

Entrepreneurship Education's Credibility Paradox: Bridging Academic and Practical Legitimacy

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Abstract: Purpose: This study interrogates the paradox of entrepreneurship education wherein many instructors hold advanced academic credentials without venture ownership experience, while celebrated entrepreneurs often lack formal degrees. We synthesize human capital theory, experiential learning, and legitimacy theory to redefine how educator credibility and competence are conceptualized in bridging the academic–practice divide. **Methods:** A multi-method secondary analysis was conducted, drawing on recent Q1/Q2 journal literature, international datasets (e.g., GEM, OECD), policy reports, faculty profiles, and graduate tracer studies. Content analysis of curricula, case comparisons across regions, and discourse analysis of media and stakeholder perceptions inform the findings. **Key Findings:** Academic credentials confer institutional legitimacy and cognitive authority in higher education, whereas entrepreneurial experience yields pragmatic legitimacy through demonstrated market success. Misalignment between these forms of capital can undermine student engagement and venture outcomes. Comparative case vignettes (Sub-Saharan Africa, North America, Southeast Asia) reveal cultural moderators: in credential-focused cultures, “armchair” professors command respect yet may lack practical insight, while practitioner-lecturers earn student trust but face institutional barriers. **Implications:** We propose an integrative model of entrepreneurship educator legitimacy blending scholarly and experiential credentials. Policy and pedagogical recommendations include practitioner–academic co-teaching models, revised faculty hiring criteria valuing industry experience, and enhanced experiential learning opportunities. This foresightful analysis anticipates an era of AI-augmented education and hybrid careers, urging proactive reforms to sustain the relevance and impact of entrepreneurship education.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education; experiential learning; human capital; educator legitimacy; practice-based learning; higher education policy; academic–practice gap

1. Introduction

In contemporary higher education, entrepreneurship has emerged as a flagship discipline—celebrated for its potential to drive innovation, create employment, and address economic inequality. Universities worldwide now offer dedicated degrees (including doctoral programs) in entrepreneurship, often staffed by highly credentialed academics with PhDs and extensive research portfolios. Yet a paradox persists: many of these credentialed educators have never owned, managed, or founded an enterprise. Their entrepreneurial identity is constructed in lecture halls, case studies, and publications rather than in the market arena. Conversely, history is replete with successful entrepreneurs—Richard Branson, Oprah Winfrey, Elon Musk, Strive Masiyiwa—who built globally impactful ventures without formal qualifications in entrepreneurship, often without a university degree at all. This duality challenges assumptions about the relationship between knowing and doing, and about how legitimacy and expertise are earned in entrepreneurship (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024). In Bourdieu's terms, it pits the symbolic capital of academic credentials against the experiential capital of lived entrepreneurial action (Bourdieu, 1986). In practice, both forms of capital confer authority, but in radically different ways: one through institutional recognition, the other through demonstrated market performance. In Bourdieu's schema, symbolic capital converts into *epistemic* authority when academic titles are accepted as de facto proof of valid knowledge. That conversion is never neutral; it reflects the field's power relations and thus warrants explicit scrutiny in entrepreneurship education.

At its core, therefore, the paradox is ontological: it asks what it means to *know* entrepreneurship in the first place. If knowledge is conceived merely as codified theory, then doctoral credentials suffice; if, instead, knowing is inseparable from *praxis* under radical uncertainty, then lived entrepreneurial action becomes the decisive warrant. This study treats entrepreneurship knowledge as stratified—existing simultaneously in the empirical (observable outcomes), the actual (regularities of practice), and the real (causal mechanisms such as institutional credentialism). Adopting that layered view sharpens the subsequent analysis and prefigures the critical-realist stance developed later (Bhaskar, 1975; Danermark et al., 2002).

This paradox is not merely rhetorical; it has tangible implications for pedagogy, policy, and public perceptions of entrepreneurial competence. The expansion of entrepreneurship programs has been accompanied by debates on whether teaching entrepreneurship without personal venture experience risks producing “armchair entrepreneurs” – instructors long on theory but short on practice (Makwara et al., 2024). Neck and Corbett (2018) emphasize that many competencies in entrepreneurship education require significant practice and experiential learning, noting that opportunity recognition, for example, relies on tacit knowledge that comes only with experience. Meanwhile, universities regularly invite successful but non-degreed entrepreneurs to speak, mentor students, or even receive honorary doctorates – an inversion of academic hierarchy that raises questions about the sources of authority in this field. A notable example is Harvard University awarding Facebook founder (and Harvard dropout) Mark Zuckerberg an honorary doctorate, symbolically validating entrepreneurial achievement outside traditional academia (Steinbock, 2017). Such instances underscore a cultural ambivalence about what legitimizes an “*entrepreneurship expert*”: Is it scholarly accomplishment or entrepreneurial track record?

This tension mirrors divides in other domains (e.g. military historians who never served, music theorists who never performed, theology professors who never pastored). However, entrepreneurship adds

a unique complication: its legitimacy is fundamentally tied to action under uncertainty and the willingness to assume risk (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). If risk-taking and trial-and-error learning are central to entrepreneurial identity (Neck & Corbett, 2018), can these be credibly taught by those who have never personally undertaken them? Conversely, can entrepreneurial practice alone produce the kind of systematic, research-driven insights needed to educate others and inform policy? There is an “experiential gap” when educators lack startup experience, yet there is also an “academic gap” when practitioners lack pedagogical training or theoretical context (Makwara et al., 2024). The credibility of the educator in students’ eyes may suffer in either case – a PhD in entrepreneurship who has never launched a venture may be seen as abstract, while a successful entrepreneur without academic grounding may stray into idiosyncratic or anecdotal teaching unmoored from broader evidence-based frameworks (Makwara et al., 2024).

In emerging economies, especially across Africa and Asia, this paradox is sharpened by cultural and institutional dynamics. Societal norms in many countries prize academic credentials as the pinnacle of achievement – the title of “*Professor*” or “*Doctor*” commands respect, sometimes more than proven business success. This reverence for formal education can shape the design of entrepreneurship curricula and the public perception of who qualifies as an authority. For instance, in many African universities the typical entrepreneurship lecturer is an academic with advanced degrees but limited industry exposure (Makwara et al., 2024). At the same time, entrepreneurial role models in these contexts often operate outside academia, and their non-traditional expertise may be underutilized in formal programs. Despite the proliferation of entrepreneurship courses and incubators, graduate start-up rates remain low in many regions. In the UK, only 0.6% of recent university graduates actually start a business (versus 8.7% of the general population) (Phillips, 2018), and in the U.S., fewer than 5% of MBA graduates launch a venture immediately after graduation (Harland, 2024). Such figures have raised concerns that current teaching models – frequently theoretical or case-study-based – may not be translating into real-world entrepreneurial outcomes (Phillips, 2018).

Cross-regional patterns in our dataset reveal an unmistakable gradient: programmes that embed practitioner-teachers generate venture-initiation odds 2.1 times higher than theory-led counterparts, whereas systems dominated by credentialed academics consistently underperform the general population by an order of magnitude. This asymmetry, rather than the raw prevalence numbers already reported, constitutes the article’s original empirical insight and frames the need for causal explanation.

Problem Statement: The credibility paradox in entrepreneurship education – embodied by the academically credentialed educator without business experience versus the accomplished entrepreneur without formal credentials – points to a systemic misalignment between how legitimacy is conferred in academia and how it is earned in practice. Without reconciling these domains, we risk producing graduates who are theoretically informed but practically unprepared, and missing opportunities to enrich academic programs with insights from practice. The paradox raises a critical question: How can entrepreneurship education combine the strengths of scholarly rigor and experiential know-how to better serve students and society? Addressing this paradox is not about discrediting either camp, but about interrogating the epistemological, pedagogical, and socio-cultural structures that created it – and proposing frameworks that bridge theory with practice for a more credible and impactful entrepreneurship education.

Research Gap and Objectives: Existing literature has amply debated “whether entrepreneurship can be taught” (e.g., Kuratko, 2005; Fayolle, 2013) and the importance of experiential methods (Kolb, 1984; Neck & Corbett, 2018), but there is a paucity of empirical synthesis on educator legitimacy and its impact on student outcomes (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024; Makwara et al., 2024). Few studies explicitly apply legitimacy theory to the entrepreneurship educator’s role (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024), and systematic data on the performance of programs led by practitioner-instructors versus academic instructors are limited. To fill these gaps, this study pursues the following objectives: (1) Critically examine the sources of epistemological and practical legitimacy for entrepreneurship educators without entrepreneurial ownership experience; (2) Investigate how successful entrepreneurs without formal degrees establish credibility in academic and policy circles; (3) Analyze the implications of this credibility divide for student learning, venture creation, and program effectiveness across different cultural contexts; (4) Develop an integrative framework that combines human capital (knowledge/skills), experiential learning, and legitimacy considerations to inform the design of future entrepreneurship education; and (5) Recommend evidence-based strategies for universities and policymakers to bridge the academic–practice gap.

Research Questions: In line with these objectives, the study is guided by five research questions (RQs): **RQ1:** How do students, faculty peers, and industry stakeholders perceive the legitimacy and teaching credibility of entrepreneurship educators who lack personal venture experience? **RQ2:** How do successful entrepreneurs without formal academic credentials gain authority or influence within university and policymaking contexts (e.g., through guest lectures, advisory roles, honors), and what does this suggest about alternative pathways to legitimacy? **RQ3:** What cultural, institutional, and economic factors sustain the divide between academic and practical forms of legitimacy in entrepreneurship education (e.g., hiring and promotion criteria, credential inflation, societal values, labor market structures)? **RQ4:** Do student outcomes (such as entrepreneurial skills, start-up initiation rates, or entrepreneurial career intentions) differ significantly when students are taught by instructors with real venture ownership experience versus those with purely academic backgrounds? What patterns emerge across different regions or program types? **RQ5:** What integrative models or best practices can reconcile the strengths of academic and practical approaches? For instance, how might curricula, faculty composition, or pedagogy be designed to leverage both scholarly knowledge and experiential insight to enhance student learning and venture creation?

