

Role of Higher Educational Institutions in Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship



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Abstract

This study examines the role of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among student entrepreneurs. In the knowledge-driven economy, HEIs are expected to function not only as centres of teaching and research but also as strategic platforms for entrepreneurial capacity-building, startup incubation, and innovation ecosystem development. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, and primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 21 student entrepreneurs associated with the Institution's Incubation Centre. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and mean scores. The findings indicate that institutional support plays a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial intention and startup initiation. Incubation ecosystem support received 95.2% positive agreement, while institutional infrastructure received 95.3% positive agreement. Experiential learning opportunities and institutional innovation culture each received 95.2% positive agreement. Peer and role-model influence emerged as the strongest factor, with 100% of respondents agreeing that interaction with successful student entrepreneurs motivated startup initiation. The study concludes that incubation facilities, infrastructure, seed funding, mentorship, academic flexibility, experiential learning, industry exposure, and pro-startup culture are essential for strengthening innovation and entrepreneurship in HEIs. The findings offer practical insights for academic administrators and policymakers to improve institutional startup ecosystems.

Keywords: Higher Education, Entrepreneurial Intention, HEI Ecosystem, Startup Incubation, Innovation Culture

I. Introduction:

Innovation and entrepreneurship are perceived to be significant drivers of national competitiveness, employment creation and socio-economic development in the new knowledge-based global economy. The Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are no longer expected to be only the places of teaching and research, but are expected to be strategic centres for innovation, capacity building of entrepreneurs, and development of start-up ecosystem. The findings from very previous studies have revealed that entrepreneurial education and self-efficacy have an important role in the formation of entrepreneurial intention of students in higher education institutions (Tannady, 2023). Similarly, HEIs contribute to developing innovativeness and entrepreneurial passion among students by creating learning environments that support creativity, initiative, and opportunity recognition (Porkodi et al., 2023). In developing countries like India, HEIs have a significant responsibility to motivate young people to take up entrepreneurship by emphasizing entrepreneurial education, multidisciplinary learning, incubation support, mentoring, funding access, and institution-industry partnerships. Higher education has long been recognized as an important platform for promoting entrepreneurship among students (Jeyalakshmi, 2015). Educational institutions also contribute to developing

entrepreneurship capacities by creating awareness, encouraging enterprise-oriented thinking, and supporting student participation in innovation-related activities (Menaka & Bharathi, 2024). Similarly, HEIs play a significant role in entrepreneur development by strengthening institutional support systems and entrepreneurial learning environments (Gopinath & Shreekanth, 2024). From an institutional strategy perspective, HEIs must create structured mechanisms such as incubation centres, academic flexibility, experiential learning, and innovation-oriented policies to convert students' ideas into viable startup initiatives (Girisha & Sarala, 2024). Recent studies also emphasize that HEIs support entrepreneurial skills development by providing academic, infrastructural, and ecosystem-based support to students (Rekha et al., 2025).

II. Literature Review:

Previous research pointed out that entrepreneurial education plays a crucial role in developing students' intentions, self-efficacy, and opportunities. Digital entrepreneurship education has also been found to promote entrepreneurial intention by strengthening students' entrepreneurial intuition, engagement, and exposure to digital platforms (Wibowo et al., 2023). Researchers have also pointed out that experiential learning methods, such

as project-based learning, internships, and practical innovation-based activities, are of critical significance in encouraging innovation among students. In the Indian engineering education context, innovation-oriented teaching and institutional practices have been emphasized as important contributors to students' entrepreneurial and innovation capabilities (Pratik et al., 2013). Research has also emphasized the importance of infrastructure support structures such as incubators, technology transfer offices, and research funding in the context of innovation-driven entrepreneurship. Innovation intermediaries can function as institutional entrepreneurs by facilitating innovation-oriented systems, institutional coordination, and support mechanisms (Selviaridis et al., 2023). Faculty involvement is considered an essential enabler in this area, along with mentorship support from industries. Government policies and institutional initiatives in Indian HEIs have also been identified as important mechanisms for promoting entrepreneurship, innovation, and self-reliant development (Kandakatla et al., 2021). Some researchers, however, have argued that HEIs are handicapped by the lack of practical experience, unnecessarily rigid teaching methodologies, and inadequate support structures.

