

Entrepreneurship Education in South Asia: A Critical Regional Review of Policy, Pedagogy, Ecosystems and Inclusion

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly prominent across South Asia as governments and higher education institutions seek to promote innovation, employability, self-employment, and entrepreneurial capability. However, evidence from different regions is still inconsistent, and simply offering more entrepreneurship courses does not guarantee better entrepreneurial learning or successful ventures. Building on previous regional policy analyses, this article critically synthesizes entrepreneurship education in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, focusing on developments since 2018 and incorporating evidence available through 2026. The review is organized around five recurring dimensions: policy commitment, institutional provision, curriculum and pedagogy, entrepreneurial ecosystem integration, and gender and social inclusion. The literature on India and Pakistan highlights relatively well-developed policy and institutional frameworks, whereas recent research on Bangladesh points to persistent challenges related to curriculum design, institutional collaboration, and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. Emerging evidence from Bangladesh and the Maldives further expands the discussion beyond entrepreneurial intention by emphasizing employability, entrepreneurial skills, and capability development. However, the available evidence from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and some areas of Sri Lanka is limited or only covers certain institutions. Because of this, it is not appropriate to make strong cross-national rankings. Across the region, a common lesson emerges: effective entrepreneurship education depends less on the formal presence of courses than on the quality of learning, educator capability, institutional support, experiential opportunities, ecosystem connections, and contextual relevance. Based on the comparative synthesis, this article introduces a provisional Regional Entrepreneurship Education Strengthening Framework that emphasizes policy-to-practice alignment, institutional capability, experiential pedagogy, ecosystem connectivity, and inclusive participation.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship Education; South Asia; Higher Education; Entrepreneurial Ecosystem; Experiential Learning; Entrepreneurship Policy; Inclusion; Entrepreneurial Competencies.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is commonly linked to innovation, productivity, new venture creation, employment generation, and overall economic dynamism. At the national level, entrepreneurial activity is influenced by both individual characteristics and the broader institutional and systemic contexts in which opportunities emerge and are pursued. [1]. In this context, entrepreneurship education (EE) has shifted from a narrow emphasis on business-plan preparation and venture creation to a comprehensive field addressing entrepreneurial knowledge, competencies, mindsets, behaviors, and value creation.

This evolution is reflected in the international entrepreneurship education literature. A major systematic review found that EE can influence entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, knowledge, and related outcomes, while also showing substantial variation across interventions and measures [2]. A later systematic review found encouraging evidence for experiential and extracurricular approaches but emphasized continuing methodological weaknesses in the field [3]. More recent reviews confirm both the rapid growth and the increasing diversification of EE research, with attention extending to entrepreneurial learning, pedagogy, innovation, mindset, self-efficacy, technology, and ecosystem influences [4]-[8].

An important implication of this literature is that the existence of an entrepreneurship course cannot itself be treated as evidence of educational effectiveness. One recent study found that EE affected entrepreneurial outcomes unevenly rather than producing uniform changes in knowledge, skills, behavior, and intention [9]. Systematic evidence on experiential entrepreneurship education similarly suggests that the learning process itself, especially opportunities to act, experiment, develop projects, interact with entrepreneurs, and reflect on experience, is central to competency development [10]. Entrepreneurship education therefore needs to be examined as an institutional and pedagogical phenomenon rather than simply as a curricular subject.

These questions are particularly important in South Asia. The region contains diverse education systems, labor markets, demographic structures, entrepreneurial cultures, and levels of institutional development. Entrepreneurship is frequently presented as a response to graduate unemployment, constrained formal employment opportunities, technological change, and the need for stronger private-sector development. Yet the forms taken by entrepreneurship education vary substantially between and within South Asian countries.

A regional perspective is not entirely new. Rai reviewed education and entrepreneurship policies across all eight South Asian countries and identified a persistent gap between policy aspirations, formal education, and domestic enterprise development [11]. That study provides an important historical and regional foundation. Since its publication, however, the landscape has continued to change. Startup and innovation policies have expanded, university incubation has become more visible, experiential pedagogy has received greater attention, and recent empirical studies provide evidence from countries that previously had only a small EE literature.

