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(IJEMP)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijemp**A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF CURRICULUM COURSE
CONTENT AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN UAE
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Abstract:

The United Arab Emirates has prioritised entrepreneurship education (EE) to reduce reliance on the public sector and support its transition to a knowledge-based economy. To promote entrepreneurial intention (EI) to students in universities, entrepreneurship programmes have been established. Nevertheless, it has been shown that the existing results are still below national policy expectations. This article maintains that ineffective student motivation or insufficient institutional resources are not the primary challenge. Rather, the issue lies in the lack of alignment between the EI development approaches influenced by the psychological, cultural, and structural contexts of EI in the UAE and the taught entrepreneurship courses reflected in current curricula. This paper critically reviews the UAE-based, theoretically applicable literature to discuss the impact of curriculum design on entrepreneurial intention. It assesses paramount and declarative instruction, growth of self-efficacy, integration with role models, online learning, content that remains gender conscious and compatibility with the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The review determines five important conclusions. Instruction that relies on theory constrains the development of self-efficacy. Misaligned culturally controlled curricula undermine the social norms and perceived behavioural control. Equity: Gender-responsive course design is not an equity effort, but a construction requirement. Ineffectiveness of the the curricula and ecosystem support programme due to poor alignment. Last, the disjuncture between the entrepreneurial intention and business creation indicates systemic impediments that cannot be overcome through a reformed curriculum. The article wraps up by providing institution-specific and theoretically

grounded recommendations to higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators of entrepreneurship in the UAE.

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Keyword:

Curriculum Course Content, Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Intention, Higher Education In The UAE, Self-Efficacy



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Introduction

The UAE lies in a structurally paradoxical situation in the world of entrepreneurship education. On the national policy level, entrepreneurship is a clear and material commitment: the UAE Vision strategy has been successively repeated, identifying the post-oil economic sustainability as a material imperative to rely on the presence of the private-sector entrepreneurship, the involvement of the knowledge economy, and the lack of public-sector employment (Facchini et al., 2021; Jabeen et al., 2019). Colleges in the federation have reacted through the incorporation of entrepreneurship courses, setting up incubation facilities, and officially institutionalizing entrepreneurship education as a strategic institutional priority (AlDhaheri, 2024). On the behavioral outcomes level, though, the data is alarming: empirical research repeatedly records that Emirati graduates still maintain a strong inclination towards working in the public sector rather than establishing their own businesses (Jabeen et al., 2017). This means that measured EI levels among students of UAE universities are limited by cultural and structural factors that course delivery has not been structured to overcome, and that the intention-behavior gap, the difference between the declared desire and the actual venture formation, remains constant.

This paradox has not been properly addressed in the UAE-specific literature. The prevailing research trend has been to evaluate the overall outcome of exposure to entrepreneurship education on EI without unpacking what exposure actually entails pedagogically, what the sequence and test-retest of that exposure is, and whether the content of that exposure has been optimized to the motivational and cultural contexts of UAE learners specifically (Khalifa & Dhiaf, 2016; Khalil et al., 2024). This is a consequential omission in theory. According to the global literature, which is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior developed by Ajzen and the social cognitive frame by Bandura, courses content does not necessarily lead to intention

change; instead, the formation of EI involves the particular psychological processes triggered by the contents, which are preconditioned by the cultural background, the quality of institutional ecosystems, and demographical structure of the student population, in which the education is provided (Boucif et al., 2025). When these insights are applied to the UAE without prior consideration of the unique structural circumstances, they yield analytically impoverished diagnoses and practically inert curriculum suggestions. Accordingly, the theoretical grounding adopted in this review does not treat Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and social cognitive theory (SCT) as fixed, universally portable templates. Instead, the following section goes through each of their central constructs the attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and self-efficacy. It continues to explore the reconfigurations of each of these by considering the UAE-specific cultural, institutional and demographic architecture. This positions the global frameworks as an analytical starting point rather than a conclusion, with the UAE-specific evidence base used throughout to test, qualify, and where necessary revise their standard operationalisation.

