends on existing business climates. Moreover, the development of effective EE teaching infrastructure (educator human capabilities, methods, strategies, curricula, and technology) that cures the entrepreneurship update inertia among EE graduates is affected by a country's economic state and level of industrialization. For example, low industrial diversity means fewer opportunities for networking access to successful role models and industry experts to teach entrepreneurship.

Overall, therefore, in this paper, we set out to gather the views of entrepreneurship academics towards entrepreneurship educator characteristics and teaching strategies utilizing human capital theory and experiential learning theory as theoretical lenses. In this endeavor, our main contribution is gathering reflective perceptions of educators to the ensuing EE discourse regarding questions about 'who may teach' and how best to teach

entrepreneurship. Broadly, it responds to a perceived lack of research on entrepreneurship educators (Wraae and Walmsley 2020), particularly in developing contexts.

6. Implications for Theory and Practice

This study has several theoretical and practical implications for the EE discourse and how entrepreneurship teaching contributes to SDG #4. We found a growing preference for real-world entrepreneurship experience utilizing practicing entrepreneurs and guest speakers complimentary to traditional theoretical approaches. Currently, there is no firm theory that maps, guides, explains, and informs this transition to inform emerging practices. Therefore, scholars must address this gap to promote theory-driven practices that positively impact EE teaching practices. Moreover, as it becomes slowly acceptable to embrace practicing entrepreneurs and guest speakers in academia, their contribution still requires theoretical validation, particularly on the impact on entrepreneurship behavioral development and action. Nonetheless, how practitioners and guest speakers will overcome pedagogic shortcomings as they engage students, even in experiential learning set-ups, appear to have eluded theoretical scrutiny among those who call for inclusion in the EE teaching framework. While we believe in the hybridization of teaching expertise, this study suggests the need to consider equipping practitioners and guest speakers with the necessary basic pedagogic and university teaching experiences before leading student learning programs.

It is also evident that entrepreneurship educators must adapt teaching approaches towards facilitation, mentorship, networking, and collaborative strategies. Our findings indicate that relying on traditional didactic teaching methods like lectures, though still relevant, may slowly become incongruent with emerging theoretical best practices when developing entrepreneurs. We further believe that the current findings challenge the conventional separation between theory and practice in entrepreneurship. They support seeing entrepreneurship training as an iterative process requiring a more integrated approach, blending academic frameworks with experiential learning opportunities. Therefore, universities must prioritize and develop robust entrepreneurial ecosystems with ready access to industry, entrepreneurs, incubators, and academic support. These opportunities will give educators and students more continuous and diverse opportunities to engage with real-world entrepreneurial environments.

Educators' limited endorsement of online strategies reveals realities in developing countries regarding progress and technology adoption for learning. They ideally challenge the assumption that digital learning tools are universally accessible, acceptable, and useful across all disciplines and countries. They indicate that, in practice, South African universities must reconsider how they approach setting up online entrepreneurship courses. Several possibilities point to a lack of conviction about how current digital platforms are effective for teaching entrepreneurship, gaps in educators' digital skills competencies, their comfort with teaching entrepreneurship using online methods, and problems with the availability of technology infrastructure in universities. Therefore, universities in South Africa need to roll out online teaching skills development programs for educators, practitioners, and guest speakers involved in teaching entrepreneurship. Such programs must help them integrate online tools and strategies in teaching while maintaining the experiential learning aspects critical to the discipline.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

We interviewed 14 respondents from different universities in South Africa. This number may be considered low despite the qualitative nature of the study and the extensive data it extracted from the respondents. We, therefore, believe EE scholarship may benefit from further studies in the same or different contexts with larger sample sizes and possibly utilizing various methodologies. Such further studies might explore questions about, for example, the perceived impact of practitioners and guest speakers on entrepreneurship stu-

dent success or key technology adaptation skills needed for successful educator transition from traditional to online teaching entrepreneurship teaching.

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