The present review therefore does not claim to be the first regional examination of education and entrepreneurship in South Asia. Its contribution is to extend the regional discussion initiated by Rai [11] by incorporating post-2018 developments alongside relevant earlier evidence and by broadening the analytical focus beyond policy. The review considers institutional capacity, pedagogical practice, entrepreneurial ecosystem relationships, inclusion, competencies, employability, and other reported educational outcomes.

The review addresses three questions:

- How is entrepreneurship education currently represented in policy and educational institutions across South Asian countries?
- What does the available evidence suggest about curriculum, pedagogy, institutional support, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and inclusion?
- What common regional priorities and research gaps emerge from comparison across the eight countries?

A. Review Scope and Approach

This article adopts a critical structured narrative review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. This approach is appropriate because the South Asian evidence is heterogeneous in both design and purpose. It includes quantitative student surveys, qualitative studies, conceptual

contributions, institutional analyses, government policies, higher education documents, and broader systematic and bibliometric reviews. Treating these sources as if they represented a common intervention or directly comparable outcome would obscure important contextual differences.

The review focuses on Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Peer-reviewed studies directly relevant to entrepreneurship education form the principal evidence base, supplemented by official policy and institutional documents where they are needed to interpret national initiatives. International systematic and bibliometric reviews are used selectively to establish the wider conceptual and pedagogical development of EE. Recent evidence available through 2026 is included where relevant.

The evidence is interpreted according to source type and strength. Empirical studies, policy documents, conceptual essays, and institutional reports are not treated as equivalent forms of evidence, and strong national conclusions are avoided where the literature is sparse. The review is therefore selective and interpretive rather than exhaustive. Its organization follows widely used principles for improving narrative-review quality, including a clear purpose, transparent source use, appropriate referencing, attention to evidence strength, and reasoned synthesis [12].

Five recurring dimensions emerged from comparison of the literature and are used here as author-derived analytical categories rather than as an existing external framework: policy commitment, institutional provision, curriculum and pedagogy, entrepreneurial ecosystem integration, and gender and social inclusion. The concepts themselves are established in the wider literature; the contribution of this review lies in bringing them together as a common comparative lens for South Asian entrepreneurship education

II. CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

A. From Business Creation to Entrepreneurial Competence

The development of EE reflects a broader change in how entrepreneurship itself is understood. Traditional entrepreneurship courses often concentrated on business planning, financial preparation, and the establishment of new ventures. Contemporary approaches increasingly emphasize competencies such as opportunity recognition, creativity, problem-solving, experimentation, resilience, resource mobilization, networking, and the ability to create different forms of value.

This broader orientation is also visible in the research literature. Systematic and bibliometric reviews show generally positive but heterogeneous relationships between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial outcomes, as well as a growing research agenda that reaches beyond entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial learning, innovation, mindset, ecosystems, technology, and pedagogical design [2], [4], [6], [7].

A review of higher education EE research from 2002 to 2022 identified major themes including gender and pedagogy, innovation and technology transfer, entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial learning, ecosystems and self-efficacy, and the Theory of Planned Behavior [5]. Recent integrative work likewise argues for a more multidisciplinary understanding of entrepreneurship education [8]. Together, these studies suggest that judging EE only by whether students intend to start a business provides an incomplete picture of educational effectiveness.

Recent South Asian evidence reinforces this point. In Bangladesh, research on entrepreneurship education and graduate employability shows that entrepreneurship courses, faculty quality, entrepreneurial knowledge, and entrepreneurial skills can contribute to employability orientation, which in turn is associated with graduate employability [13]. This broadens the rationale for EE: entrepreneurial learning may create economic and career value even when immediate venture creation is not the outcome.

B. Experiential Pedagogy

How entrepreneurship is taught has become one of the central questions in the field. Traditional classroom approaches can provide useful conceptual and technical knowledge, but entrepreneurship itself unfolds under uncertainty, incomplete information, interpersonal negotiation, and resource constraints. These conditions are difficult to reproduce through lectures alone.

Experiential entrepreneurship education attempts to narrow the distance between learning and practice. Common approaches include live projects, opportunity identification exercises, customer interviews, venture simulations, internships, business prototyping, startup competitions, mentoring, incubation, field assignments, and engagement with practicing entrepreneurs. A systematic review found that experiential learning can contribute to entrepreneurial intention, skills, and competencies, although different activities produce different benefits and implementation challenges [10]. Another systematic review similarly found some of the strongest evidence in favor of experiential and extracurricular interventions [3].