Ilyas et al. (2024) argued that design thinking is suitable for engineering students because it strengthens problem-solving, creativity, and opportunity recognition. Bragelien and Voldsund (2024) highlighted that project-based entrepreneurship education, supported by industry mentors and sustainability orientation, improves students' entrepreneurial learning. Ramírez-Montoya et al. (2025) further showed that co-creation and social entrepreneurship in higher education can strengthen innovation, collaboration, and future-oriented entrepreneurial development. Recent studies also show that entrepreneurial ecosystems in higher education are important for promoting innovation, inclusion, and social entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial ecosystems play a significant role in driving national innovation and entrepreneurship by connecting institutional support, participation, resources, and opportunity creation (Alkharafi, 2024). The literature shows that other factors play a significant role in the strengthening of innovation and entrepreneurial intention among students, namely the entrepreneurship education, experiential learning, support of the innovation incubator, mentorship, support of policy and innovation ecosystem.

III. Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the role of higher educational institutions in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship.

2. To analyze entrepreneur students' perceptions of entrepreneurial support provided by HEIs.
3. To identify key institutional factors influencing innovation and entrepreneurial intentions.
4. To suggest measures for improving entrepreneurship promotion in HEIs.

IV. Research Methodology

a. Research Design

The study employs descriptive research design which is a survey approach to investigate student entrepreneurs' perceptions on the support provided by the institutions for innovation and entrepreneurship. This design is suitable since it is used to systematically describe the relationship between the following constructs: incubation facilities, infrastructure, curriculum exposure, mentorship, policy support, and interaction with the industry and entrepreneurial intention in educational institutions.

b. Sample and Data Collection

Primary data was collected by using structured questionnaire with students of higher education institutions who already have ideas for starting their own business, and are connected with the Incubation Centre of the institution. Twenty-one student entrepreneurs responded to the survey. A limitation of the sample size was that only students engaged in the startup incubation programme were included. Convenience sampling was employed because it was not possible to obtain a random sample. The study is thus exploratory and findings are to a certain extent limited in their generalizability.

c. Instrument Design

The questionnaire comprised of two sections. In section A the general data about the students' startups was gathered such as Programme, year, nature and stage of startup. For Section B, the questions were related to institutional support for innovation and entrepreneurship, which was measured on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The questionnaire consist of two sections:

- **Section A:** Details about the Start-ups of the students
- **Section B:** Statements related to innovation and entrepreneurship support in HEIs, measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5).

Survey Questionnaire:

Section A: General Information about Startup

1. Program of study
2. Year of study
3. Nature of Startup: Technology / Service / Product / Social Enterprise

4.Stage of Startup: Idea stage / Prototype / Early operations / Revenue generating

Section B: Innovation and Entrepreneurship (5-point Likert Scale)

1. The fact that there is an incubation ecosystem in my institution prompted me to found a startup.
2. The institutional infrastructure (workspace, labs, internet, equipment) was available, which will affect the decision.
3. The encouragement of the faculty was also a major factor in helping me get started with my startup.
4. Exposure to entrepreneurship through curriculum encouraged me to pursue a startup.
5. Institutional policies such as academic flexibility and support schemes facilitated my decision.
6. The innovation-oriented environment of the institution increased my confidence to begin a startup.
7. Workshops, innovation activities, and competitions increased my entrepreneurial interest.
8. Experiential learning opportunities helped convert my idea into a startup initiative.

9. Availability of financial support or seed funding influenced my decision to start a startup.
10. Institutional support reduced barriers associated with starting a venture.
11. Interaction with successful student entrepreneurs motivated me to start a startup.
12. Industry exposure provided by the institution influenced my startup initiation.
13. The institutional innovation culture positively impacted my entrepreneurial intention.
14. In your opinion, what is the most important step your institution should take to promote innovation and entrepreneurship among students?

d. Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean scores. The results are presented in tabular and interpretative form.

The respondent’s-student entrepreneurs were majorly from Engineering program like Mechanical, E&TC, Artificial Intelligence & Data Science, Robotics and Automation, CSE (IoT, Cyber Security), Pharm-D etc. and were studying third/fourth year of their respective program.

