

Reflection and Optimization Strategies for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Universities in the New Era

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Improving the level of innovation and entrepreneurship education in universities is not only crucial for enhancing the quality of higher education but also essential for students to develop competitive employment skills. However, many universities face multiple predicaments in implementing effective innovation and entrepreneurship education, including unsystematic course structures, overemphasis on formalized practices, insufficient student enthusiasm, and an excessive focus on winning competitions. Upon examining the actual situation in university education, it becomes evident that factors such as unclear curriculum design objectives, lack of practical content, students' insufficient understanding of courses, and inadequate support for subsequent innovation and entrepreneurship endeavors contribute to these issues. To address these concerns, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive and scientific approach to innovation and entrepreneurship education in universities, including promoting top-level design, systematically building practice-oriented courses, fostering student enthusiasm, and strengthening feedback on educational outcomes.

Keywords: innovation and entrepreneurship education, practice situation, root causes, optimization strategies

Background: Why Is Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Essential?

In an era of intense competition, universities must foster high-quality talents who align with societal demands. Innovation consciousness and spirit have become prominent requirements for talents in the current era, making it increasingly crucial for universities to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship education. Exploring existing studies on innovation and entrepreneurship education not only provides insights for this article but also reinforces the theoretical foundation.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education: Expanding Student Development Systems

Universities can innovate and transform traditional student development systems through innovation and entrepreneurship education. In the past, higher education mainly emphasized knowledge transfer. But in the modern era, this approach no longer meets talent-cultivation requirements. With the explosive growth of knowledge, university-taught knowledge's leading role is weakening, and teaching materials update slowly. Also, university-taught content is hard to apply in real-world situations, showing a gap between education and practice.

Many universities respond by enriching education content and adopting new concepts. Through classroom learning and practical training, students can develop innovative thinking and problem-solving skills. This education also creates an active learning atmosphere, promoting the overall upgrade of university education and teaching.

Academic Exploration on Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education

Universities have been actively exploring the establishment of an innovation and entrepreneurship education system. This has not only attracted high attention from the whole society but has also led to rapid growth in related academic research. Overall, academic research on this topic can be mainly divided into the following four aspects: first, the overall definition and promotion of the strategic value of innovation and entrepreneurship education. On the whole, the development of new quality productivity is a fundamental choice made by China in response to the new global technological developments, while promoting innovation and entrepreneurship education is a fundamental choice made by universities to adapt to the requirements of developing new productive forces (Wang, 2024). At the same time, with the deepening of economic globalization and the transformation of knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship education is extending both forward and backward from the higher education stage, presenting a trend towards lifelong learning (Song & Wang, 2024). Second, a comprehensive reflection on typical practices in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in universities. In practice, many universities actively explore the mode of innovation and entrepreneurship practice education for college students based on projects (Feng, Lei, & Qi, 2024), and there are two typical modes of “open” and “concentrated” innovation and entrepreneurship talent cultivation in China’s “Double First-Class” universities (Shi & Huang, 2024). The integration path of professional education and innovation and entrepreneurship education in the United States includes three typical integration models: demand-driven, technology-driven, and employment-driven (Ruan, 2023). Israel’s innovation and entrepreneurship education curriculum reform is oriented towards cultivating innovation and entrepreneurship talents, focusing on the harmony of tradition and modernity, the combination of commonality and individuality, the equal importance of discipline and integration, and the balance between inside and outside the school (Pan, 2022). The third aspect involves accurately reflecting on various predicaments that universities encounter when promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. From the perspective of the origin of innovation and entrepreneurship education, universities still face institutional, operational, and environmental predicaments (Cao, 2025), which prominently include issues such as the prevalence of entrenched customs, competition among professional disciplines, and widespread communication barriers (Jin, Zhang, & Deng, 2024).

As evident from the aforementioned, although scholars have conducted considerable in-depth research on the issues of innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education institutions, which has provided significant support for enriching and perfecting the innovation and entrepreneurship education system in universities to a certain extent, there are still two prominent problems: Firstly, there is a relative lack of precise interpretation of innovation and entrepreneurship issues in higher education institutions from a micro perspective. Most existing research offers macro-level judgments, making it challenging to clearly analyze the current specific circumstances. Secondly, there is a relative lack of specific and actionable policy recommendations, which makes it difficult to directly guide universities in carrying out specific optimization work. To address these issues, this paper attempts to accurately analyze the micro-level dilemmas of innovation and entrepreneurship, comprehensively explore the underlying causes leading to these dilemmas, and, in accordance with practical needs, propose more pragmatic suggestions for practical implementation pathways.

Practical Challenges: Multiple Challenges in the Practice of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education

Despite some achievements, universities haven’t fully realized the potential of innovation and entrepreneurship

education. They face challenges in curriculum systems, education formality, student participation, and competition-centered goals.

Incomplete Curriculum System for Education Practice

Field research shows that many universities' innovation and entrepreneurship education curricula are underdeveloped, affecting education quality. The curriculum system lacks a scientific basis, with weak connections between courses. For example, the link between theory and practice in some courses is insufficient, making it hard to inspire students' innovative and entrepreneurial spirit.

There is also a shortage of qualified teachers, mostly part-time, lacking relevant experience and research. Moreover, the assessment orientation is unclear. Traditional exams can't fully evaluate students' learning, and they fail to attract students' interest. Without a complete curriculum system, education initiatives can't be effectively implemented.

The Formalization and Concentration in Educational Practice

Innovation and entrepreneurship education has become part of higher education, but it has serious formalization problems. Driven by national policies, universities have quickly established education systems, often as policy responses rather than well-designed curricula.

