Entrepreneurship Education Has Gone Global. Now It Must Grow Up.

by

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Entrepreneurship education has achieved something few academic fields ever accomplish: It has escaped the university.

What began as a small and largely American experiment after World War II has become a worldwide movement. Entrepreneurship is now taught in universities, community programs, incubators, accelerators, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations across developed and developing nations alike. By the first two decades of the 21st century, entrepreneurship had become a genuinely global phenomenon.

That success should be celebrated. But it also creates a new problem.

We have globalized entrepreneurship education faster than we have learned how to make it truly global.

Too often, entrepreneurship curricula developed in the United States and Western Europe are exported to Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East as if entrepreneurial behavior were

culturally neutral. A business-plan template developed in Chicago or London can be transferred to Nairobi, Colombo or São Paulo in an afternoon. The assumptions embedded in that template are harder to transfer.

Culture, institutions, family systems, financing practices, attitudes toward uncertainty, social relationships and expectations about the role of business in society shape entrepreneurship. The same entrepreneurial competency can therefore look very different from one region to another. Opportunity recognition may depend heavily on individual market scanning in one society and on family or community networks in another. Initiative may be celebrated as independent action in one culture while requiring consultation and social legitimacy elsewhere.

This is why the next stage in the field's development must be Global Entrepreneurship Education, or GEE.

By GEE, I do not mean creating one worldwide curriculum and asking everybody to follow it.

Quite the opposite.

A genuinely global approach should identify the strongest entrepreneurial knowledge, practices and teaching methods from around the world and adapt them to local circumstances. It should combine globally informed competencies with locally grounded realities. Entrepreneurship education should become less an exercise in exporting American models and more an exchange among entrepreneurial cultures.

My article defines Global Entrepreneurship Education as the development of the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and networks that enable people in any region and at every stage of life to create economic and social value while remaining both locally grounded and globally informed. That distinction will become increasingly important.

The problems entrepreneurs are being asked to solve are no longer comfortably local. Climate change, artificial intelligence, demographic shifts, migration, supply-chain disruption, food security and technological inequality cross borders. Entrepreneurs may begin with a local problem, but the knowledge, technology, financing, customers and consequences surrounding that problem increasingly extend around the world.

Entrepreneurship education must prepare students for that reality.

A student developing an agricultural venture in Africa may learn from mobile-payment systems in Asia, financing practices in Europe and distribution innovations in Latin America. A social entrepreneur in Chicago may need to understand how similar problems are addressed in India or Sri Lanka. A technology founder may employ engineers on three continents before serving the first customer.

Global awareness is therefore no longer an enrichment activity in entrepreneurship education. It is becoming part of entrepreneurial competence itself.

Yet globalization also exposes weaknesses that were easier to ignore when entrepreneurship education was primarily a Western endeavor.

The field still lacks reliable ways to determine whether its programs work. Researchers use measures ranging from entrepreneurial intentions and student attitudes to business formation and venture survival. These indicators are useful, but they do not provide a universal standard for judging long-term educational, social, or economic impact.

At the same time, the global expansion of entrepreneurship education has exposed severe differences in educational resources. Some regions enjoy experienced faculty, sophisticated incubators, mentoring networks and abundant capital. Others lack trained professors, entrepreneurship centers, digital infrastructure and access to mentors. Western-centric curricula are sometimes introduced into precisely those environments where contextual adaptation matters most.

These differences should not be treated merely as implementation problems. They are intellectual challenges to the field itself.

We have spent decades codifying entrepreneurial knowledge. Scholars converted much of entrepreneurship's tacit know-how into competencies, canvases, frameworks, decision trees, and playbooks. That was an essential achievement. It allowed knowledge once confined to experienced entrepreneurs to be taught systematically.

But codification has limits.

Entrepreneurship cannot be reduced entirely to a manual because context matters too much. Informal business practices, Indigenous traditions, local networks, coping with failure, improvisation under scarcity, and the cultural meaning of risk often remain beneath the surface of our formal frameworks.

That is why I use an ecological metaphor for the future of entrepreneurship education.

We should think less like factory managers and more like gardeners.

The industrial approach to entrepreneurship education breaks venture creation into standardized units. It moves students through a prescribed sequence—from opportunity recognition to launch and scaling—using milestones and metrics as quality controls. It has advantages: consistency, efficiency, and scalability.

But it can also produce cookie-cutter thinking.

The alternative is what I call the "cultivate-butterflies" model. The educator becomes a gardener who creates the conditions for entrepreneurial potential to develop. Students receive structure, but also room for experimentation. They acquire financial and managerial knowledge, but they also learn through mentoring, networks, reflection, prototypes, mistakes, and real-world

experience. Different students may develop at different speeds and pursue different forms of entrepreneurship.

The goal is not disorder. Entrepreneurship education must still teach discipline, analysis and accountability.

The challenge is to combine that discipline with what E.F. Schumacher called the "magnanimity of disorder"—the willingness to enter the unknown, experiment, improvise, and imagine possibilities that no spreadsheet can fully predict; entrepreneurship education must teach students to balance precisely these two forces: rigor and imaginative audacity.

This is where Global Entrepreneurship Education becomes especially important.
A global framework can provide enough common language to allow educators and entrepreneurs to learn from one another while resisting the temptation to make everyone entrepreneurial in the same way.

The future should therefore be neither complete standardization nor complete local isolation.
We need global principles with local adaptation.

We need common knowledge without cultural homogenization.

We need rigorous measurement without reducing entrepreneurship to venture counts.

And we need educational systems that recognize that a successful entrepreneur in rural Sri Lanka may look very different from one in Silicon Valley—and that both may create extraordinary value.

Entrepreneurship education has already won the battle for legitimacy. It no longer needs to prove that it belongs in universities or public policy.

Its next challenge is more difficult.

The field must prove that it can become truly global without becoming uniform.
The worldwide expansion of entrepreneurship education gives us an extraordinary opportunity to learn not only how entrepreneurs differ across cultures, but also what they can learn from one another.

If we get that right, Global Entrepreneurship Education can become more than the international expansion of an academic discipline. It can become a worldwide learning system for cultivating the people who will confront problems we cannot yet predict, in places we may never visit, using ideas that have not yet been imagined.

I would regard this as a strong companion editorial to "**Are Universities Cultivating Entrepreneurs—or Manufacturing Them?"**The first challenges excessive standardization; this second piece explains why the globalization of entrepreneurship education makes contextual adaptation even more urgent.