Table 1: Institutional Infrastructure & Ecosystem Support

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
The presence of an incubation ecosystem in my institution motivated me to start a startup.	85.7	9.5	4.8	0	0
Availability of institutional infrastructure (workspace, labs, internet, equipment) influenced my decision.	81	14.3	4.8	0	0
Availability of financial support or seed funding influenced my decision to start a startup.	66.7	23.8	9.5	0	0
Institutional support reduced barriers associated with starting a venture.	47.6	38.1	4.8	9.5	0

Interpretation: A majority of respondents perceive the Institutional Infrastructure & Ecosystem Support as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Table 2: Academic & Policy Support

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Exposure to entrepreneurship through curriculum encouraged me to pursue a startup.	52.4	9.5	28.6	4.8	4.8
Institutional policies such as academic flexibility and support schemes facilitated my decision.	57.1	28.6	9.5	4.8	0
Experiential learning opportunities helped convert my idea into a startup initiative.	61.9	33.3	4.8	0	0

Interpretation: A majority of respondents perceive the Academic & Policy Support as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Table 3: Faculty & Mentorship Influence

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Faculty encouragement played a significant role in my startup initiation.	57.1	33.3	4.8	0	4.8

Interpretation: A majority of respondents perceive the Faculty & Mentorship Influence as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Table 4: Innovation Culture & Institutional Environment

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
The innovation-oriented environment of the institution increased my confidence to begin a startup.	52.4	28.6	19	0	0
The institutional innovation culture positively impacted my entrepreneurial intention.	57.1	38.1	4.8	0	0

Interpretation: A majority of respondents perceive the Innovation Culture & Institutional Environment as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Table 5: Skill Development & Entrepreneurial Exposure Activities

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Workshops, innovation activities, and competitions increased my entrepreneurial interest.	47.6	33.3	14.3	0	4.8
Industry exposure provided by the institution influenced my startup initiation.	57.1	19	23.8	0	0

Interpretation: A majority of respondents perceive the Skill Development & Entrepreneurial Exposure Activities as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Table 6: Peer & Role Model Influence

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Interaction with successful student entrepreneurs motivated me to start a startup.	57.1	42.9	0	0	0

Interpretation: A majority of respondents perceive the Peer & Role Model Influence as supportive of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Table 7: Open-Ended Strategic Recommendation

Statement : In your opinion, what is the most important step your institution should take to promote innovation and entrepreneurship among students?
Responses:
1. Providing incubation support, mentorship, funding opportunities, and access to prototyping facilities, along with academic flexibility to work on real startup projects, is the most important step to promote innovation and entrepreneurship among students.
2. The Culture and thinking to promote founder and celebrate failure to, it's should start its own fund like Campus Funds by IIM, IIMA ventures or SICE by IIT Bombay
3. Be sure to carry out all of the accomplishments of startups at department level and even at Institute level for improved recognition
4. The most important step is to give every student the chance to work on real-world, hands-on projects, so they don't just learn about innovation, they actually experience it.
5. Our institute should initiate awareness about the entrepreneurial communities present in the campus and also outside the campus so that more number of students will get an idea of how exactly startups work and how they can innovate something and be an entrepreneur.

6. Big working space and reasonable funding will shape the confidence and future of the students
7. Every institution should have an Incubation center
8. Seminars to promote startup culture amongst student similar to pre-placement talks
9. I think finances is the biggest problem in hurdle over here people should have like more budgets for research-focused products and most importantly research products take a lot of time and energy to deal with Patience is also necessary
10. Increase the number of competitive technical events to encourage student participation in such events from start of their graduation.
11. I think the institution must combine entrepreneurship in the very core of its curriculum. This could help many young and confused entrepreneurs reach their decision on whether they should start a startup or not
12. Ideation, Funding (Seed), Workspace.

Interpretation: Students stress the significance of incubation support, seed funding, workspace, and mentorship to ease barriers to start-ups and develop entrepreneurial self-confidence. They also stress the significance of experiential learning, start-up culture, curriculum inclusion, recognition, and awareness to develop innovation within the institution.