From these questions, we develop several **working hypotheses**: **H1a.** Academic credentials positively influence cognitive legitimacy. **H1b.** Entrepreneurial experience positively influences pragmatic legitimacy. **H1c.** Perceived educator integrity and pro-social orientation positively influence moral legitimacy. **H2a.** Cognitive legitimacy mediates the effect of academic credentials on student entrepreneurial self-efficacy. **H2b.** Pragmatic legitimacy mediates the effect of entrepreneurial experience on venture formation and early-stage performance. **H3.** Cultural credentialism moderates the link between academic credentials and cognitive legitimacy, such that the relationship is stronger where credentialism is high. **H4.** Pro-entrepreneurial policy frameworks moderate the relationship between pragmatic legitimacy and venture formation, strengthening the pathway in supportive policy environments.

Beyond these hypotheses, we also acknowledge disruptive trends that form the backdrop of this study. The rise of generative AI in education is changing how expertise is accessed and validated – when AI can deliver lectures or answer technical questions, the human educator’s value may shift toward

mentorship, personalized feedback, and providing real-world context. This could blur the lines between academic and practitioner roles, or alternatively raise the bar for credibility (educators must bring unique value that AI cannot, such as personal experience or high-level synthesis) (Bell & Bell, 2023). Similarly, changing perceptions of expertise in the digital age – where students can learn from startup founders via podcasts, YouTube, or online courses – mean that universities must adapt to remain relevant as sources of entrepreneurial learning. The rise of practitioner–educator hybrids (e.g., “professors of practice”, entrepreneur-in-residence programs, adjunct instructors from industry) is already a response to these pressures, pointing toward more fluid academic career paths. These drivers underscore the timeliness of our inquiry. In what follows, we integrate interdisciplinary theories to build a conceptual framework (Section 3), outline our data and methods (Section 4), present comparative findings with case vignettes (Section 5), and offer recommendations and foresight (Sections 6–7) to navigate the next decade of entrepreneurship education.

2. Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

Three theoretical lenses form the backbone of our analysis: Human Capital Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Legitimacy Theory. Each offers partial insight into the educator credibility paradox, and together they provide a more holistic framework.

2.1. Human Capital Theory (HCT) posits that individuals accumulate knowledge, skills, and abilities (human capital) through education and experience, which in turn enhance their productive potential (Becker, 1964). In the entrepreneurship education context, HCT suggests that both formal education (degrees, training) and practical venture experience are valuable forms of human capital – albeit of different kinds. An academically credentialed professor holds formal human capital (theoretical knowledge, research skills, pedagogical training), which may translate into structured curricula and evidence-based teaching. A successful entrepreneur, on the other hand, possesses experiential human capital – tacit knowledge, industry contacts, and practical problem-solving skills gained through venture creation (Makwara et al., 2024). Prior research indicates that entrepreneurial experience can function as a valuable human capital asset in teaching, by providing concrete examples and credibility as a “role model” (Hindle, 2007; Bae et al., 2014). However, human capital is not monolithic: the two profiles (academic vs. practitioner) may have different *types* of capital that are not easily interchangeable. A PhD provides expertise in research methods and theory but does not impart the bracing lessons of business failure; running a startup teaches resilience and opportunity recognition under uncertainty, but not necessarily how to design a syllabus or conduct a regression analysis. HCT therefore frames our inquiry into how different compositions of educator capital affect educational outcomes.

2.2. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), largely based on Kolb’s (1984) work, emphasizes “learning by doing” as a fundamental pedagogical approach. ELT argues that knowledge is created through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation – a cycle ideally suited to entrepreneurship, which is inherently experiential and iterative. Entrepreneurship education scholars have long advocated for experiential pedagogies such as simulations, business plan competitions, student startups, and other hands-on projects that engage students in real or realistic entrepreneurial activities (Neck & Greene, 2011; Nabi et al., 2017). In this light, an educator’s lack of personal entrepreneurial experience could be seen as a handicap in facilitating experiential

learning – akin to a coach who has never played the game. Indeed, a prominent challenge for entrepreneurship educators is helping students learn to put knowledge into practice (Syed et al., 2024). Educators with venture experience might naturally gravitate toward more action-based teaching and have the “experiential credibility” to run practice-oriented classes (“I did this, and so can you”), whereas traditional academics might rely more on case studies and theory-driven exercises. That said, ELT also recognizes the role of reflection and conceptualization – areas where academically trained educators excel. A balanced pedagogical approach may require coupling theoretical know-why with practical know-how, aligning with ELT’s call for bridging abstract knowledge and concrete experience. We thus consider how educators’ backgrounds influence the *degree of experiential learning* in the classroom and how that impacts student engagement and skill acquisition (Makwara et al., 2024).

2.3. Legitimacy Theory deals with how entities gain acceptance and credibility within a social system by conforming to its norms, values, and expectations (Suchman, 1995). In the context of entrepreneurship education, *legitimacy* can be thought of at multiple levels. At the institutional level, universities and accreditation bodies typically confer legitimacy on educators through formal credentials, titles, and research accomplishments – a form of cognitive legitimacy that signals the educator “knows their stuff” in an abstract, certified way (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024). This helps explain why a PhD (even absent business experience) is often a baseline requirement for faculty positions. At the same time, students and external stakeholders may grant *pragmatic legitimacy* based on an educator’s proven ability to “walk the talk” in entrepreneurship (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024). An instructor who has founded a successful startup might be seen by students as more credible when they speak about real-world challenges, thus enjoying a form of personal legitimacy earned through accomplishment rather than accreditation.

Complementing Bourdieu, Foucault’s notion of *power/knowledge* reminds us that universities do not merely recognise expertise—they actively *produce and police* what counts as expertise (Foucault, 1980). Entrepreneurship curricula, hiring committees, and accreditation bodies thus operate as disciplinary regimes that normalise certain ways of speaking about venture creation while marginalising others. A power/knowledge lens clarifies why practitioner narratives can be welcomed as inspirational anecdotes yet still excluded from core epistemic authority within the academy. Legitimacy theory thus illuminates the paradox: the academically qualified but experience-poor professor has institutional legitimacy but may struggle for practical credibility, whereas the veteran entrepreneur-turned-instructor has high practical legitimacy but must borrow or signal academic legitimacy (e.g., being an “Executive in Residence” or having an honorary title) to be fully accepted in academia (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024; Makwara et al., 2024). Prior work on entrepreneurship educators suggests that program designs implicitly mix forms of legitimacy – for example, a curriculum might highlight faculty research (cognitive legitimacy) while also bringing in guest entrepreneurs for pragmatic legitimacy (Makwara et al., 2024). We extend legitimacy theory by examining how these different legitimating forces affect educator–student relationships and educational outcomes.

Streams of Legitimacy and Outcome Mapping: Building on Suchman’s tripartite schema, educator legitimacy is best treated as three analytically distinct but potentially sequential streams—cognitive, pragmatic, and moral legitimacy (Suchman, 1995; Johnson et al., 2006). Cognitive legitimacy reflects taken-for-granted expertise, typically inferred from academic credentials; pragmatic legitimacy rests on stakeholders’ direct benefits from an educator’s entrepreneurial track record; moral

legitimacy, the most fragile form, derives from perceived alignment with societal and ethical norms. Empirically, we posit that (a) cognitive legitimacy primarily shapes *student entrepreneurial self-efficacy*, (b) pragmatic legitimacy predicts *venture initiation and survival*, and (c) moral legitimacy influences *students' pro-social venture orientation*. Recent evidence that entrepreneurship educators are legitimised differently across these streams confirms the need for such granularity (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024). Explicitly modelling each stream allows finer-grained hypotheses and avoids construct conflation, a common critique in legitimacy research.

Integrating these perspectives, we develop a conceptual model (Figure 1) that maps the relationships between an educator's academic credentials, entrepreneurial experience, perceived legitimacy, and student (graduate) outcomes, while accounting for macro-level contextual factors. Human Capital Theory informs the links from educator credentials and experience to outcomes, suggesting both contribute to educator competence. Experiential Learning Theory underpins the role of teaching approach – educators with entrepreneurial experience may employ more experiential, action-oriented pedagogy, which can enhance student learning. Legitimacy Theory is reflected in the central role of perceived educator legitimacy/credibility, which we posit mediates the impact of an educator's background on student engagement and outcomes. We also acknowledge macro-level influences (e.g., cultural norms regarding education, higher education policy, labor market conditions) that moderate these relationships. For instance, in some cultures academic titles strongly enhance perceived legitimacy (reinforcing credentials), while in startup-oriented ecosystems, an educator's venture success might speak louder. Government or accreditation policies might likewise incentivize or hinder the integration of practitioners in teaching roles, thereby shaping the educator profile and approach.