Universities should design practical education content according to their characteristics. However, many simply copy others' models, neglecting their own disciplinary and student features. Although they organize many activities, they pay little attention to the effectiveness of students' innovation and entrepreneurship efforts. The low success rate of Chinese college students in innovation and entrepreneurship compared to their Western counterparts shows the need for improvement.

Insufficient Motivation of Student Subjects

Innovation and entrepreneurship education requires students' initiative. But currently, many students lack enthusiasm. Some don't understand the importance of this education, and they lack identification with it. University promotion of innovation often fails to resonate with students, and the teaching method in some courses is traditional, providing few opportunities for students to participate. Many students only engage to get credits, lacking a comprehensive understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship.

The Prominence of the Single Objective of Winning Competitions in Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education

In innovation and entrepreneurship education, overemphasizing competition wins has become a problem. Competitions have become a main way for students to get credits and scholarships, making education overly focused on winning. This not only fails to stimulate students' innovative spirit but also makes them more utilitarian.

Students focus on competition techniques instead of learning theories. They often make "strategic selections" for awards, neglecting the essence of innovation and entrepreneurship. This overemphasis also creates dissatisfaction among students, harming the educational environment.

Cause Analysis: Deep-Rooted Obstacles to Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education

The challenges in innovation and entrepreneurship education are mainly due to unclear curriculum design goals, lack of practical content, students' insufficient understanding, and inadequate follow-up support.

Unclear Course Design Objectives

Unclear course design objectives are the root cause of low-quality education. Some universities overemphasize credit training, simply including these courses in the curriculum without realizing their importance. Others focus too much on serving students' competitions, teaching plan-writing skills but not how to find innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities. This leads to a chaotic curriculum system, which is not conducive to high-quality education.

Practicality of Curriculum Content Is Lacking

The practicality of curriculum content in innovation and entrepreneurship education is weak. Innovation and entrepreneurship rely on practice to test ideas and technologies, but many university courses lack practical content. Students are mainly taught theoretical knowledge, and the teaching method is traditional. Teachers with little relevant experience can't guide students well, resulting in "formal" and "hollow" courses.

Insufficient Course Recognition Among Student Groups

Students often don't fully understand the significance of innovation and entrepreneurship courses. They see them as a way to get credits, and because many programs are theoretical, they can get credits easily, reducing the importance they attach to these courses. Also, they lack a deep understanding of the innovation and entrepreneurship spirit, so they don't realize the importance of this education.

Insufficient Subsequent Support for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Innovation and entrepreneurship need continuous support, but many universities can't provide it. Their courses are often short-term, making it hard to guide students continuously. Universities also offer little support for students' practical activities. For example, they don't provide enough "seed funding" for students' projects, and incubation platforms don't support students well.

Optimizing the Path: Improving Innovative Entrepreneurship Education Practice Through New Programs

To improve the quality of innovation and entrepreneurship education, universities should promote top-level design, develop practical courses, stimulate student enthusiasm, and strengthen educational outcome feedback.

Promoting the Top-Level Design of Innovation and Entrepreneurship

A well-designed top-level plan can guide the implementation of innovation and entrepreneurship education. Universities should set clear schedules based on long-term, medium-term, and short-term goals. For example, using three years, five years, and 10 years construction cycles can clarify goals at each stage.

They should also develop work plan according to actual needs, ensuring the rational allocation of resources. Building a high-level faculty team is important. Universities can attract outside experts with experience through talent-attraction and incentive mechanisms. Additionally, top-level design should cover resource mobilization, curriculum system design, and culture cultivation.

Developing Practical Guidance Courses

Enhancing students' practical abilities is crucial. Universities should enrich the curriculum system by reducing theoretical courses and increasing practical ones. For example, in business plan writing, students should be guided to write plans after learning key elements, so they can "learn by doing".

Teaching methods should be innovated. Using situational simulation, role-playing, and brainstorming can help students understand from a practical perspective. Inviting successful alumni to share experiences and arranging visits to entrepreneurial scenarios can also deepen students' understanding.

Inspiring Students' Active Participation and Enthusiasm

Universities should strengthen the promotion of the innovation and entrepreneurship spirit. Sharing more success stories can create a positive environment. For example, the "Dian" team at Huazhong University of Science and Technology has inspired students and activated the campus innovation atmosphere.

Material and spiritual incentives can encourage students to participate. Selecting model students can drive others, and material rewards can provide financial support for students' innovation and entrepreneurship activities.

Strengthening Education Practice Performance Feedback

Universities should establish a tracking mechanism for students' innovation and entrepreneurship. Keeping student education archives and providing timely support, such as connecting resources, can help students grow.

The evaluation mechanism should be improved. Extending the evaluation period, for example, evaluating students' first-year exploration in their third or fourth year, can cultivate their long-term commitment. Different evaluation indicators should be set according to different projects to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

Conclusion

Building an innovation-oriented nation is a significant undertaking for China to realize its modernization. Naturally, it requires higher education institutions, which bear the important responsibility of cultivating talents, to play a more significant role. However, in real-world practice, many universities face substantial challenges in innovation and entrepreneurship education. Not only is it difficult to effectively cultivate students' innovation and entrepreneurship awareness and spirit, but universities also fail to provide more assistance in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among students. Based on this, this article proposes some policy suggestions on effectively drawing on successful domestic and foreign experiences, improving top-level design, enriching curriculum practical systems, and stimulating students' positivity. Of course, due to the actual circumstances of each university, it is also necessary to adopt more targeted optimization schemes to truly effectively improve the level of innovation and entrepreneurship education in universities.

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