Curriculum Development and Design for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Undergraduate Programmes at Private Universities

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Abstract: This study focuses on the development and design of innovation and entrepreneurship education courses for undergraduate students at private universities. By analysing the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship education in private undergraduate institutions, it identifies existing issues in course development and design. Taking into account the unique characteristics of private universities and student needs, the study proposes principles that course development and design should adhere to. It then constructs a scientifically sound and well-structured curriculum system encompassing course objectives, content, implementation, and evaluation. The aim is to enhance the quality of innovation and entrepreneurship education at private undergraduate institutions, thereby strengthening students' innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities and employment competitiveness.

Keywords: Private undergraduate institutions; Innovation and entrepreneurship education; Curriculum development; Course design

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1.Introduction

In this era of accelerating global technological revolution and industrial transformation, 'mass entrepreneurship and innovation' has become a vital strategic initiative for driving high-quality economic development and realising innovation-driven societal progress[1]. This era presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges for higher education[2]. As a pivotal component in adapting to contemporary demands, innovation and entrepreneurship education has emerged as a key direction for reform and development within higher education[3]. It not only concerns students' individual career advancement and comprehensive development but also holds profound significance for implementing the national innovation-driven development strategy, optimising economic structures, and alleviating social employment pressures[4].

Private undergraduate institutions, as an indispensable component of China's higher education system, play a unique and vital role in the process of mass higher education[5]. Compared to public undergraduate institutions, private universities possess distinctive characteristics in their operational mechanisms and talent cultivation objectives, placing greater emphasis on nurturing applied talents who are responsive to market demands and possess strong practical capabilities and innovative spirit[6]. This institutional positioning endows private undergraduate institutions with a heightened responsibility in innovation and entrepreneurship education[7]. Specifically, they must stimulate students' innovative potential, cultivate entrepreneurial awareness, and enhance their innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities through effective educational programmes[8]. This empowers students to excel in competitive markets, securing high-quality employment or launching their own ventures.

Curricula serve as the core vehicle for educational activities and the pivotal pathway to achieving educational objectives. Strengthening innovation and entrepreneurship education, and developing scientifically sound curricula tailored to the characteristics and needs of private undergraduate students, constitutes the core element in enhancing the quality of such education. A well-designed innovation and entrepreneurship curriculum provides students with systematic knowledge and skills training, fosters a supportive cultural environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, guides students towards correct attitudes towards innovation and entrepreneurship, and cultivates their innovative thinking, entrepreneurial spirit, and practical abilities. This, in turn, promotes students'

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comprehensive development and facilitates their employment and entrepreneurial endeavours. However, examining the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship education in private undergraduate institutions reveals numerous pressing issues in curriculum development and design. These challenges severely constrain the effectiveness of such programmes and undermine the quality of students' innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities. Consequently, conducting in-depth research into curriculum development and design for innovation and entrepreneurship education in private undergraduate institutions holds significant practical urgency and theoretical value.

2.Current State of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Private Undergraduate Institutions and Issues in Curriculum Development and Design

2.1 Current State of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education

In recent years, with the state's increasing emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship education and society's growing demand for innovative and entrepreneurial talent, private undergraduate institutions have progressively recognised the importance of such education. They have incorporated innovation and entrepreneurship education into their talent cultivation systems and implemented a series of measures to advance it. In terms of curriculum design, some institutions have introduced foundational courses such as Principles of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Management, aiming to equip students with fundamental theoretical knowledge. Regarding practical activities, certain institutions organise innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, entrepreneurial lectures, and hands-on training programmes, providing students with opportunities for practical experience. Concerning faculty development, some institutions have established preliminary teaching teams for innovation and entrepreneurship education by recruiting professionals from the business sector and training existing academic staff.

However, from an overall developmental perspective, innovation and entrepreneurship education in private undergraduate institutions remains highly disparate, with uneven progress. While some institutions have established relevant courses, these often lack systematic coherence and targeted focus, failing to form a comprehensive curriculum framework. Certain institutions' innovation and entrepreneurship activities prioritise form over substance, yielding limited practical outcomes. Regarding faculty development, teaching staff generally lack practical experience in innovation and entrepreneurship, with teaching capabilities requiring enhancement. Furthermore, private undergraduate institutions generally struggle to integrate innovation and entrepreneurship education with professional education, failing to leverage the foundational role of professional education in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. This results in a pronounced disconnect between the two domains.