This article addresses this gap by undertaking a systematic critical literature review, positioning UAE higher education as the main plane of analysis, with the operation of global theoretical frameworks as scaffolding explanatory pulls. The research question that underlies this inquiry is the following: by what precise mechanisms is curriculum course content in UAE higher education related to entrepreneurial intention, and what structural, cultural and pedagogical circumstances moderate the mechanisms? Four subsidiary questions are sought to be addressed: first, to what degree is the content of UAE entrepreneurship courses architecturally consistent with psychological antecedents of EI? Second, what are the cultural and gender effects on the content-intention pathway in the UAE? Third, how does ecosystem-content integration affect the enhancement or reduction of EI outcomes? And fourth, what is the evidentiary limit of current UAE EE-EI research, and what are methodological and conceptual constraints of current knowledge claims? The article is an original contribution, as it synthesizes the evidence base specific to the UAE with critical theoretical analysis to provide both a diagnostic account of why UAE EE is performing poorly and a set of curriculum reform recommendations grounded in that account.

Literature Review

Theory Backing: TPB and Social Cognitive Theory in the UAE

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which began with Ajzen (2011), represents the most widely implemented theoretical model in EI studies around the world as well as the architectural framework of how course material is likely to shape entrepreneurial behavior. In the TPB, EI is conceptualized as the direct antecedent to entrepreneurial behavior, which in turn is influenced by three constructs, which are attitude toward the behavior (ATB), subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Boucif et al., 2025). Theoretically, entrepreneurship education would alter all three: enhancing ATB by exposing it to knowledge and creating enthusiasm, transforming SN by legitimizing entrepreneurship as a desirable career path in society, and empowering PBC by developing competence and building efficacy (Hassan & Ibourk, 2023; Khetarpal et al., 2025). But the most important weakness of this framework as it is applied without contextualization to the UAE is that it assumes the construct universality. In their use of TPB with Emirati female student entrepreneurs, (Damodharan & Asraar Ahmed, 2022) showed that subjective norms within the UAE context were mediated by the channel of family approval and tribal reputation that the standard operationalizations of

TPB failed to address, and that PBC was significantly mediated by institutional support perceptions in a manner that the original framework had not anticipated. This is not a single methodological anomaly but rather indicative of a systematic construct non-equivalence that would force UAE researchers and curriculum developers to view the TPB as a tentative, rather than definitive, explanatory system.

The second and analytically more manageable theoretical building block towards explaining the effects of course content on EI in the UAE context is the social cognitive theory in its version by Bandura, and, more specifically, the construct of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) based on it. ESE, or the belief of the individual in his/her ability to effectively perform the tasks entailed in new venture creation, has been consistently found to be among the strongest proximal predictors of EI in the empirical literature around the world, and it is responsive to course content in a theoretically distinctive way that neither ATB nor SN can be (Elnadi & Gheith, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). The ESE-to-EI pathway is systematically underactivated in the UAE where the structurally constrained mastery experience provision and culturally proximate role model integration is a theoretical forecast that aligns with the empirical data of EI underperformance reported in a range of studies in the UAE.

Typology Of Course Content and Its Connection To EI: A Synthesis of The World

An explanation of the ways in which course content influences EI that is theoretically defensible would involve breaking down the content of the concept of entrepreneurship education by defining it as a set of content modalities instead of assuming it to be a single independent variable. The most analytically fruitful difference in the world literature is that between theoretical frameworks, business model concepts, legal-structural knowledge and market analysis templates (declarative content) and the need to perform entrepreneurial judgment under circumstances of real uncertainty (procedural or experiential content) (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Fiet, 2001). In an early contribution, Fayolle & Gailly (2008) suggested that the replacement of experiential richness by theoretical rigor in entrepreneurship education was simply the replacement of motivational and agentic engagement with theoretical understanding, leading to the creation of students who are knowledgeable about entrepreneurial concepts but who lack confidence in taking action based on them. This criticism is very relevant to UAE EE, where the prevailing pedagogical direction is didactic and knowledge-transmissive (AlDhaheri, 2024; Dennett, 2025). In the world, Sukavejworakit et al. (2018) showed that experiential learning interventions yielded substantial EI gains in the context of the university, and Curtis et al. (2021) provided longitudinal data over six years that the approach to learning and problem orientation changed in the students using active entrepreneurship education and not with declarative content. All these findings form the theoretical and empirical argument of experiential content dominance in EI development, an argument that has been recognized by the literature that is specific to the UAE but has not been systematically incorporated into UAE curriculum practice.