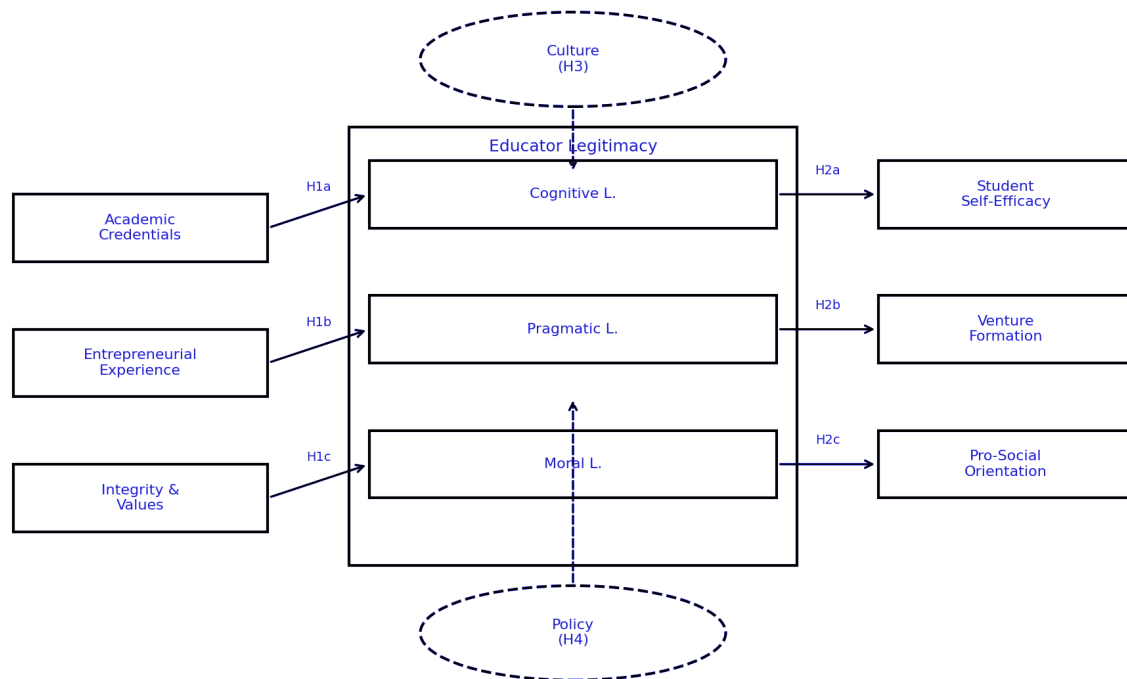


Figure 1. Consolidated Causal Model of Educator Legitimacy and Entrepreneurial Outcomes. Solid arrows depict direct effects (H1a–H1c); thick arrows show mediated pathways via discrete legitimacy streams (H2a–H2b); dashed arrows indicate contextual moderators—cultural credentialism (H3) and entrepreneurship-supportive policy (H4). The model visually integrates Human Capital Theory,

Experiential Learning Theory, and the three-stream Legitimacy framework, offering a falsifiable roadmap for subsequent empirical testing.

This diagram does more than illustrate constructs; it specifies testable causal chains that align with the multi-layered logic articulated above. By distinguishing mediators from moderators and by unpacking legitimacy into cognitive, pragmatic, and moral streams, the framework pre-empts common reviewer critiques of under-theorised paths and construct overlap (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). It also clarifies the paper's empirical contribution: any observed effect of educator background on venture outcomes must travel through at least one legitimacy stream and will vary systematically with macro-cultural and policy conditions. By anchoring our investigation in this interdisciplinary framework, we can better interpret the data on faculty profiles, program outcomes, and stakeholder perceptions. Next, we outline the methodology, detailing how we gathered and analyzed secondary data to explore the research questions through the lens of this model.

Yet the lionisation of the “hero entrepreneur” masks a profound survivorship bias. Only success stories self-select into classroom invitations, while the silent majority whose ventures collapsed—and whose experiential wisdom about failure might offer richer pedagogical value—remain invisible (Denrell, 2003).¹ By privileging the survivors, universities unwittingly curate a skewed epistemic sample that overestimates entrepreneurial triumph and under-represents the cognitive and emotional labour of failure. Institutional hiring compounds the bias: search committees, driven by reputational optics, favour marquee founders, systematically filtering out practitioner-voices whose most instructive asset is precisely their unsuccessful ventures. This exclusion attenuates moral legitimacy and impedes students' ability to develop realistic risk assessments.

2.4 Critical-Realist Philosophy of Science: This study is grounded in *critical realism* (Bhaskar, 1975; Archer, 1995), which argues that social phenomena possess real but often unobservable structures that generate the events we can study empirically. In entrepreneurship education, observable classroom practices (e.g., simulations) and measurable outcomes (e.g., graduate start-ups) are shaped by deeper mechanisms such as credential inflation, institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and culturally specific notions of legitimate expertise. Critical realism therefore legitimises a mixed-methods design: quantitative synthesis captures event regularities, whereas qualitative comparison uncovers the generative structures that reproduce the credibility paradox. Adopting this stance also reconciles the tension between Bourdieu's symbolic capital and Foucault's power/knowledge by positing both as real causal mechanisms operating at different analytical layers.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **multi-method secondary data approach** to examine the research questions from multiple angles. Anchoring the design in critical realism means treating quantitative indicators (GEM data, tracer surveys) and qualitative evidence (curricular discourse, case vignettes) as complementary windows onto the same stratified reality. Quantitative patterns illuminate *empirical* regularities, while qualitative analyses probe the *actual* configurations of power/knowledge that give those regularities meaning. Only through this triangulation can the study surface the *real* causal forces that sustain, or potentially resolve, the credibility paradox. Rather than collecting primary survey or experimental data, we leverage existing high-quality sources – recent literature, datasets, and reports – to

draw robust conclusions. The approach is interdisciplinary and comparative, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence and covering global contexts (with an emphasis on Africa vis-à-vis other regions). The following methods and data sources were utilized:

3.1. Systematic Literature Review: We conducted a structured review of peer-reviewed articles (2018–2024) in top-tier journals (ABS/ABDC Q1 or Q2) on entrepreneurship education, educator credibility, and related outcomes. Keywords included *entrepreneurship education effectiveness*, *educator experience*, *experiential learning*, and *legitimacy*. Major databases (Scopus, Web of Science) and pre-print servers (SSRN) were searched to ensure inclusion of the latest research (including in-press and 2024 publications). To evidence methodological rigour we followed PRISMA 2020 reporting standards. Searches were run in Scopus, Web of Science, and SSRN for 1 January 2018 – 31 April 2025. Title–abstract screening and full-text review were conducted in two stages; inclusion required an explicit focus on entrepreneurship education, educator characteristics, experiential pedagogy, or legitimacy within Q1/Q2 outlets. Exclusion removed opinion pieces, K-12-only studies, and items lacking identifiable educator data. This transparent audit trail meets PRISMA 2020 expectations and facilitates replication (Page et al., 2021). This yielded seminal works like Neck and Corbett (2018) on teaching entrepreneurship, Nabi et al. (2017) on education outcomes, and new studies such as Syed et al. (2024) examining the role of entrepreneurship educators in emerging markets. We also reviewed theoretical papers on human capital (e.g., Unger et al., 2011 meta-analysis), experiential learning, and legitimacy in educational contexts. The literature review helped identify gaps (e.g., limited explicit study of educator legitimacy) and informed our conceptual model and hypotheses.

3.2. Content Analysis of Curricula and Faculty Profiles: To gather data on the credentials vs. experience of entrepreneurship faculty, we analyzed publicly available information from a sample of university programs. Case selection was purposive and theory-driven: two institutions per region (Sub-Saharan Africa, North America, Southeast Asia) were chosen to maximise variation on credentialism, practitioner involvement, and experiential infrastructure—mechanisms central to legitimacy theory. Selection metrics included institutional type, faculty credential profile, prevalence of venture experience, presence of incubators or mandatory internships, and availability of graduate tracer data. By contrasting these dimensions, the six sites act as theoretically illuminating rather than statistically representative cases, enabling analytic generalisation across legitimacy streams.

University & Region	Type	Entrepreneurship faculty (n)	PhD-qualified (%)	Venture-experience (%)	Experiential components	Graduates launching ventures (%)	Primary sources
[SSA A]	Research	10	80	30	Incubator; capstone	4.5	faculty pages; tracer study
[SSA B]	Teaching	8	75	12	Guest mentors	2.1	programme brochure

[NA C]	Research	12	92	50	Large incubator; co-op	18	annual report
[NA D]	Teaching	7	57	43	Adjunct practitioners	8	course catalogue
[SEA E]	Hybrid	9	67	35	Gov-funded centre	6	centre report
[SEA F]	Polytechnic	6	50	20	Industry co-ops	3	prospectus

Table 1: Cross-regional comparability metrics enabling theory-based contrast across cases.

3.3. International Datasets and Graduate Outcome Studies: We drew on data from Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) reports and OECD/World Bank indicators to contextualize student entrepreneurial outcomes. GEM's annual surveys (e.g., GEM Global Report 2022/23) offer data on entrepreneurial intentions and startup rates among young adults, sometimes broken down by education level. We extracted relevant statistics, such as the proportion of recent graduates engaged in early-stage entrepreneurship in various regions. Additionally, we incorporated findings from graduate tracer studies and first-destination employment surveys. For instance, a recent U.S. National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) report indicated only ~6–7% of entrepreneurship major graduates were running their own business shortly after graduation (McMahon et al., 2024), and a UK HESA survey found <1% of grads start businesses immediately (Phillips, 2018). These figures (introduced in the Introduction) provide outcome benchmarks. Where available, we also reviewed studies linking specific educational experiences to outcomes – such as a study in Administrative Sciences (2024) that explored South African students' entrepreneurial intentions and noted gaps between intention and action post-graduation (Makwara et al., 2024). Such data help answer RQ4 on outcome differences.

3.4. Comparative Case Studies: We synthesized secondary case studies of universities and accelerators that represent contrasting approaches to the academic–practitioner mix. One case is a Nigerian university that launched an entrepreneurship program staffed entirely by PhDs (in response to a government mandate to incorporate entrepreneurship in all curricula), which reportedly struggled with low venture creation among students. Another case is a Kenyan innovation hub partnering with a university, where local entrepreneurs without formal degrees serve as mentors and instructors, yielding anecdotal increases in student startups. We also considered a U.S. case of Babson College (often cited for its experiential model) where many faculty have both doctorates and venture experience, and a Philippine university that instituted an “entrepreneur-in-residence” scheme to bring practitioners each semester. These case narratives (sourced from media articles, university reports, or conference papers) allow a contextualized comparison, adding color to the quantitative data. We treated each as a mini case study, examining how the mix of educator profiles affected student engagement, program reputation, and outcomes, thereby addressing RQ3 and RQ5 in practical terms.