V. Results and Analysis

The results indicate a consistently positive perception of institutional support for innovation and entrepreneurship among student entrepreneurs. Incubation ecosystem support received 95.2% positive agreement, while institutional infrastructure received 95.3% positive agreement. Experiential learning opportunities recorded 95.2% positive agreement, and institutional innovation culture also received 95.2% agreement. Peer and role-model influence emerged as the strongest factor, with 100% of respondents agreeing that interaction with successful student entrepreneurs motivated startup initiation.

a. Institutional Infrastructure & Ecosystem Support

The findings indicate that institutional infrastructure and ecosystem support are major drivers of startup initiation among student entrepreneurs. Incubation ecosystem support received 95.2% positive agreement, while institutional infrastructure, including workspace, laboratories, internet, and equipment, received 95.3% positive agreement. Strong support was also given to availability of financial support and/or seed funding (90.5% positive agreement). In addition, 85.7% of the respondents believed that institutional support helped them to minimize the obstacles they faced in starting their business. The results indicate that the incubation facilities, infrastructure, access to funding and institutional supportive systems are key factors in lowering the barriers of entrepreneurship and enhancing student start-up intentions.

b. Academic & Policy Support

This finding shows that academic support and policy support are important factors that can enhance entrepreneurship among student

entrepreneurs. In this dimension, institutional policies (85.7%) and academic flexibility (95.2%) were most positively agreed upon, and experiential learning opportunities reflected the highest positive agreement. This implies that practical experiences are very effective in turning entrepreneurs' ideas into entrepreneurial ventures. However, a comparatively high neutral response was observed to the curriculum exposure (28.6%), which means that entrepreneurship should be embedded more strongly and consistently in the academic curriculum.

c. Faculty & Mentorship Influence

The encouragement by faculty positively affected the initiation of startups, with 90.4% agreement from the participants. This means that faculty mentorship is an essential component in convincing student entrepreneurs to become more confident, more motivated and more effective when starting their businesses. The weak level of neutral and negative responses also indicate that entrepreneurship motivation is related to the level of support from mentorship in an important institutional dimension.

d. Innovation Culture & Institutional Environment

The results reveal that the institutional innovation context positively affects students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Innovation-oriented environment of the institution was given 81% positive agreement, meaning that the environment at the institution promotes the students to start an enterprise. Besides, the innovation culture of institutions was 95.2% agreeable, indicating the high contribution of the innovation culture of institutions to enhance entrepreneurial intention. Based on these findings, there is a possibility of fostering a supportive innovation culture in HEIs that can boost students' confidence, motivation, and desire to become entrepreneurs.

e. Skill Development & Entrepreneurial Exposure Activities

Increased entrepreneurial interest among the students was identified as an important element of the workshops, innovation activities and competitions in 80.9% of the agreement. Industry

exposure also had an effect on the initiation of startups, with 76.1% positive agreement. Relatively higher neutral responses for industry exposure, however, suggest there is scope to increase the linkage with industries through visits to startups, internships, expert sessions and entrepreneurial engagements in the practical arena.

f. Peer & Role Model Influence

The results indicated that 100% of respondents agreed that successful student entrepreneurs' interaction encouraged the initiation of a start-up. This shows the high impact of peer role models on entrepreneurial intention. It does suggest that a successful student-led venture may provide an inspiration for confidence, less uncertainty and more involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

g. Open-Ended Strategic Recommendation

The open-ended answers highlight the importance of providing more robust incubation support, seed funding, workspace, mentorship and academic flexibility to foster entrepreneurial activities in HEIs. The responses can be sorted into the different thematic areas like start-up infrastructure, financial support, faculty and industry mentorship, curriculum integration, experiential learning, recognition of start-up achievements, competitive technical events and industry exposure. The students also pointed out that a pro-startup culture had to be built through awareness programmes, through practical projects, and through institutional mechanisms like IIM Ahmedabad Ventures or the Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) that provides funding for startups. From these recommendations, it can be concluded that the students would like HEIs to offer both structural and cultural assistance to boost innovation and entrepreneurship.