In addition to the declarative-experience dichotomy, a third content modality, reflective and identity-oriented content, has become an increasingly popular theoretical focus and has a specific implication on the UAE context. Chen (2024) showed that the perceived educational support mediated the proactive personality-to-EI linkage under the influence of the attitudinal formation processes elicited specifically due to reflective course material: structured self-assessment tasks, biographical experience with stories about entrepreneurs, and mentorship interactions. López-Carril et al. (2024) adopted a methodology of fuzzy-set qualitative

comparative analysis to demonstrate that narrative entrepreneurial content (in this case, TED Talks by practitioners) was a component of configurational combinations that are adequate to generate high EI results but not essential ones. The theoretical implication is that the formation of intentions is configurational rather than additive: there is no single type of content necessary, and the interactions among the declarative, experiential, and reflective content modalities determine the strength of the EI outcome (Straatmann et al., 2018). No use of this configurational logic has been made in the UAE curriculum design, in which types of content are seen as additive elements of a course, as opposed to interdependent elements of a carefully designed psychological intervention.

UAE Entrepreneurship Education Landscape: Structure and Content and Reported Deficits.

The institutional analysis of the UAE entrepreneurship education shows a sector that is institutionally committed with a lack of pedagogical development. The most systematic audit of EE integration in UAE undergraduate programs by AlDhaheeri (2024) reported that even though it is widely indicated by formal commitment to embedding EE, its implementation is unevenly distributed across institutions, the models of pedagogy are largely didactic, and course content has been obtained largely off the international curricula with little to no contextualization to activate intention-relevant mechanisms in UAE students specifically.

This institutional isomorphism, the imitation of surface characteristics of EE without the pedagogic content needed to develop EI, is not an accident, but structural: it indicates the lack of a UAE-specific system of EE curriculum development, based on its empirical evidence. This diagnosis was supported in the article by Jabeen et al. (2019) via a student lens in that the authors identified that youth in the UAE believed that there was a structured inconsistency between what entrepreneurship education taught them in theory- familiarity with business concepts and what entrepreneurial activity required in reality. The fact that the students were able to express this gap implies that the coursework had provided them with a level of conceptual literacy to be aware of its own constraints, and that is intellectually interesting but practically inadequate result towards the development of EI.

Ecosystem, Extracurricular Integration and Structural Amplifiers of EI

Another important aspect of the EE-EI relationship in higher education in the UAE that has not been specified in the literature is the functional interdependence of formal course content and the extracurricular and institutional ecosystem structures in which the content is framed. Using a social identity theory framework, Ratkovic et al. (2025) established that course engagement-to-EI pathway depended on the quality of university entrepreneurship support, which included incubators, mentoring networks, seed funding, and alumni entrepreneurial exemplars, where good ecosystem support enhanced the effects of course content and weak ecosystem support weakened them. Bodolica et al. (2021) presented directly relevant Middle East data showing that extracurricular involvement was a strong predictor of social entrepreneurial leadership growth among graduating youth at local universities, and that co-curricular organizations and official course materials were functionally interdependent and not functionally independent determinants of EI. Ayed et al. (2026) also discovered that extracurricular entrepreneurial engagement was a predictor of EI that was independent of the influence of formal coursework, and that the boundary between curriculum and co-curriculum was functionally relevant to intention formation in a manner that most UAE curriculum frameworks had not operationalized.