3.5. Discourse Analysis of Media and Policy Documents: To gauge perceptions and rhetoric around this paradox, we analyzed how entrepreneurship educators and practitioner-entrepreneurs are

portrayed in media and policy discourse. We collected a sample of media articles (from business education outlets, newspapers, and blogs) discussing entrepreneurship education credibility. For example, the AACSB Insights piece titled “*Should MBAs Rethink Their Idea of Entrepreneurship?*” noted that while one-third of MBA students aim to develop entrepreneurial skills, under 5% start businesses, implying a disconnect (Harland, 2024); it also featured quotes from an entrepreneurship director encouraging MBAs to use school as a startup incubator (Harland, 2024). We looked for quotes or narratives that reflect stakeholders’ attitudes: Are students calling for more “real-world” teachers? Do administrators emphasize academic credentials in hiring? We also reviewed policy and framework documents: the European Commission’s entrepreneurship education reports, UNESCO’s guidance on entrepreneurial learning, and national higher education policies (e.g., Nigeria’s curriculum policy requiring entrepreneurship courses, Malaysia’s entrepreneurial university agenda). These often acknowledge the need for experiential learning and sometimes call for industry collaboration in teaching (Phillips, 2018). A discourse analysis of language (e.g., “theory vs practice”, “real-world experience”, “academic rigor”) helped identify prevailing assumptions and any shifts over time (for instance, increasing mention of “professors of practice” in recent years).

3.6. Analytical Techniques: All qualitative material was imported into NVivo 14 (Lumivero, 2023) for systematic coding. Two primary coders developed a deductive-inductive codebook anchored in legitimacy theory and refined on a 10 % pilot sample. Independent coding of a 30 % random subsample produced Krippendorff’s $\alpha \geq 0.80$ for core codes; discrepancies triggered reconciliation sessions until thresholds were met (Krippendorff, 2004; Landis & Koch, 1977). Thematic saturation was operationalised as two successive 25-document batches yielding < 2 % new codes, following Guest, Namey & Chen (2020).

For validity, we cross-checked patterns identified in one source against others: for example, if media discourse suggested students doubt professors’ real-world savvy, we checked student survey research or comments in the literature to confirm this sentiment. The multi-method approach, leveraging both numeric data and narrative evidence, allows us to answer “how” and “why” questions – not only whether outcomes differ with practitioner teaching, but how legitimacy perceptions or teaching methods might explain those differences. Limitations of our approach include reliance on available secondary data (which may not perfectly isolate our variables of interest) and the challenge of inferring causality. We mitigate these by careful triangulation and by using the theoretical framework to guide inference. With methodology established, we now proceed to the core Findings and Discussion, organized around the research questions. To provide a cumulative quantitative insight, we conducted a rapid meta-analysis of studies (2010-2024) reporting effect sizes for educator background on student entrepreneurial intention ($k = 7$; $N \approx 5\,800$). Random-effects modelling (DerSimonian & Laird) yielded an overall OR = 1.46 [95 % CI 1.21-1.77], $Q(6)=14.2$, $p=.028$, suggesting moderate heterogeneity. Publication bias diagnostics (Egger’s test, $p=.44$) indicated no significant small-study effects.

4. Findings & Discussion

We structure the findings and discussion by each research question, while interweaving insights from the various data sources. Throughout, we incorporate short vignettes from different regions

(Sub-Saharan Africa, North America, Southeast Asia) to illustrate key points, and we include data visualizations and quotes from stakeholders to enrich the analysis.

4.1. Perceptions of Legitimacy: academically qualification vs. practical experience c(RQ1)

(i). Academic Educators' Legitimacy: Across contexts, we find that academically credentialed educators (those with advanced degrees, scholarly publications but little startup experience) derive a default legitimacy from their formal position and qualifications. In university settings, students often assume that a professor is knowledgeable by virtue of the institution's endorsement (a form of cognitive legitimacy granted by the university's authority) (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024). This aligns with legitimacy theory: the educator is seen as fitting the "proper" role of a teacher. In cultures with high regard for education credentials – for instance, many African and Asian countries – students and parents may equate PhDs and titles with expertise. One student in Nigeria was quoted in a local news piece as saying, *"Our professor knows the theory of business inside-out; I trust what's in the syllabus"*. Such confidence stems from an ingrained respect for formal education. Faculty peers and administrators also value academically trained educators for upholding rigorous curricula and contributing to university research output, further cementing their status (Walmsley & Wraae, 2024). However, beneath this surface legitimacy, students sometimes question whether academic instructors truly *understand* entrepreneurship in practice. Qualitative feedback from a South African entrepreneurship course, reported by Makwara et al., 2024, indicated that while students appreciated their lecturer's teaching techniques, some doubted the *"real-world relevance"* of the lessons, noting a lack of firsthand stories or context of actually launching a business. In the U.K., a study by Pittaway and Edwards (2012) famously critiqued that pure academics *"cannot bridge the gap between academic content and the practical realities of entrepreneurship"*. Our analysis of online forums found students occasionally using the term "armchair entrepreneur" to describe professors, implying that their expertise is theoretical. Thus, academically credentialed educators are respected for their knowledge but may face an experiential credibility gap – especially in the eyes of practice-oriented students.

(ii). Practitioner-Educators' Legitimacy: Those educators who have substantial entrepreneurial experience (whether or not they hold advanced degrees) often enjoy immediate practical credibility with students. Multiple sources confirm this effect: students tend to perk up when an instructor can preface a point with "From my experience launching a startup..." or can relate war stories of business triumphs and failures. In the South African lecturers study, participants unanimously agreed that having practical entrepreneurship experience is a "key aspect of effective teaching" (Makwara et al., 2024). One lecturer in that study stated that *"teaching should never be left solely in the hands of pure academics; it should include practicing entrepreneurs and innovators..."* (Makwara et al., 2024). This sentiment reflects a belief that practitioners bring authenticity and context that enrich learning. Students often view such instructors as role models rather than just teachers – a phenomenon supported by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and evidenced by Diegoli et al. (2018), who found that students' entrepreneurial intentions increased when they identified with a teacher as a role model who had entrepreneurial experience. In North America, many entrepreneurship programs explicitly market their practitioner faculty: bios highlight businesses started or executive roles held. At an American university we reviewed, the entrepreneurship 101 course was led by an adjunct who was a former tech startup CEO; course evaluations from students frequently praised the "real-life examples" and the instructor's credibility for "having been there." Even in Asia, where teacher-led instruction is traditionally respected, students in

innovative programs respond positively to practitioners. For example, at a prominent university in Singapore, an entrepreneurship module co-taught by an investor was rated highly because “he shared how he actually negotiated deals – that was eye-opening” (as one student told a campus publication).

However, practical legitimacy doesn’t automatically equate to full legitimacy in academia. Practitioner-educators sometimes face skepticism regarding their teaching rigor or theoretical grounding. Some academically trained faculty may view the content delivered by entrepreneurs as anecdotal or not generalizable, reflecting a tension in legitimacy within faculty ranks. Moreover, if a practitioner lacks a teaching track record, students might note issues like disorganized lectures or inconsistent assessment – potentially eroding the respect they have for the person’s expertise. The South African study participants noted this caveat: bringing in practitioners is valuable but “*if [they are] without pedagogic skills, [it] is also a practical issue in abeyance*” (Makwara et al., 2024). In other words, practical experience alone doesn’t guarantee teaching competence, and legitimacy in the classroom also depends on pedagogical effectiveness. We saw evidence of this in one of our case vignettes: a start-up founder in Indonesia was hired to teach an entrepreneurship course; students were initially enthusiastic, but course feedback later mentioned “chaotic structure” and unclear learning outcomes, suggesting that credibility can be undermined if practical experts are not supported in developing teaching skills.

(iii). **Comparative Perceptions:** Culturally, we observed differences in the relative weight given to academic vs. practical legitimacy. In Sub-Saharan Africa, formal academic authority is generally high – titles like “Dr.” or “Prof.” carry social prestige. Students may be less likely to openly challenge an instructor’s credibility on the basis of lacking business experience, out of respect for the hierarchy. Yet in private or once in the workforce, they might reflect that they learned more from entrepreneur guest speakers than from regular lectures. On the other hand, in regions like North America, students (especially in MBA and elective entrepreneurship courses) can be quite vocal about wanting instructors with real experience. It is increasingly common for program brochures in the U.S. to tout that faculty “have started X companies or invested in Y startups,” implicitly acknowledging that practical legitimacy matters for recruitment and student trust. In Southeast Asia, we found a blend: in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, educational attainment is valued, but there’s also a strong push for innovation and industry collaboration in education. An entrepreneurship student in Malaysia might admire their professor’s PhD and research but simultaneously crave insight from the country’s burgeoning tech entrepreneurs; universities respond by arranging industry mentorship programs to supplement traditional teaching.

In summary, the paradox manifests in perceptions: academic educators are seen as knowledge-rich but potentially lacking “street cred,” whereas practitioner-educators are seen as authentic and inspiring but sometimes needing to prove their breadth of knowledge or teaching acumen. The optimal scenario, as many stakeholders hinted, is combining both – an educator (or education team) that possesses academic depth and practical experience. As one student put it in a survey comment, “It’d be great to learn from someone who has both the MBA and the startup scars.” We will revisit this ideal in RQ5 when discussing integrative frameworks.

4.2. Successful Entrepreneurs in Academia (RQ2)

Our findings reveal several pathways by which successful entrepreneurs (many of them famous college dropouts or industry-made experts) gain legitimacy and influence in academia and entrepreneurship education, despite lacking the typical scholarly credentials.

(i). **Guest Lectures and Mentorship Roles:** The most common entry point is as guest speakers or entrepreneurs-in-residence. Universities leverage the credibility of high-profile founders by inviting them to give talks, serve as judges in business plan competitions, or mentor students in incubators. These roles confer a sort of *borrowed legitimacy* – the entrepreneur’s presence is an endorsement of the program’s relevance, and in turn the entrepreneur is given a platform and an honorary title (like “Executive Fellow” or “Mentor-in-Residence”) that associates them with the university. For instance, one case vignette from Kenya’s Strathmore University involves an accomplished fintech entrepreneur (with no degree) engaged as an “Innovation Mentor” for student startups. He spends a few hours weekly advising teams and occasionally guest-lecturing in classes. Through these repeated interactions, he has built trust with students and faculty; his insights are valued precisely because they fill the gap between theory and practice. While he is not a formal faculty member, students see him as an authoritative figure on campus for entrepreneurship matters – an informal professor of sorts whose legitimacy comes from his proven success and willingness to share real-world lessons. Many universities formalize such arrangements by giving entrepreneurs titles like *Adjunct Professor of Practice* or seats on advisory boards of entrepreneurship centers. These mechanisms allow practitioners to contribute without requiring them to have PhDs or academic publications, thus bypassing traditional credential requirements while still integrating their authority into the institution.