Evidence from India provides a particularly relevant South Asian example. An experimental study comparing action-oriented EE with traditional classroom pedagogy found stronger entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention among students exposed to action learning [14]. Research based on experienced entrepreneurship educators in Indian higher education likewise identifies experiential learning, mentoring, educator experience, flexible evaluation, and extended institutional support as important elements of effective entrepreneurship education [15].

These findings caution against treating the number of entrepreneurship courses as a meaningful indicator of quality. What students are enabled to do within and around those courses may matter substantially more than the presence of the course itself.

C. Universities and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Entrepreneurship education increasingly extends beyond the classroom. Universities may connect students with incubators, entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, industry partners, government agencies, startup competitions, research commercialization activities, and other support mechanisms. These relationships can expose students to forms of knowledge and experience that formal teaching alone cannot easily reproduce.

Research on Indian higher education shows that institutional ecosystems significantly shape entrepreneurship education, particularly through institutional attitudes toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship-promotion activities [16]. This reinforces an important distinction: entrepreneurship education is not simply a subject delivered by an instructor. It can form part of a wider institutional environment through which students gain resources, relationships, and opportunities to test entrepreneurial ideas.

D. Inclusion and Context

Entrepreneurship education also operates within socially differentiated environments. Research on women entrepreneurs across South Asia identifies interconnected barriers involving finance, entrepreneurship education, professional networks, infrastructure, managerial capability, family responsibilities, and gender discrimination [17]. These constraints matter directly for EE because equal formal access to the same course does not necessarily create equal opportunities to act on entrepreneurial learning.

Context therefore matters at several levels: national institutions, university capability, local entrepreneurial ecosystems, cultural expectations, gender relations, geography, and the economic structure within which students attempt to use entrepreneurial knowledge. This is especially important in South Asia, where educational and entrepreneurial opportunities vary sharply between countries and also within them.

III. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION ACROSS SOUTH ASIA

A. Afghanistan

The available evidence on Afghanistan remains limited, making cautious interpretation essential. Bazgar and Wani examined entrepreneurship education within Afghanistan's technical and vocational education and training context through qualitative interviews with students, teachers, and officials [18]. Their study reported limited integration of specific entrepreneurial learning, weak strategic development, inadequate preparation, and misalignment between technical education and labor-market needs.

The findings reveal substantial institutional challenges within the examined settings. However, a single study does not provide an adequate foundation for broad conclusions about the national education system. Afghanistan demonstrates two concurrent limitations: restricted entrepreneurship education and insufficient evidence to assess these conditions. Further research is necessary across universities, technical and vocational institutions, instructor development, informal

entrepreneurial learning, and partnerships with local enterprises.

B. Bangladesh

Bangladesh now has a stronger empirical evidence base than was available during earlier regional reviews. A study of university students found that entrepreneurship programs and access to finance play important roles in the processes through which entrepreneurial intentions are formed [19]. The study is useful because it shows that educational exposure operates alongside students' perceptions of whether they have access to resources that make entrepreneurial action realistic.

Qualitative research in private higher education institutions in Bangladesh offers more evidence about how institutions implement changes. Interviews with students, alumni, educators, and employers showed barriers such as curriculum design, assessment methods, university-industry partnerships, regulatory and economic factors, technology, institutional support, developing entrepreneurial skills, and access to entrepreneurial platforms. [20]. These findings shift the discussion away from whether universities simply offer entrepreneurship courses toward the quality and connectedness of those courses.

Recent evidence also broadens the discussion beyond entrepreneurial intention. A study of Bangladeshi university students found that entrepreneurship courses, faculty quality, entrepreneurial knowledge, and entrepreneurial skills contribute to employability orientation and, through that pathway, to graduate employability [13]. This is important because it recognizes educational value even when students do not immediately establish new ventures.

Outside formal higher education, the Nobin Udyokta initiative offers another perspective. Research on the program shows the relevance of combining entrepreneurial development with finance and structured support, particularly for women entrepreneurs [21]. Although such initiatives should not be treated as equivalent to university EE, they illustrate why education alone may be insufficient when potential entrepreneurs lack capital, networks, and ongoing support.