2.2 Issues in Curriculum Development and Design

Course objectives serve as both the starting point and ultimate goal of curriculum development and design, determining content selection, implementation methods, and assessment criteria. Currently, some private undergraduate institutions exhibit ambiguity and vagueness in setting objectives for innovation and entrepreneurship courses, lacking precise positioning for cultivating such competencies among students of different disciplines and academic years. Some institutions formulate overly broad objectives, merely aiming to cultivate students' awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship without specifying concrete requirements for developing innovative thinking, entrepreneurial skills, or practical experience. Others fail to align their course objectives with the institution's overall talent development goals, neglecting societal demands and individual student needs. This results in unclear implementation directions, hindering effective enhancement of students' innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities.

Course content constitutes the core element of any programme, with its quality directly impacting teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Presently, innovation and entrepreneurship education courses at private undergraduate institutions commonly suffer from a lack of distinctiveness and practical relevance. In content selection, most institutions prioritise theoretical instruction, while teaching materials undergo slow updates, failing to reflect the latest developments and real-world case studies in the innovation and entrepreneurship field. This results

in course content becoming disconnected from practical realities. Concurrently, course content lacks tailored design for the characteristics of private undergraduate students, failing to adequately consider their knowledge foundations, interests, and career aspirations. This hinders the stimulation of students' learning interest and motivation. Furthermore, course content is not closely integrated with professional education, failing to fully explore innovation and entrepreneurship elements within specialised courses. Consequently, students struggle to apply acquired knowledge to practical innovation and entrepreneurship activities during their studies, preventing the organic integration of professional knowledge with innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities.

Course implementation transforms curriculum plans into teaching practice, with its methodologies directly impacting student learning experiences and outcomes. Currently, innovation and entrepreneurship education in private undergraduate institutions relies predominantly on classroom lectures, where instructors often prioritise knowledge transmission while neglecting students' active participation and agency. Under this model, students passively absorb information, lacking opportunities for independent thought and exploration, thereby failing to effectively cultivate innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets. Moreover, the weakness in practical teaching components represents a prominent issue in the implementation of innovation and entrepreneurship education courses at private undergraduate institutions. Due to the lack of stable practical bases and specialised instructors, students struggle to gain authentic innovation and entrepreneurship experiences, and their practical operational skills are not effectively honed. Although some institutions have introduced activities such as entrepreneurial simulations and practical entrepreneurship exercises, these often lack systematic depth and fail to achieve the intended educational outcomes.

Course evaluation constitutes a process of assessing the value of course implementation and outcomes, providing crucial grounds for course refinement and enhancement. Presently, the evaluation systems for innovation and entrepreneurship education courses in private undergraduate institutions exhibit numerous shortcomings. Evaluation methods predominantly rely on examination results, a singular approach incapable of comprehensively and objectively reflecting students' innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities or learning effectiveness. Innovation and entrepreneurship education emphasises cultivating students' innovative thinking, practical abilities, and teamwork spirit – competencies difficult to accurately gauge through traditional examination methods. Regarding evaluation content, excessive emphasis is placed on students' mastery of theoretical knowledge, while neglecting their performance in practical operations, project planning, and team collaboration. Furthermore, course evaluations lack effective assessment of the implementation process, making it difficult to identify issues during delivery and implement timely adjustments and improvements. Simultaneously, the evaluation body is singular, primarily consisting of teacher assessments, lacking student self-evaluation and peer assessment. This fails to fully mobilise students' enthusiasm and initiative, hindering their self-reflection and self-improvement.