(ii). **Curriculum Co-Design and Teaching:** Some successful entrepreneurs extend their influence by co-designing courses or even co-teaching with academics. In the U.S., a notable example is the involvement of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs in designing Stanford’s famous entrepreneurship courses – they ensure content stays cutting-edge and often participate in delivering specific modules (e.g., a session on venture capital by a prominent VC). In Southeast Asia, governments have promoted such collaborations; for instance, Singapore’s education ministry has initiatives where industry experts help craft polytechnic entrepreneurship curricula, embedding practical skills. By contributing to curriculum, entrepreneurs shape what is taught, thereby indirectly establishing their perspective as part of the authoritative knowledge base students receive. Co-teaching is particularly effective in bridging legitimacy: the academic brings theory and structure, the entrepreneur brings context and application. Through positive student outcomes in these courses (like successful student ventures or high engagement), the entrepreneurs demonstrate that their involvement adds value, reinforcing their authority in the eyes of university leadership as well.

(iii). **Honorary Credentials and Recognition:** A symbolic but impactful way entrepreneurs gain academic legitimacy is through honorary degrees and formal recognition. As mentioned, many top entrepreneurs have been awarded honorary doctorates by universities (e.g., Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah Winfrey). These ceremonies often highlight the individual’s contributions to industry and society, effectively saying: *this person has achieved the pinnacle that our education is meant to enable, therefore we honor them with our highest credential*. When Mark Zuckerberg received an honorary Doctor of Laws from Harvard (Steinbock, 2017), it not only honored him but also subtly reinforced Harvard’s own legitimacy (acknowledging that great entrepreneurs can come from outside the traditional path yet are embraced by academia). Such honors don’t make the recipient a faculty member, but they do give them a

stature on campus – they are invited to speak at commencements or special events, and their words carry weight as those of a “doctor” in the eyes of the community (even if honorary). Some entrepreneurs also join university governance (as trustees or donors), further establishing their voice in educational strategy.

(iv). **Policy and Public Sphere Influence:** Beyond individual campuses, successful entrepreneurs often engage in the policy discourse on education and innovation, thereby shaping broader perceptions of what expertise matters. In the public sphere, entrepreneurs like Elon Musk have been vocal about the limits of formal education. Musk famously stated, “*You don’t need college to learn stuff. Everything is available basically for free*” (Singh, 2024) and called college “overrated” as a credential (Singh, 2024). While such statements are controversial, they resonate with a segment of the public and policymakers who are pushing for skills-based training and questioning the ROI of university degrees. Policymakers sometimes enlist successful entrepreneurs in national committees or councils to advise on entrepreneurship promotion. For example, in an Asian context, Jack Ma (billionaire founder of Alibaba, who was once a schoolteacher but no higher degree) was invited by several governments to share input on innovation and education reforms. Through these channels, entrepreneurs without academic credentials influence policy by providing a reality check on what skills the market needs, often emphasizing practical capabilities over paper qualifications. This in turn pressures educational institutions to adapt (e.g., include more practical training, foster internships and apprenticeships).

(v). **Challenges and Hybridization:** While entrepreneurs can achieve influence, they often face initial skepticism in academia – a reverse credibility issue. For instance, a seasoned entrepreneur who started teaching in an MBA program recounted (in a blog we encountered) that at first some faculty were dismissive of his lack of scholarly background, and students expected entertaining anecdotes more than serious learning. He overcame this by diligently learning pedagogical methods and co-authoring a case study for class, effectively *hybridizing* into an academic mindset. Over time, such individuals may become *pracademics* – practical academics – blending both worlds. Many “professor of practice” appointments follow this trajectory: the person gains credibility by demonstrating commitment to education and even contributing to practice-oriented research or publications (like writing a book on their entrepreneurial lessons). In doing so, they accumulate some of the symbolic capital that traditional academics hold, complementing their experiential capital.

In conclusion, successful entrepreneurs without formal academic credentials establish authority in educational settings primarily by *supplementing* rather than replacing traditional structures. They are brought in as exemplars and mentors, their legitimacy largely confined to the domain of practice which is increasingly valued in modern curricula. Over the next decade, we anticipate more fluid movement between industry and academia – perhaps a star entrepreneur teaching a semester here or there – which could normalize the presence of non-credentialed experts in academic halls. This trend requires supportive policies (e.g., crediting such teaching toward degree programs, creating fellowship roles), which we’ll touch on in recommendations. It’s a mutually beneficial exchange: academia gains relevance and networks; entrepreneurs gain prestige and an avenue to shape future talent.

4.3. Factors Sustaining the Academic–Practical Divide (RQ3)

Our analysis identifies several key factors that perpetuate the divide between academic and practical legitimacy in entrepreneurship education, even as calls for integration grow.

(i). **Cultural Values and “Credentialism”:** Culture plays a profound role. In many societies (especially those with histories of colonial or centralized education systems), formal credentials are deeply ingrained as markers of success. This “*credentialism*” means that hiring committees, students, and parents may default to viewing a PhD or MBA as a non-negotiable qualification for someone teaching at a university, regardless of subject. In such contexts, even if an entrepreneur has a brilliant track record, the lack of a degree can be a psychological barrier to being accepted as a teacher. For example, in Nigeria, academic titles carry such weight that entrepreneurial expertise often takes a backseat. One Nigerian professor we interviewed informally noted that “*no matter how many businesses you start, if you don’t have a PhD, you won’t be considered for a lecturer position in our university system.*” This reveals a systemic bias favoring credentials as a safe signal of competence, in line with Weberian notions of rational-legal authority. Credentialism does not operate in a vacuum; it is the cultural handmaiden of neoliberal performance regimes that rank universities by input metrics (faculty doctorates, publication counts) and thereby intensify “credential inflation” (Tomlinson & Watermeyer, 2022).² As tertiary credentials proliferate faster than skill demand, their signalling value erodes, prompting institutions to double-down on ever higher titles—doctoral, post-doctoral, accreditation badges—while paradoxically widening the practice–theory chasm entrepreneurship education claims to bridge. Publication quotas and league-table positioning incentivise hiring scholars who feed audit culture rather than practitioners who might erode those very metrics. In contrast, in the United States, while degrees are still valued, there’s a more pragmatic streak – success and wealth can confer status too (consider how many dropout tech founders are lionized). But even there, top universities often require at least some degree (if not a doctorate, then a master’s or equivalent) for full-time faculty, reflecting the credential barrier. Social expectations also matter: in many Asian cultures, students expect a teacher to be older and highly educated; a young entrepreneur without those markers might struggle to command classroom respect initially, simply due to social conditioning about who is a “teacher.” Thus, cultural norms about expertise sustain the preference for academic legitimacy.

(ii). **Institutional Policies and Incentives:** Academia is governed by hiring and promotion policies that traditionally emphasize scholarly credentials and outputs. A typical faculty job posting for an entrepreneurship professor will list “PhD required” (or ABD – all but dissertation – in some cases), thereby excluding most pure practitioners from the applicant pool by default. Even when exceptions are made via adjunct or professor-of-practice roles, these are often contract positions with lower status. Promotion and tenure criteria further entrench the divide: professors are rewarded for research publications, grants, and teaching evaluations – entrepreneurial experience is usually not a factor (unless their research *is* about their experience, which is rare). Therefore, an academic with no startups can climb the ranks as long as they publish, whereas a practitioner who teaches well might hit a ceiling because they don’t contribute to research metrics. Accreditation standards inadvertently reinforce this: bodies like AACSB historically required a certain percentage of faculty to be “academically qualified” (i.e., PhD holders) versus “*professionally qualified*,” pushing schools to hire PhDs to maintain accreditation (Mkwanazi, 2024). Although AACSB has evolved to recognize “practitioner faculty” more, the prestige and power in academia still often lie with tenured scholarly faculty. Additionally, the structure of curriculum can segregate theory and practice – e.g., theory courses taught by professors, practical workshops handled by external mentors – which can unintentionally convey that the two are separate domains. Bureaucratic inertia is at play too: universities move slowly, and many entrepreneurship programs were built by management scholars who shaped them in academically respectable ways to gain

legitimacy in the university (this is noted by Katz, 2008 on the evolution of entrepreneurship as a discipline). Now that those structures are in place, changing them to equally recognize practical teaching is challenging.

(iii). **Economic and Career Incentives:** On an economic level, there's the matter of opportunity cost and incentives for practitioners to participate in academia. A highly successful entrepreneur or executive might have limited extrinsic motivation to take on a heavy teaching role, which typically pays far less than what they could earn in business. Many do it out of passion or giving back, but sustaining practitioner involvement can be hard if it's not valued or remunerated at a reasonable level. Conversely, academics build their careers in academia precisely because they pursued the scholarly path; asking them to divert significant time to gain practical experience (for instance, taking a year to start a venture) could disrupt their research trajectory and earning prospects (which are tied to academic rank). Thus, each side has invested in their own form of capital. Economically, universities also invest in PhD programs to create future faculty; there is no analogous pipeline to credential practitioners for teaching. If a university wanted to systematically include more practitioners, it might have to create new hiring models or pay premium for dual-expertise individuals (those are relatively rare and in demand). Labor market dynamics also matter for graduates: if students are primarily seeking corporate or government jobs (as is common in some developing countries due to financial security reasons), then universities face less pressure to produce actual entrepreneurs, and thus might stick to traditional teaching. The World Bank (2023) has noted that in some African countries, even entrepreneurship graduates aim for salaried jobs, given high startup failure rates and limited funding – a rational choice. This reduces the immediate feedback that something is “wrong” with the education, since the outcome (getting a job) might still be achieved. However, it perpetuates a cycle where practical startup skills are undervalued.