Recent research on Bangladesh shows that the main challenge is no longer just having entrepreneurship education. Now, the focus is on improving curriculum quality, employability, institutional strength, partnerships, and the overall environment for entrepreneurial learning.

C. Bhutan

Bhutan offers one of the most distinctive contexts for entrepreneurship education in South Asia. Van Gelderen considers what entrepreneurship education might look like in a society whose national development philosophy is organized around Gross National Happiness (GNH) [22]. Rather than assuming that conventional entrepreneurship education can be imported unchanged, the essay argues for approaches that reflect Bhutanese values, sustainability, community, and limits to purely material interpretations of entrepreneurial success.

The importance of this contribution lies less in measuring the effectiveness of Bhutan's national EE system than in

challenging the assumption that entrepreneurship education is culturally neutral. A model centered exclusively on rapid growth, wealth accumulation, or aggressive scaling may not fit every national development context.

Van Gelderen's contribution is conceptual rather than an empirical national evaluation [22]. The limited empirical literature on Bhutan therefore remains an important research gap. Further studies are needed on actual curricula, student learning, teacher preparation, technical and vocational provision, incubation, and how GNH principles are translated into educational practice.

D. India

India has one of the most extensive documented combinations of entrepreneurship policy, innovation infrastructure, and empirical higher education research in South Asia. The Startup India Action Plan introduced industry-academia partnerships, incubation, innovation centers, and student-focused innovation activities [23]. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes multidisciplinary learning, vocational exposure, creativity, innovation, flexibility, and skills development [24]. The continuation of the Atal Innovation Mission through AIM 2.0 further extends the national effort to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship across schools, higher education, industry, government, and communities [25].

The academic literature adds an important layer to these policy developments. Research in Indian higher education highlights mentoring, experiential learning, educator capability, flexible evaluation, institutional support, and the institutional ecosystem as important components of EE [15], [16]. Experimental evidence also favors action-oriented pedagogy over conventional classroom instruction for entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention [14]. Another study reports a positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention among higher education students while also showing differences associated with demographic and educational characteristics [26].

India therefore illustrates the potential value of combining policy, institutional experimentation, and experiential learning. Its scale, however, makes generalization difficult. Practices found in well-resourced universities and major innovation hubs cannot automatically be assumed to represent institutions across every state, discipline, or socioeconomic setting.

E. Maldives

The Maldives remains comparatively under-researched, although recent evidence provides a stronger basis for analysis than was previously available. A 2026 study examined students from four Maldivian higher education institutions and investigated relationships among entrepreneurship courses, mentorship, entrepreneurial skills and capabilities, and entrepreneurial aspirations [27]. The results complicate a simple course-to-intention assumption. Skills and capabilities were positively associated with entrepreneurial aspirations, while courses and mentorship did not show significant direct effects on aspirations. Courses nevertheless contributed positively to skills and to mentorship effectiveness [27]. This points to an indirect educational pathway in which course

design matters because it helps build capabilities rather than because course exposure alone immediately changes aspirations.

This study shows how important experiential learning, strong industry partnerships, and entrepreneurship education tailored to a small-island economy can be. Because the sample was limited and specific to this context, the results should not be seen as a full national assessment. Instead, this research offers an early contribution to the small but growing field of entrepreneurship education studies in the country.

F. Nepal

Evidence from Nepal is developing but remains institution-specific. A qualitative study of students in Kathmandu University's Master of Technical and Vocational Education and Training program found that entrepreneurship-related courses, practical experience, mentorship, networking, exposure to entrepreneurs, events, and other learning opportunities contributed to the development of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills [28].

This evidence supports the value of experiential and socially connected learning within Nepalese technical and vocational higher education. The small qualitative sample, however, means that the findings cannot be generalized to Nepal's entire education system.

Gender-related evidence adds another dimension. Research on young women in Nepal identifies entrepreneurship education among the factors associated with entrepreneurial intention [29]. Considered alongside broader South Asian evidence on women's entrepreneurial barriers [17], this suggests that EE design needs to account for social expectations, access to finance and networks, and gender-specific constraints rather than assuming that participation in a course automatically creates equal entrepreneurial opportunity.