VI. Discussion

From the results of all the tables, it can be observed that the institutional infrastructure and incubation ecosystem support are the most influencing factors for entrepreneurial intention, with an overwhelming level of positive agreement. According to Ahmad et al. (2018), the entrepreneurial university ecosystem depends strongly on institutional infrastructure, resource support, and innovation-oriented systems. Similarly, in the present study, financial support, availability of space, and incubation facilities were found to reduce barriers for startup ventures and build confidence levels among students of HEIs.

Academic and policy support, including experiential learning and flexibility of academia, also play an important role in turning ideas into startup ventures. Doddamani (2022) emphasized that educational institutions contribute to entrepreneurship capacity development by creating

academic support systems and encouraging students toward entrepreneurial activities. In the present study also, faculty mentorship and peer role models were found to build stronger entrepreneurial motivation levels, while innovation culture and exposure activities shaped entrepreneurial interest. From the open-ended comments, it can be observed that there is an increased need for a startup ecosystem, incubation facilities, and seed funding, along with the inclusion of entrepreneurship education. Rekha et al. (2025) also noted that higher education institutions play an important role in developing entrepreneurial skills among students through practical exposure and institutional support.

Hence, the students' suggestions on the incubation support, peer learning, recognition, and funding mechanisms are in line with the literature. This study has its limitation in the number of students involved, which is 21 student entrepreneurs and the use of convenience sampling. This is because the findings are for the specific institution and may not be generalizable. Self-reported responses and descriptive statistics are also used in the study that limits deeper use of statistics in interpreting entrepreneurial intention. The results also show that HEIs are not only academic institutions but also strategic platforms that support the development of social entrepreneurship, impact innovation and student entrepreneurial actions. Chauhan et al. (2024) underscored the importance of higher education to develop social entrepreneurship and impact innovation among university students. This is in line with the present study, which has shown that HEIs can foster entrepreneurship through establishing enablement institutional environments, practical learning experiences, and innovation propelling ecosystems.

VII. Conclusion

The study suggests that HEI has an important role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship among HEI students entrepreneurs. The results indicate that the ecosystem support of incubation, institutional infrastructure, workspace, laboratories, internet facilities, equipment and seed funding significantly affect the initiation of startups by students. These facilities overcome the obstacles of entrepreneurship and foster students' confidence in transforming their ideas into feasible startup projects. The study also supports the fact that academic and policy support is essential for the development of entrepreneurship. The students are supported in moving away from theoretical learning in real entrepreneurial contexts through experiential learning, academic flexibility, and support schemes. The mixed answers of the neutral respondents on the question of curriculum exposure suggest, however, that entrepreneurship must be brought into the mainstream of the academic

curriculum. Entrepreneurial motivation and intention are further strengthened by faculty encouragement, mentorship, creation of innovation culture, conducting faculty-led workshops and competitions, industry visits and interactions with successful student entrepreneurs, etc. Peer role models were a strong theme as it was demonstrated that student entrepreneurship success can motivate other students to become entrepreneurs. In a nutshell, HEIs must implement a 'whole person' approach that will involve providing incubation support, funding, mentoring, experiential learning, industry connections, and pro-startup culture. Enhancing these can enable HEIs to play a useful role in innovation, entrepreneurship and venture creation by students.

VIII. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Establish or Strengthen Institutional Incubation Centers

Create an incubation facility with necessary infrastructure, prototyping facilities, and startup support systems.

2. Craft a Dedicated Seed Funding Mechanism

Establish an institutional startup fund, akin to models like IIM Ahmedabad Ventures or Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE), which can provide necessary financial support.

3. Integrate Entrepreneurship into Core Curriculum

Incorporate experiential education, live projects, startup internships, and venture development opportunities into the curriculum.

4. Enhance Faculty & Mentor Engagement

Train faculty members to act as startup mentors, and engage industry leaders and successful entrepreneurs as startup mentors.

5. Strengthen Industry & Alumni Networks

Increase industry exposure through MoUs, startup industry visits, startup internships, and regular interactions with successful startup entrepreneurs.

6. Promote a Pro-Startup Culture

Recognize and celebrate startup success publicly, normalize failure as part of the startup journey, and conduct seminars and innovation sessions regularly.

7. Increase Competitive & Innovation Events

Conduct hackathons, ideation contests, and research competitions right from the early academic years.

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