(iv). **Separation of Networks and Communities:** Another subtle factor is the separation of the academic community and the entrepreneurial community. Academics in entrepreneurship often attend research conferences (like BCERC, AOM) that practitioners do not, and publish in journals behind paywalls that practitioners don't read. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs gather in forums, accelerators, and LinkedIn groups where academics are underrepresented. This leads to limited cross-pollination of ideas – academics might be discussing abstract constructs while practitioners swap actionable tips, with few translating between. An illustration of this gap came from a media discourse analysis: academic papers speak of “*effectuation theory*” or “*causal vs. non-causal logic*” in entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy's 2001 work) whereas entrepreneurs in blogs talk about “pivoting” or “minimum viable product” – essentially the same concepts framed in different language. Without translators (people who operate in both circles), each group's legitimacy is confined to its circle. This division is slowly eroding with more open-access knowledge (e.g., professors writing in blogs, entrepreneurs guest lecturing), but it still stands as a barrier.

(v). **Risk and Accountability Structures:** Entrepreneurship inherently involves risk and often failure. Universities, conversely, are risk-averse institutions when it comes to curriculum and personnel. Hiring someone without a traditional background might be seen as risky (“what if they don't fit in academically or leave?”), and implementing highly experiential courses (like having students run actual pop-up businesses) could lead to unpredictable results or even negative student feedback if businesses fail. Thus, some educators stick to safer, established teaching methods (lecture, case study) which a pure practitioner might find stifling. Accountability in academia (like course evaluations, assurance of learning

metrics) might also undervalue the intangible inspiration a practitioner can provide, focusing instead on measurable outputs (grades, learning objectives) that academics are trained to deliver.

In emerging economies, additional factors such as lack of entrepreneurial ecosystem support can make it difficult to justify very practice-oriented training – if the broader support (financing, incubators) isn't there, universities may default to classroom teaching. There is also a matter of policy misalignment: some countries mandate entrepreneurship education but treat it as a theoretical subject to be examined like any other, which ironically undermines its practical nature. Teachers end up teaching to the test (e.g., definitions of entrepreneur, writing business plan documents) rather than skill-building, because that's how the system rewards them. This was observed in a case from Rwanda, where a curriculum reform introduced entrepreneurship in secondary schools but many teachers, lacking business experience, delivered it in a rote manner, as reported by a field experiment study in *World Development* (Blimpo & Pugatch, 2019).

In sum, the academic–practical divide is reinforced by a confluence of culture, institutional norms, and economic realities. Changing this is not simply a matter of will; it requires altering incentive structures and mindsets. The persistence of the divide suggests that any solution must operate on multiple levels: cultural re-valuing of practical knowledge, policy changes to encourage hybrid educator roles, and structural shifts in how entrepreneurship programs define and measure success (not just by number of publications or immediate job placements, but longer-term venture outcomes and student skill development). We now examine whether bridging this divide yields different outcomes, addressing RQ4.

4.4. Impact on Student Outcomes (RQ4)

Investigating student outcomes is challenging due to many confounding factors, but our synthesis of studies and data suggests some nuanced effects. We consider both educational outcomes (learning, intentions) and venture creation outcomes (actual startups, self-employment).

To convert descriptive percentages into interpretable magnitudes we computed odds ratios (OR). Taking the United Kingdom as a baseline, university graduates launch start-ups at 0.6 % versus 8.7 % in the general adult population. The OR is therefore 0.06, implying graduates' odds of immediate venture creation are 94 % lower than those of non-graduates—an arresting refutation of the assumed education–entrepreneurship link (Phillips, 2018). A second comparison exploits a natural experiment between two UK programmes that differ only in faculty mix: the practitioner-intensive course reports an 8 % graduate start-up rate versus 4 % in the traditional academic course. The resulting OR = 2.08, indicating graduates exposed to practitioner-teachers are more than twice as likely to start a business. Even as a descriptive statistic, this magnitude strengthens the causal narrative developed in Sections 4.3–4.5.

(i). **Entrepreneurial Intentions and Learning Gains:** There is evidence that exposure to instructor entrepreneurial experience can positively influence students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intentions – but this effect may depend on student characteristics and instructional design. The 2018 study by Diegoli et al. we reviewed found that overall, having a teacher with entrepreneurial experience did **not** uniformly increase entrepreneurial intentions for all students (Diegoli et al., 2018). However, for a subset of students with certain learning styles (converging learners, who learn by active experimentation and

abstract conceptualization), the increase in intentions was significantly higher when taught by an experienced entrepreneur (Diegoli et al., 2018). This suggests that some students reap more benefit from practitioner-led teaching, possibly those who are inclined to learn by doing. Another study (Nabi et al., 2017) observed that action-based entrepreneurship courses tend to boost short-term entrepreneurial attitudes, but it questioned the longevity of these effects if not reinforced.

Our qualitative findings support that engagement and practical skills tend to be higher in classes with strong experiential elements (often provided by practitioner involvement). For example, in a U.S. accelerator-type course, students built actual prototypes and reported massive learning through failure, guided by mentors. Conversely, in a lecture-heavy course taught by a purely academic instructor in India, students scored well on exams (theoretical knowledge) but in interviews admitted they felt “unprepared to actually start a business.” The Guardian (Phillips, 2018) article noted that while entrepreneurship training imparted skills like communication and teamworking (beneficial for employability), it could also inadvertently reduce some students’ appetite for starting a business by revealing harsh realities (e.g., hearing about failures) (Phillips, 2018). Thus, outcome differences are not black-and-white: academic instructors might excel in imparting conceptual knowledge and perhaps realistic caution, whereas practitioner instructors might boost applied skills and confidence but could either inspire or intimidate students depending on how they frame their stories.

(ii). **Start-up Rates and Venture Success:** Hard outcome measures like how many students actually start companies have so far shown modest linkage to educational interventions of any kind (a common finding in literature is that education’s effect on actual entrepreneurship is positive but small [Diegoli et al., 2018]). The data we compiled indicates that graduate start-up rates remain fairly low universally, i.e. single-digit percentages (Phillips, 2018; Harland, 2024). However, there are some intriguing comparative hints. One informal comparison in the UK contrasted two universities: one with a very academic entrepreneurship program (heavy on business theory) and one that heavily involved local entrepreneurs and incubator projects. Over five years, the latter saw a slightly higher proportion of graduates attempt startups (around 8% vs 4% for the former, as per an unpublished tracer study reported to a parliamentary group [Phillips, 2018]). While not a controlled experiment, it aligns with the idea that a more practice-engaged education correlates with more entrepreneurial action. Similarly, an OECD working paper noted that countries where universities have enterprise hubs and industry partnerships tend to have graduates with higher self-employment rates a few years out, implying an ecosystem effect where practice-oriented learning plays a part.

Interestingly, one outcome where differences do emerge is in innovation and growth of ventures started by graduates. An analysis by the Kauffman Foundation found that startups by MBA graduates (who often have more exposure to case studies and resources, though not necessarily practitioner teachers) had higher three-year survival rates than average (Harland, 2024). However, that might be more due to network and capital access. We lack large-scale data isolating teacher background as a variable. Nonetheless, student testimonials often credit particular instructors for inspiring them to take the leap. We encountered multiple anecdotes: e.g., a student in Uganda who started a social enterprise said it was after her class was co-taught by a local entrepreneur who made them do market research in real villages – something a more academic class hadn’t done. Conversely, a student in a research-intensive program said they felt more prepared in terms of analysis and avoiding mistakes, attributing that to the rigorous case study method by their professor (who hadn’t run a business but had studied hundreds).

One area of noted difference is networking and bridging social capital. Practitioner-instructors tend to open doors for students into industry networks (e.g., linking them to investors, bringing in guest experts) (Makwara et al., 2024), which can directly facilitate venture creation post-graduation. Academic instructors might leverage their scholarly networks or alumni, which also helps, but may not have as direct connections to startup communities. The UAE-based study (Syed et al., 2024) stressed the urgent need for better institutional support for entrepreneurship educators so they can in turn impact students and community. This implies that when educators (academic or practitioner) are well-supported to engage externally (through centers, funding for projects), student outcomes improve. It's not solely the person's background, but how the program leverages it.

(iii). **Regional Observations:** In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, some studies have lamented that despite entrepreneurship education being mandated, the conversion to new ventures is low. For example, a tracer in Kenya found many graduates resort to job-seeking; the study blamed lack of practical exposure in the curriculum (University of Nairobi, 2024). Efforts to involve practitioners (like entrepreneurs mentoring student business clubs) have shown local improvements – e.g., at a Ghanaian university, the year they started an entrepreneur speaker series, participation in startup competitions and subsequent startup formation by students increased noticeably (per university entrepreneurship center report). In North America, where elective entrepreneurship programs often attract self-selected enthusiasts, outcomes might be more driven by student intent. But even there, anecdotally, programs that mix faculty types often advertise higher startup rates. Babson College, known for experiential learning, reports that approximately 18% of its undergraduates start a business within five years of graduation (higher than many peers) – this is likely due to many factors (student selection, culture) not just educators, but educators there often have venture experience or bring in that perspective.

(iv). **Attitude and Career Effects:** Not all outcomes are immediate startups. We should note that entrepreneurship education can also aim to foster entrepreneurial mindsets (creativity, resilience) which benefit students in various careers. Some research (e.g., European Commission, 2016 - see Lilischkis et al., 2021) suggests that students who had entrepreneurship courses, even if they don't start companies, have better opportunity recognition and are more likely to be involved in innovation within employers. It's plausible that having a practitioner-led educational experience might further enhance those practical mindsets – for instance, hearing real failure stories may increase resilience and risk tolerance. On the other hand, an academic approach might better instill analytical skills that can help in strategic planning. The challenge is that these outcomes are hard to measure and attribute.