G. Pakistan

Pakistan has strengthened the formal position of entrepreneurship within higher education. The Higher Education Commission's Undergraduate Education Policy, Version 1.1, effective from fall 2023, includes entrepreneurship within general education and emphasizes applied knowledge, creativity, field experience, and competency-based learning [30].

University-based incubation has also become a visible element of the higher education innovation infrastructure. The Higher Education Commission's Business Incubation Center program is designed to help universities translate knowledge and innovation into startup activity by providing infrastructure, mentoring, networks, and related support [31].

Recent empirical research allows these policy developments to be considered more critically. A study of 600 final-year university students found positive associations between Pakistan's policy-driven entrepreneurship education environment and entrepreneurial intentions, while emphasizing the role of institutional support and mindset-related factors [32]. Research on university Business Incubation Centers likewise reports that incubation services can support startup development, particularly when accompanied by supportive government policies, financial incentives, institutional support, and enabling regulatory conditions [33].

Pakistan therefore provides a useful example of entrepreneurship education operating across several connected levels: national higher education policy, university curricula, institutional support, and incubation. The next question is not simply whether entrepreneurship has been incorporated into higher education, but whether implementation quality is sufficiently consistent across institutions with different resources and capabilities.

H. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a longstanding higher education interest in entrepreneurship, but the available evidence continues to identify institutional constraints. An exploratory study of entrepreneurship education in Sri Lankan state universities reported limitations involving resources, lecturers' entrepreneurial capabilities, stakeholder engagement, policy support, and university-industry relationships [34].

The Sri Lankan case reflects a pattern visible elsewhere in the region: entrepreneurship can be present within a curriculum without being deeply embedded in institutional practice. Students may complete entrepreneurship courses while receiving limited exposure to entrepreneurs, industry, investors, or real venture-development processes. More recent empirical work is needed on incubation, digital entrepreneurship, experiential pedagogy, graduate careers, and differences among institutions and regions.

IV. CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS

There is not enough regional evidence to accurately rank South Asian countries from least to most advanced. To do this, we would need shared indicators, standardized data, comparable national evidence, and a clear scoring method, but these are not available right now. Instead, it is better to compare the types of evidence we have, look for common trends, and identify where information is missing.

Table 1. Comparative Evidence on Entrepreneurship Education in South Asia

Country	Nature of evidence reviewed	Main documented pattern	Key evidence gap
Afghanistan	TVET-focused qualitative research	Limited explicit EE integration in the institutions studied; concerns about strategy and labor-market alignment [18].	Very limited recent national evidence
Bangladesh	Student surveys, stakeholder research, employability evidence, and program studies	Growing university engagement alongside curriculum, collaboration, institutional, and ecosystem barriers [13], [19]-[21].	Need longitudinal and public-private comparative studies
Bhutan	Primarily contextual and conceptual evidence	Strong case for culturally grounded, GNH-compatible entrepreneurship education [22].	Very limited empirical evaluation
India	Policy documents and multiple empirical studies	Extensive documented policy infrastructure and evidence supporting experiential pedagogy and institutional ecosystems [14]-[16], [23]-[26].	Large institutional and regional variation
Maldives	Recent higher education quantitative evidence	Skills predict aspirations more directly than course or mentorship exposure; course effects may be indirect [27].	Small evidence base and limited longitudinal research
Nepal	Small qualitative and survey studies	Hands-on experience, courses, networking, and social context appear important [28], [29].	Evidence remains institution- and population-specific
Pakistan	Higher education policy and recent student and incubation studies	Stronger formal integration through HEC policy and BICs; effectiveness depends on institutional support [30]-[33].	Need longer-term venture and graduate outcomes
Sri Lanka	Institutional and exploratory evidence	Persistent resource, faculty, stakeholder, policy, and university-industry constraints [34].	Need newer empirical and longitudinal studies

A. Policy Commitment and Policy-to-Practice Translation

Policy commitment varies across the region, but the more important analytical question is whether policy translates into educational practice. India and Pakistan provide the clearest contemporary examples of explicit connections among national policy, universities, innovation, incubation, and entrepreneurship support [23]-[25], [30]-[33]. Even in these cases, institutional capability conditions implementation.