3.Curriculum Development and Design for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Private Undergraduate Institutions

Based on the institutional positioning and student characteristics of private undergraduate institutions, the objectives for innovation and entrepreneurship education courses are structured across three tiers: knowledge objectives, competency objectives, and character development objectives. Knowledge objectives aim to equip students with an understanding of fundamental concepts, theories, and methodologies in innovation and entrepreneurship, alongside relevant legal frameworks and policy knowledge, thereby providing theoretical underpinnings for their entrepreneurial pursuits. Specifically, this includes understanding the essence, types, and processes of innovation and entrepreneurship; mastering knowledge and methods in market research, business model design, and entrepreneurial financing; and becoming familiar with national laws, regulations, and policies concerning innovation and entrepreneurship. Competency objectives focus on cultivating students' innovative thinking, entrepreneurial awareness, and practical innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities, including market

research skills, project planning abilities, teamwork capabilities, communication and expression skills, and risk assessment and response competencies. Through coursework and practical activities, students shall learn to apply acquired knowledge and methodologies to identify market opportunities, devise innovation and entrepreneurship projects, and implement them effectively. The quality objectives emphasise cultivating students' innovative spirit, entrepreneurial ethos, and sense of social responsibility, thereby enhancing their overall competence and professional integrity. This specifically entails fostering innovative awareness, a spirit of risk-taking, perseverance, integrity, and social responsibility, enabling students to become high-calibre talents possessing innovative spirit and social accountability.

These include Innovation and Entrepreneurship Fundamentals, Innovation Thinking Training, and Entrepreneurship Management Basics. They primarily impart core knowledge and theories of innovation and entrepreneurship, cultivating students' innovative thinking and entrepreneurial awareness. The Foundations of Innovation and Entrepreneurship course introduces core concepts, historical development, typologies, and processes, providing students with a comprehensive understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship. The Creative Thinking Training course employs various activities—such as brainstorming, reverse thinking, and associative thinking—to stimulate students' innovative potential and cultivate habitual creative thinking. The Fundamentals of Entrepreneurial Management course covers organisational management, marketing, and financial management techniques for start-ups, offering managerial guidance for entrepreneurial pursuits.

Leveraging distinct disciplinary characteristics, subject-specific innovation and entrepreneurship courses are offered, such as 'Discipline + Innovation & Entrepreneurship' case studies and entrepreneurial opportunity identification within professional fields. By integrating specialised curricula with innovation and entrepreneurship modules, students gain insight into current practices and emerging trends within their discipline, while acquiring relevant methodologies and skills. For instance, computer science students may take courses like 'Internet Plus Innovation and Entrepreneurship Case Studies' or 'Software Development Project Entrepreneurship Planning'; marketing students may study 'Marketing Innovation and Entrepreneurship' or 'Brand Strategy and Entrepreneurial Practice'.

Practical courses encompass innovation and entrepreneurship practice, business simulation, and project incubation, providing authentic entrepreneurial platforms. Innovation and entrepreneurship practice courses may involve student visits to enterprises and entrepreneurial parks to observe actual operations. Entrepreneurship simulation courses replicate the operational processes of start-ups, enabling students to experience the entire entrepreneurial journey in a virtual environment, thereby enhancing practical skills and decision-making abilities. Entrepreneurship project incubation courses provide students with dedicated incubation spaces and financial support, alongside professional mentors, to assist in transforming entrepreneurial ideas into tangible projects and facilitating their implementation.

Extension courses covering entrepreneurial legislation, financing, and risk management broaden students' knowledge and perspectives. These enable students to understand relevant laws, regulations, and policies within the innovation and entrepreneurship process, while mastering methods and techniques for entrepreneurial financing and risk management. The Entrepreneurship Laws and Regulations course primarily explains laws and regulations pertinent to entrepreneurship, such as the Companies Act, Contract Law, and Intellectual Property Law, enabling students to understand legal risks and preventive measures during the entrepreneurial process. The Entrepreneurship Financing course introduces channels, methods, and approaches for securing startup funding, helping students master financing techniques to address capital requirements. The Entrepreneurship Risk Management course analyses various risks that may arise during entrepreneurship, such as market risk, technological risk, and financial risk, teaching students methods for risk assessment and response to enhance their risk management capabilities.

4.Conclusion

The development and design of innovation and entrepreneurship education curricula for undergraduate students at private universities constitutes a systematic endeavour, requiring adherence to principles such as student-centredness, practicality, interdisciplinary integration, and systematic coherence. By clarifying course objectives, optimising content, innovating implementation methods, and refining assessment frameworks, a scientifically sound and rational curriculum system for innovation and entrepreneurship education can be established. This approach effectively enhances the quality of such education at private undergraduate institutions, cultivating students' innovative and entrepreneurial capabilities alongside their employability.

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