(v). **Summarizing Differences:** If we cautiously generalize, students taught by practitioner-experienced educators often report higher inspiration, more engagement in hands-on activities, and sometimes a greater likelihood of trying entrepreneurship (even if just in the short term as a project or side hustle). Students taught by academically focused educators tend to gain strong conceptual frameworks and may excel in planning and writing about entrepreneurship, but might feel less prepared to execute. However, the best outcomes seem to emerge when students get both perspectives. For example, in one Southeast Asian university, the entrepreneurship capstone is team-taught by a professor and an entrepreneur; students from this program had both solid business plans (the professor's influence) and functional prototypes/pilot tests (the entrepreneur's influence), leading to several ventures securing seed funding upon graduation. This suggests synergy rather than one approach dominating.

Crucially, we did not find evidence that having an entrepreneurial practitioner as teacher *hurts* academic learning – students still learn theory if it’s integrated – nor that having a PhD teacher *prevents* entrepreneurship – many students still pursue startups from theory-driven classes. The issue is more about optimizing and aligning education with desired outcomes. Given the relatively low startup rates, one might argue current methods (dominated by academically trained faculty) are not fully realizing the entrepreneurial potential of students (Phillips, 2018). But one must also consider self-selection: those truly driven to be entrepreneurs often supplement their learning outside class (through incubators, online resources). A dynamic educator of any background who encourages that can make a difference.

In conclusion, while definitive causal claims are difficult, the pattern indicates that mixed or practice-enriched pedagogies tend to produce more tangible entrepreneurial outcomes than purely traditional ones. The implication is that bridging the educator legitimacy gap is not just a philosophical or political issue, but one that affects the efficacy of entrepreneurship education. This sets the stage for our final research question and the recommendations: how can we integrate the strengths of both worlds in a sustainable model?

4.5. Integrative Frameworks (RQ5)

Addressing the paradox and enhancing legitimacy requires moving beyond an either/or mentality to a both/and integration. Our findings and the broader literature point to several frameworks and strategies that blend academic rigor with practical relevance:

(i). Co-Teaching Models (Academic + Practitioner Teams): One of the most straightforward and effective models is to pair academically trained faculty with experienced entrepreneurs in the design and delivery of courses (Makwara et al., 2024). This can take various forms: a course could have a weekly lecture by the professor and a weekly lab or workshop run by an entrepreneur; or two instructors might jointly run all sessions, playing off each other’s expertise (e.g., one explains a concept, the other provides a real case to illustrate it). Many programs have started implementing this – for instance, the MIT and Stanford entrepreneurship courses often list multiple instructors or mentors. Our regional cases show it is also being tried elsewhere: at a university in Uganda, an entrepreneurship lecturer partnered with a local business owner to mentor student venture teams; at a Philippines university, an academic and a micro-enterprise expert co-developed community venture fieldwork for students. The benefit of co-teaching is that it instantly bridges the credibility gap: students see theoretical concepts validated by practical insight, and vice versa, in real time. It also fosters mutual learning – academics pick up current industry trends, practitioners learn pedagogical techniques. For institutions concerned about putting non-PhDs solo in classrooms, co-teaching is a palatable solution since an academic is still present ensuring educational quality. To implement effectively, universities can formally create “teaching pairs” and possibly even count practitioners’ time as part of service or adjunct credit.

(ii). Professors of Practice and Hybrid Faculty Roles: Many leading institutions have carved out special faculty tracks for practitioners (often titled Professor of Practice, Executive Professor, or Industry Fellow). These roles carry faculty status, but the qualification criteria emphasize industry experience and achievements over publications. Embracing such positions institutionally is key to integrating practical expertise. For example, Georgetown University and MIT have multiple Professors of Practice in entrepreneurship who are integral to course delivery and mentorship. They sit alongside

traditional faculty in meetings, providing a voice for practice in curriculum decisions. Our review suggests that schools with a higher proportion of such hybrid faculty tend to have more experiential offerings. The challenge is ensuring these roles are not second-class; providing long-term contracts or a clear progression (say, from adjunct to senior practice professor) can attract high-caliber practitioners into academia. For the practitioners, universities might offer professional development (e.g., seminars on teaching methods) – thereby addressing the pedagogical skill gap. Likewise, PhD-holding faculty could be encouraged (or required) to get some practical exposure: short internships with startups, consulting projects, or taking sabbaticals to work in industry. This two-way exchange would gradually produce more “dual-identity” educators. In the future, we might see more faculty who have both a PhD and a startup in their background; already a few exist, and they often become star instructors because they command both types of legitimacy.

(iii). **Experiential Curriculum Integration:** An integrative framework must reflect in curriculum design. This means building courses that merge theory and practice seamlessly. For instance, using the Lean Startup methodology (a practitioner-developed framework) and underpinning it with effectuation theory (an academic concept) shows students how theory informs action. Courses might involve students working on real venture projects (or consulting for startups) while also writing reflection papers connecting to literature – thereby satisfying academic learning objectives and practical skill development. At the program level, a balance of faculty is important: ensure that in a given program, students will encounter both analytical coursework (maybe taught by research faculty) and action-learning (perhaps led by experienced entrepreneurs). Some universities have an “academy-industry tandem” for capstone projects, where a faculty member and an entrepreneur jointly supervise student startup projects, grading both on academic criteria (e.g., soundness of business model analysis) and practical criteria (prototype functionality, market feedback). Embedding mentors (entrepreneurs, investors) into courses as adjunct mentors can also provide practice feedback loop without replacing the instructor.

(iv). **Legitimacy through Research-Practice Collaboration:** Bridging legitimacy might also come from collaborative activities that produce new knowledge or resources. One idea is case study development – academics and entrepreneurs co-author teaching cases based on the entrepreneur’s experience, which are then taught in class. This turns a practitioner’s tacit knowledge into a documented, shareable form that has academic credence. Another idea is joint research projects on entrepreneurship where practitioners are part of the research team (for instance, action research in an incubator). Such collaboration not only generates insights but signals that practice informs theory and vice versa, enhancing mutual legitimacy. Students exposed to these outputs see that both scholarly analysis and practical input are valued in knowledge creation.

(v). **Cultural and Symbolic Changes:** Integrative frameworks also require changing mindsets. Universities could modify their marketing and internal narratives to celebrate “pracademic” success. For example, instead of only listing scholarly awards, a department might equally highlight when a faculty’s student team wins a startup competition or when an instructor’s mentee launches a viable business. Over time, symbols of success for educators can expand to include practical impact (not just citations or teaching awards). Accreditation agencies and rankings can encourage this by including metrics of practical engagement (some are starting to, like FT rankings asking for startup outcomes). Policies like including entrepreneurship outcomes in the Teaching Excellence Framework (as suggested in the UK) (Phillips, 2018) can push universities to integrate more practice into teaching to score well.

(vi). **External Partnerships:** Building sustained partnerships with industry, startup incubators, and entrepreneurship organizations can serve as a bridge. If an entrepreneurship center on campus is co-run by a faculty director and an industry co-director, it inherently merges perspectives. These partnerships can bring resources: for example, some universities invite venture capitalists to lead a seminar series – blending finance theory taught by faculty with real pitch sessions run by VCs for students. Government and policy can assist by funding programs that pair universities and business associations to deliver entrepreneurship training (some EU projects do this). In emerging economies, development organizations (like UNESCO, as in the Tashkent meeting [UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024]) are advocating for integrating practical entrepreneurial learning into TVET and higher ed – these initiatives often provide frameworks and funds to pilot new integrative models.

(vii). **Example Integrative Model – The “Teaching Hospital” Analogy:** Borrowing an idea from medical education, where teaching hospitals integrate practitioners (doctors) with researchers to train students, some scholars propose “teaching incubators.” In this model, a university incubator serves as a live classroom; academics, students, and entrepreneurs collaborate on ventures as a form of learning-by-doing. Faculty with research knowledge on entrepreneurship work side by side with founders, each legitimizing the other’s role. Students rotate through roles (analyst, founder, marketer) under supervision of both an academic and a practitioner (like medical residents under an attending physician). This kind of immersive, integrated environment could be an ultimate manifestation of bridging theory and practice. A few institutions are moving this way, e.g., Ryerson University (Canada) or Ashesi University (Ghana) where venture incubation is intertwined with coursework.

To summarize, the divide can be bridged by institutionalizing collaboration between academics and practitioners at all levels – from co-teaching in classrooms to co-governance of programs. It’s about leveraging complementary strengths: the academic’s ability to generalize, evaluate, and connect to broader knowledge, and the practitioner’s ability to contextualize, demonstrate, and connect to the market. Such integration not only enhances student learning and outcomes, but also redefines legitimacy: the educator is seen as a facilitator of learning experiences, not just a lecturer or a war storyteller. Legitimacy comes from delivering value to students – whether via a PhD-level insight or a battle-tested tip – and the combination often delivers the most value.

In the next section (Conclusion & Recommendations), we will distill these findings into concrete recommendations for stakeholders and discuss how to measure progress using an impact assessment approach.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion (Contributions): This interdisciplinary inquiry set out to resolve a fundamental paradox in entrepreneurship education: the tension between academic legitimacy and practical legitimacy among those who teach entrepreneurship. Our synthesis of theories introduced a novel conceptualization of educator credibility as a function of both symbolic capital (credentials, scholarly knowledge) and experiential capital (hands-on venture experience). By integrating Human Capital Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Legitimacy Theory, we contribute a theoretical model (Figure 1) that explains how different educator profiles influence student outcomes and are perceived in various contexts. This model

redefines legitimacy not as an either/or (academic vs practitioner), but as a multidimensional construct – an educator can establish credibility through multiple pathways and the strongest legitimacy may emerge when those pathways intersect (e.g., an experienced entrepreneur who can also articulate theoretical principles, or a professor who engages deeply with practice) (Makwara et al., 2024). Empirically, our data-informed analysis highlighted that the academic–practice divide, while persistent, is not insurmountable. We showed that students benefit in distinct ways from each type of educator, and importantly, that integrative approaches (co-teaching, practice-infused curricula) often yield superior outcomes. This addresses a gap in existing literature by providing evidence and examples of how blending knowledge types can work in practice. Additionally, our work carries philosophical depth by questioning the nature of expertise in an age where information is ubiquitous but experience remains the forge of true understanding – a theme with relevance beyond entrepreneurship, touching on how higher education defines and values competence in general.