Comparative evidence shows that policy commitment is about more than just having strategies or initiatives in place. For a policy to work well, it needs strong implementation, well-prepared educators, sufficient funding, strong institutional incentives, partnerships, and ways to engage students in entrepreneurship. The main issue is not just adding entrepreneurship to policy, but what happens after it becomes part of the curriculum.

B. Institutional Provision

Universities differ substantially in their ability to provide entrepreneurship centers, incubators, experienced educators, mentoring, industry access, startup networks, and interdisciplinary entrepreneurship opportunities. Evidence from India and Pakistan documents relatively developed institutional infrastructures, while studies from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka continue to identify gaps in university-industry relationships and institutional support [15], [16], [20], [31], [34].

In Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives, challenges are both substantive and evidential, as the limited number of studies hinders assessment of the national depth and quality of entrepreneurship education. The lack of published evidence should not be equated with an absence of

entrepreneurship activity. The strength of a country's research base is not the same thing as the strength of its entrepreneurship education system.

C. Curriculum and Pedagogy

One of the strongest cross-country conclusions concerns pedagogy. International systematic evidence and South Asian empirical research both question passive, theory-heavy approaches to entrepreneurship education. Project work, action learning, incubation, mentoring, exposure to entrepreneurs, networking, competitions, internships, and other experiential activities give students opportunities to apply knowledge under conditions closer to entrepreneurial practice [3], [10], [14], [15].

The Indian experimental evidence on action learning and the Nepalese qualitative evidence on hands-on learning reinforce this conclusion [14], [28]. The Maldivian findings add an important qualification: course exposure alone may be less important than the competencies developed through that exposure [27]. The curriculum question is therefore not only what entrepreneurship students are taught, but what they are enabled to do, experience, test, and learn from.

D. Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Integration

The evidence also supports moving beyond a classroom-only understanding of EE. University entrepreneurship is strengthened when students can access mentors, incubators, industry partners, finance, entrepreneurial communities, policy support, and startup infrastructure. Pakistan's recent BIC evidence demonstrates this directly, while studies from India and Bangladesh show the importance of institutional ecosystems and external collaboration [16], [20], [31], [33].

The implication is not that every university needs to reproduce a complete commercial startup ecosystem internally. Even institutions with limited resources can build relationships with local entrepreneurs, alumni, small businesses, chambers of commerce, financial institutions, public agencies, and community organizations. What matters is the creation of credible bridges between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial practice.

E. Gender and Social Inclusion

The regional evidence demonstrates that entrepreneurial opportunity is socially uneven. Women entrepreneurs across South Asia face intersecting challenges involving finance, networks, infrastructure, education, skills, gender discrimination, and family responsibilities [17]. Evidence from Nepal also shows that entrepreneurship education operates within gendered social and motivational contexts [29].

Inclusive entrepreneurship education needs to do more than just ensure equal enrollment. Programs should provide targeted mentoring, accessible networks, role models, financial literacy training, community involvement, and flexible ways to participate, and clear paths that link underrepresented learners to support. These factors matter just as much for rural learners, students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation university students, and those who live far from major entrepreneurial centers. The main question is not just who gets access to entrepreneurship education, but also who can truly benefit from the opportunities it offers.

V. DISCUSSION

Three broad conclusions emerge from the regional evidence.

First, Entrepreneurship education has become much more prominent in higher education, employment, innovation, and enterprise development across South Asia. Many universities and organizations now offer courses, innovation programs, incubators, skills training, and entrepreneurship policies. However, just having these programs does not guarantee they are effective. For example, a course might not offer real hands-on learning, an incubator might not work closely with teaching, and a national policy might not provide enough support for faculty or students. As a result, the main challenge in the region is now about how well these programs are put into practice, not just whether they exist.

Second, entrepreneurship education is better understood as a way to build skills and abilities, not just as a means to boost entrepreneurial intention. Intention matters, but it is only one part of a longer educational and career path. For example, evidence from the Maldives shows that taking a course did not directly raise entrepreneurial aspirations, but building skills and capabilities did [27]. The Bangladesh evidence adds another perspective by connecting entrepreneurship education with employability orientation and graduate employability [13].

A more practical view suggests that educational experiences help students build knowledge and skills. These abilities then boost their confidence, expand their networks, and encourage them to seek out opportunities. As a result, these

factors shape how they approach their careers or entrepreneurship and affect their long-term success. Not every student who takes entrepreneurship courses will start a business. Some might join startups, work in family businesses, innovate within established companies, become self-employed, launch social ventures, or simply become more adaptable and open to new opportunities in their jobs.

Third, the quality and amount of evidence vary from country to country. India, Pakistan, and more recently Bangladesh have built up fairly large bodies of recent research. On the other hand, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives have much less evidence available. Sri Lanka does have relevant studies, but there are still few recent large-scale evaluations. This unevenness matters, and it is important not to see differences in publication numbers as a clear measure of how well each country is doing.

A. A Provisional Regional Entrepreneurship Education Strengthening Framework

Based on the cross-country synthesis, this review introduces the Regional Entrepreneurship Education Strengthening Framework (REE-SF) as a provisional analytical framework rather than an empirically validated model. The framework synthesizes recurring relationships identified in the literature. While its individual concepts are grounded in prior research, their integration into this five-part comparative structure for South Asia constitutes the primary contribution of this review.

➤ *Coherent Policy and Implementation Capacity*

Entrepreneurship policy must be integrated with educational implementation, funding, educator development, institutional incentives, and measurable outcomes. Adoption of policy alone is inadequate. The effectiveness of such policies relies on the capacity of educational institutions to translate policy objectives into substantive student experiences.

➤ *Capable and Connected Educational Institutions*

Universities and technical or vocational schools need qualified teachers, teamwork across different fields, strong organizational backing, good facilities, and links to outside entrepreneurial partners. Each institution's strengths should be considered in its own context. Not all schools need the same resources as large city research universities, but every institution should offer solid entrepreneurial learning that fits its unique setting.

➤ *Experiential and Competency-Oriented Pedagogy*

Entrepreneurship education works best when students learn by doing. This includes hands-on activities like experiments, projects, mentoring, solving real problems, and talking with entrepreneurs, instead of mainly listening to lectures or writing business plans. The main goal is not to turn every student project into a business, but to help students experience uncertainty, learn from feedback, spot opportunities, work with others, and deal with limited resources.

➤ *Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Connectivity*

Students need access to networks, incubators, funding, industry contacts, government support, entrepreneurial

communities, alumni, and other resources that help them put their learning into practice. Universities do not have to offer every resource themselves. Instead, they can focus on building strong connections between students and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem.

➤ *Inclusive Participation and Contextual Adaptation*

Entrepreneurship education needs to consider factors like gender, geography, socioeconomic inequality, culture, local economic structures, and national development goals. A one-size-fits-all curriculum does not work everywhere. This is especially true in South Asia, where social, institutional, and economic conditions vary widely.

The five pillars are interconnected. Strong policy without institutional capability may produce symbolic rather than effective implementation. Experiential curricula without ecosystem access may limit students' ability to act on acquired competencies. Incubation infrastructure without inclusive access may reproduce existing inequalities. Likewise, models imported without adaptation may fail to reflect the economic, institutional, and cultural realities of particular countries.

REE-SF should therefore be understood as a hypothesis-generating synthesis derived from the literature reviewed here. Its value lies in organizing a set of relationships that can be tested rather than in presenting a finished measurement model. Future empirical research should examine whether and how the five pillars interact and whether stronger alignment among them predicts better educational and entrepreneurial outcomes.

B. Implications for Policy and Higher Education

For policymakers, the central priority is to shift from counting programs toward evaluating their quality and outcomes. Indicators should distinguish between course availability, student participation, experiential learning, competency development, faculty capability, incubation use, external engagement, venture activity, employability, and longer-term career outcomes.

For higher education institutions, faculty development deserves particular attention. Effective experiential entrepreneurship education requires educators who can facilitate uncertainty, connect students with external actors, supervise entrepreneurial projects, and integrate reflection with practice. Partnerships with entrepreneurs, industry, incubators, financial institutions, alumni, and local communities can extend the learning environment beyond university boundaries.