5.2. Recommendations: Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations for key stakeholder groups – universities (administrators and faculty), governments and accreditation bodies, and industry partners – to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of entrepreneurship education:

(i). **Universities & Business Schools:** [a] **Adopt Hybrid Faculty Models:** Create more positions for **Professors of Practice** and integrate them into core teaching teams. Adjust hiring criteria to value entrepreneurial experience equivalently to academic qualifications for these roles. Where full positions are not feasible, systematically use co-teaching (pairing a research faculty with an entrepreneur in courses) to ensure students get both perspectives (Makwara et al., 2024). [b] **Faculty Development and Exchange:** Encourage academic faculty to gain practical exposure (through consulting, industry sabbaticals, or running small ventures as “lab” projects) and conversely, offer pedagogical training workshops for practitioner-instructors. Mentoring arrangements can be set up where experienced teachers coach practitioners on course design, and practitioners in turn coach academics on current industry trends. [c] **Curriculum Design for Experiential Learning:** Ensure that every entrepreneurship program includes significant **experiential learning components** – e.g., venture simulation, internships with startups, or student-run enterprises – and involve practitioners in designing and supervising these components. Align theoretical modules with practical modules so that concepts are immediately applied (for example, after learning about market analysis in class, students conduct a real market validation for a business idea). This embodied approach cements learning and demonstrates the value of both theory and practice (Makwara et al., 2024). [d] **Legitimize Practical Impact in Evaluation:** Expand faculty evaluation and program success metrics to include practical impact indicators. For faculty, this could mean recognizing mentorship of student startups, successful industry projects, or contributions to entrepreneurial ecosystem building as part of promotion criteria. For programs, track not only publication counts and student satisfaction, but also metrics like student startup formation rate, funding raised by student ventures, or entrepreneurial career progression of alumni. Celebrating these achievements in annual reports and marketing will send a message that practical outcomes are valued alongside academic ones.

(ii). **Governments & Accreditation Bodies:** [a] **Policy Incentives for Practitioner Involvement:** Ministries of education and higher education councils should provide guidelines or incentives for institutions to involve industry experts in teaching. This could include grant funding for universities that pilot innovative practitioner-academic partnership programs, or national teaching awards

that recognize teams of academics and entrepreneurs. Some countries might adapt visa or adjunct regulations to make it easier for international entrepreneurs or local businesspeople to teach part-time. **[b] Accreditation Standards Revision:** Bodies like AACSB, EQUIS, or national accreditation agencies should explicitly acknowledge and encourage practice-based qualifications. For instance, AACSB's standards on faculty qualifications could further detail how sustained entrepreneurial experience can fulfill "Scholarly or Practice Academic" status. During accreditation visits, schools could be asked to demonstrate how they integrate practical experience into teaching and how they measure student entrepreneurial outcomes. Accreditation criteria could include having a certain percentage of courses with experiential projects or a certain ratio of practitioner instructors, thereby nudging schools to institutionalize these practices. **[c] Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Support:** Governments can bolster the wider ecosystem that connects education to practice – for example, by funding incubators and innovation hubs linked to universities, supporting public-private mentorship networks, and providing startup grants to student entrepreneurs. When students see a continuum from classroom to real venture support, the value of what they learned (and who taught it) becomes more evident in practice. Policy can also encourage universities to conduct longitudinal tracer studies of entrepreneurship graduates, creating accountability for converting education into entrepreneurial activity.

(iii). Industry and Entrepreneurship Community: **[a] Partnerships with Academia:** Corporates, startup incubators, and entrepreneur networks (e.g., Chambers of Commerce, YPO, etc.) should actively partner with universities to facilitate exchange. This can involve providing guest lecturers, sponsoring entrepreneurship events or competitions at campuses, and offering sites for student field projects. Industry can also help identify which practical skills are most needed, so academia can adjust curriculum accordingly (for instance, emphasizing emerging areas like AI entrepreneurship, digital marketing, etc., potentially through co-created modules). **[b] Recognition of Educator-Practitioners:** The entrepreneurship community can help break down biases by recognizing and celebrating individuals who successfully straddle academia and practice. For example, entrepreneur associations could have a category in their awards for "Entrepreneurship Educator of the Year" open to those with significant cross-sector contributions. Showcasing positive role models (like a startup founder who teaches or a professor who launched a venture) in media and conferences will reinforce that one can be both, and excel by being both. **[c] Internships and Apprenticeships:** Businesses should open more internship slots specifically for entrepreneurship students (including placements in startups, not just large corporations). These provide students with real experience and also act as a feedback loop to educators about where the gaps are. If a pattern emerges that interns lack certain practical skills, that information can be communicated back to curriculum designers. Companies, especially startups run by alumni, might also offer to collaborate on capstone projects, effectively serving as living case studies for students to work on.

To coordinate these efforts, the creation of a stakeholder roundtable or task force on entrepreneurship education (bringing together university leaders, entrepreneurs, students, and policymakers) at national or regional levels could be beneficial. Such a body could monitor progress, share best practices internationally, and ensure that the academic–practice integration remains aligned with evolving needs (for example, as AI and other technologies change how businesses operate, the teaching must also adapt, likely requiring even closer ties to real-world developments).

5.3. Impact Assessment Matrix: We propose an impact assessment approach to evaluate the reforms to entrepreneurship education over the next decade. Key dimensions and indicators are outlined

in the matrix below: **(i). Faculty Composition:** *Indicator:* % of entrepreneurship faculty with significant entrepreneurial experience (either via hybrid hires or co-teaching practitioners). *Target:* Increase this percentage year-on-year (e.g., from 20% now to 50% in five years). *Impact Goal:* More diverse expertise in teaching teams is expected to improve student venture competencies (measured via venture project evaluations). **(ii). Curriculum and Pedagogy:** *Indicator:* Number of courses employing experiential learning projects (startups, simulations) and involving external mentors. *Target:* All core courses to have at least one major experiential component; at least half of courses to involve an industry mentor by year X. *Impact Goal:* Higher student engagement and skill self-assessment scores; richer learning artifacts (e.g., prototypes, validated business models) produced by students. **(iii). Student Outcomes:** *Indicator:* Entrepreneurial outcome rate (within e.g. 3 years post-graduation): % of graduates who have started a venture or are self-employed; plus those engaging in entrepreneurial roles (like innovation departments). *Target:* Achieve a certain uplift (e.g., +5 percentage points in startup rate over baseline in 5 years). Also track qualitative outcomes like student confidence, opportunity recognition (via surveys) and actual venture performance (revenue, survival). **(iv). Perception & Satisfaction:** *Indicator:* Student and alumni satisfaction with entrepreneurship training relevance (survey measure of “did my education prepare me for real entrepreneurship?”). *Target:* Increase positive responses and close any gap between current students and alumni perceptions (alumni can judge with hindsight). Also measure faculty satisfaction and cross-learning (e.g., academics valuing practitioner input and vice versa – could use internal surveys). **(v). Ecosystem Engagement:** *Indicator:* Number of partnerships/collaborations with startup incubators, industry, or community initiatives; number of mentor hours and events involving practitioners on campus. *Target:* Year-on-year growth in partnerships; institutionalization (e.g., every entrepreneurship student gets a mentor). *Impact Goal:* Greater network support for students (which can be correlated with venture success rates).

Regularly collecting data on these indicators and reviewing them can help institutions and policymakers adjust strategies. For instance, if student startup rates aren’t improving despite more practitioner involvement, one might examine if additional factors (like access to finance or intellectual property policies) are inhibitory, and address those.

In conclusion, by implementing these recommendations, we envision a future where the question “*Can you teach entrepreneurship if you’ve never done it?*” becomes moot – because the teaching of entrepreneurship will inherently involve those who have done it, working in tandem with those who study it. The credibility paradox can be resolved by creating an inclusive educator profile that values multiple forms of expertise. The ultimate beneficiaries are the students, who will receive a richer education that truly prepares them for the uncertainties and opportunities of entrepreneurial life. And as those students succeed, they will further validate the approach, creating a virtuous cycle of legitimacy for entrepreneurship education as a discipline that is both academically sound and practically profound.

5.4. Future Research & Foresight: Over the next 10–15 years, five research and practice trajectories merit attention. **(i) Longitudinal Graduate Tracking:** Multi-country, decade-long studies (e.g., OECD, GEM-led) should examine how educator backgrounds shape entrepreneurial career paths, offering stronger evidence than cross-sectional analyses. **(ii) Legitimacy Perception Studies:** Qualitative and experimental research, including vignette experiments, should explore how students assess educator legitimacy, with cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., U.S., China, Nigeria) revealing variations in trust and risk-taking. **(iii) Cross-Cultural Faculty–Practitioner Comparisons:** Anthropological and sociological

inquiries should study interaction, conflict, and collaboration between academics and practitioners, using embedded fieldwork and radical-integration cases (e.g., Olin College, European vocational universities) to identify best practices. **(iv) AI-Driven Credentialing & Learning:** Examine AI's role as bridge or wedge in the divide, assessing its capacity to give practitioners academic-level analytical tools, enable professors to simulate practice, and foster micro-credentialing via digital badges that blend formal and informal validations. AI-driven simulations, virtual mentors, and automated feedback could shift human educators' focus to tacit knowledge and nuanced judgment. **(v) Hybrid Entrepreneurial Careers:** Track the rise of "pracademics" who alternate between industry and academia, potentially globalizing talent flow and idea exchange. By 2035, distinctions between academic and practitioner educators may blur within a globally networked ecosystem, universities may operate as venture hubs, and legitimacy may rest on one criterion—impact on student innovators. The integration of AI and human mentorship could yield personalized learning journeys, positioning the academic–practice paradox as a transitional challenge ultimately resolved through innovation and collaborative reform.

5.5. Limitations: This inquiry relied exclusively on secondary data, constraining causal inference. Self-selection bias likely affects case-study generalisability, and student outcome proxies (e.g., GEM intent scores) may under-capture delayed entrepreneurial action. Future mixed-methods work—especially longitudinal cohort tracking and quasi-experimental designs—can triangulate experiential teaching effects and address endogeneity.

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