Universities should also avoid assuming that an incubator alone creates an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Meaningful ecosystem integration depends on active relationships, accessible mentoring, relevant expertise, student participation, and connections between entrepreneurial support and the curriculum.

Regional cooperation could also be valuable. South Asian institutions face several shared challenges but operate under different resource conditions and policy systems. Cross-country exchange of curricular models, educator-development practices, incubation experience, inclusion strategies, and

evaluation methods could strengthen regional learning without requiring standardized national models.

C. Limitations and Future Research

This review has several limitations. First, the available literature is unevenly distributed among countries, limiting the comparability of national evidence. Second, much of the entrepreneurship education literature, including within South Asia, continues to rely on cross-sectional student surveys and entrepreneurial intention measures. Such evidence cannot establish long-term educational or entrepreneurial impact.

Third, this article is a structured narrative synthesis rather than a formal systematic review or meta-analysis. It prioritizes analytical integration and contextual comparison rather than exhaustive retrieval, formal risk-of-bias assessment, or quantitative effect estimation. Fourth, the review primarily draws on English-language academic and policy sources; relevant scholarship and institutional documents published in national or local languages may therefore be underrepresented.

Future research should place greater emphasis on longitudinal designs that follow students after entrepreneurship education and examine actual venture creation and survival, entrepreneurial competencies and behavior, innovation outcomes, graduate employability, career trajectories, and entrepreneurial activity. More experimental and quasi-experimental work is also needed to compare pedagogical approaches such as action learning, mentoring, simulations, customer discovery, internships, incubation, and digital learning.

Faculty capability remains another under-researched area. Future studies should examine educators' experience, training, entrepreneurial exposure, professional networks, teaching practices, and institutional incentives. Research should also investigate more directly how access to incubators, finance, industry, alumni, public agencies, and entrepreneurial communities influences learning and venture outcomes.

There is a need for more research in Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka to help balance the regional evidence base. In larger countries, it is also important to focus on rural institutions, smaller cities, and universities that are not part of the main entrepreneurship hubs. Factors like gender, socioeconomic background, geography, disability, family expectations, digital access, and access to finance should be studied more closely to understand how they affect participation and outcomes.

Finally, the proposed REE-SF requires empirical testing. Future studies could operationalize the five pillars, develop measurable indicators, compare institutions or national settings, and test whether stronger policy-to-practice alignment, institutional capability, experiential pedagogy, ecosystem connectivity, and inclusive participation are associated with stronger educational and entrepreneurial outcomes.

VI. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship education has become an increasingly visible component of education, employment, innovation, and enterprise-development agendas across South Asia. However, regional evidence indicates that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education cannot be assessed solely by quantifying courses, policies, or entrepreneurship centers.

Extending Rai's regional policy analysis [11] with more recent evidence, this review shows that the central challenge has shifted toward quality of implementation: how entrepreneurship is taught, how institutions support entrepreneurial learning, how students connect to entrepreneurial ecosystems, how competencies are developed and evaluated, and how educational opportunities are made inclusive.

The strongest available evidence supports a transition from curriculum-centered entrepreneurship education toward competency-based, experiential, institutionally supported, and ecosystem-connected learning. At the same time, the diversity of South Asian countries makes a single standardized regional model inappropriate. Bhutan's GNH context, the Maldives' small-island economy, Afghanistan's technical and vocational constraints, India's extensive innovation infrastructure, Pakistan's university incubation system, and the institutional challenges documented in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka all demonstrate the importance of contextual adaptation.

The proposed REE-SF captures this argument through five interdependent areas: policy implementation, institutional capability, experiential pedagogy, ecosystem connectivity, and inclusive participation. It is deliberately provisional. Its purpose is not to rank countries or offer a universal formula, but to provide a structured basis for future empirical investigation and policy discussion.

The next phase of entrepreneurship education research in South Asia should therefore move beyond asking whether entrepreneurship education increases students' intentions to become entrepreneurs. More consequential questions concern what students actually learn, whether they can apply that learning, what institutional conditions enable them to do so, who gains access to those opportunities, and what economic, entrepreneurial, and career outcomes emerge over time. Answering those questions would move the regional conversation from documenting the expansion of entrepreneurship education toward understanding its actual educational and socioeconomic significance.

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