Methods

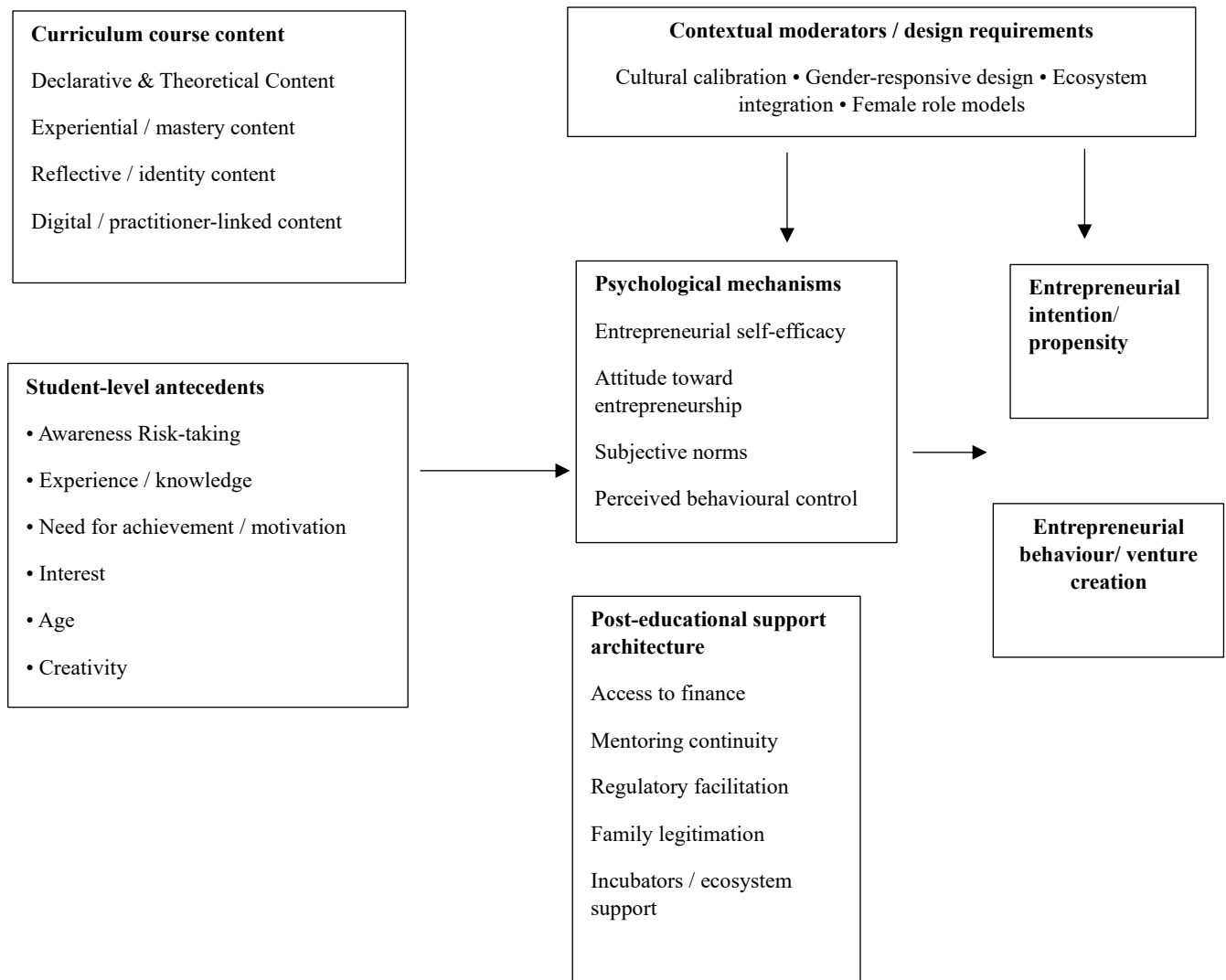


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Research Design and Epistemological Positioning

The research design applied in this article is a systematic critical literature review, which, according to both the empirical fragmentation and conceptual underdevelopment of the domain, is an appropriate research design to use in the construction of theoretically based analytical frameworks (Jalili et al., 2026; Neck & Greene, 2011). A critical literature review contrasts with a traditional narrative review in its epistemological investment: instead of synthesizing evidence in a descriptive way, it challenges the epistemological assumptions and methodological rigor and epistemological narrowness of included studies and uses evidence base as raw material on which it constructs original analytical arguments instead of merely summarizing existing results (Santos et al., 2021). This orientation suits the research problem under study, since the UAE EE-EI literature is typified by convergent descriptive assertions, which conceal divergent quality of methodology, contextual heterogeneity, which cross-contextual synthesis has concealed, and theory underdevelopment, which inhibits the field of

producing actionable knowledge of curriculum design (Lindh, 2017; Santos et al., 2021; Straatmann et al., 2018). This critical review approach is thus not only a methodological preference, but rather it is a requirement that is dictated by the nature of the evidence base.

Search Strategy and Source Identification

This review was based on a multi-stage identification of the literature base. The main corpus of sources was pegged to the UAE-specific EE and EI research, and the sources were located by searching key academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO Business Source Complete, and Google Scholar. The study used search terms such as entrepreneurship education in the UAE, entrepreneurial intention in the United Arab Emirates, entrepreneurship curriculum in the UAE, Emirati students' entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This UAE-based search was supplemented by a theoretically guided search of the world literature bearing on the specific mechanisms of interest: typologies of curriculum content, self-efficacy and EI, gender and entrepreneurship education, and ecosystem-EI relationships. These international resources were not included as empirical comparators but as theoretical frames within which the UAE-specific phenomena might be analyzed and interpreted. There was no date limit on the search stage, but only sources published before 2010 were included where they contained foundational theoretical input that was operating theoretically in the modern UAE situation (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Fiet, 2001). The final source corpus was 46, which included peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings. Figure 2 presents the PRISMA flow diagram summarizing the identification and screening of sources for this review. Of the 100 records initially identified across four databases, 46 met the inclusion criteria and were retained for the final analytical corpus

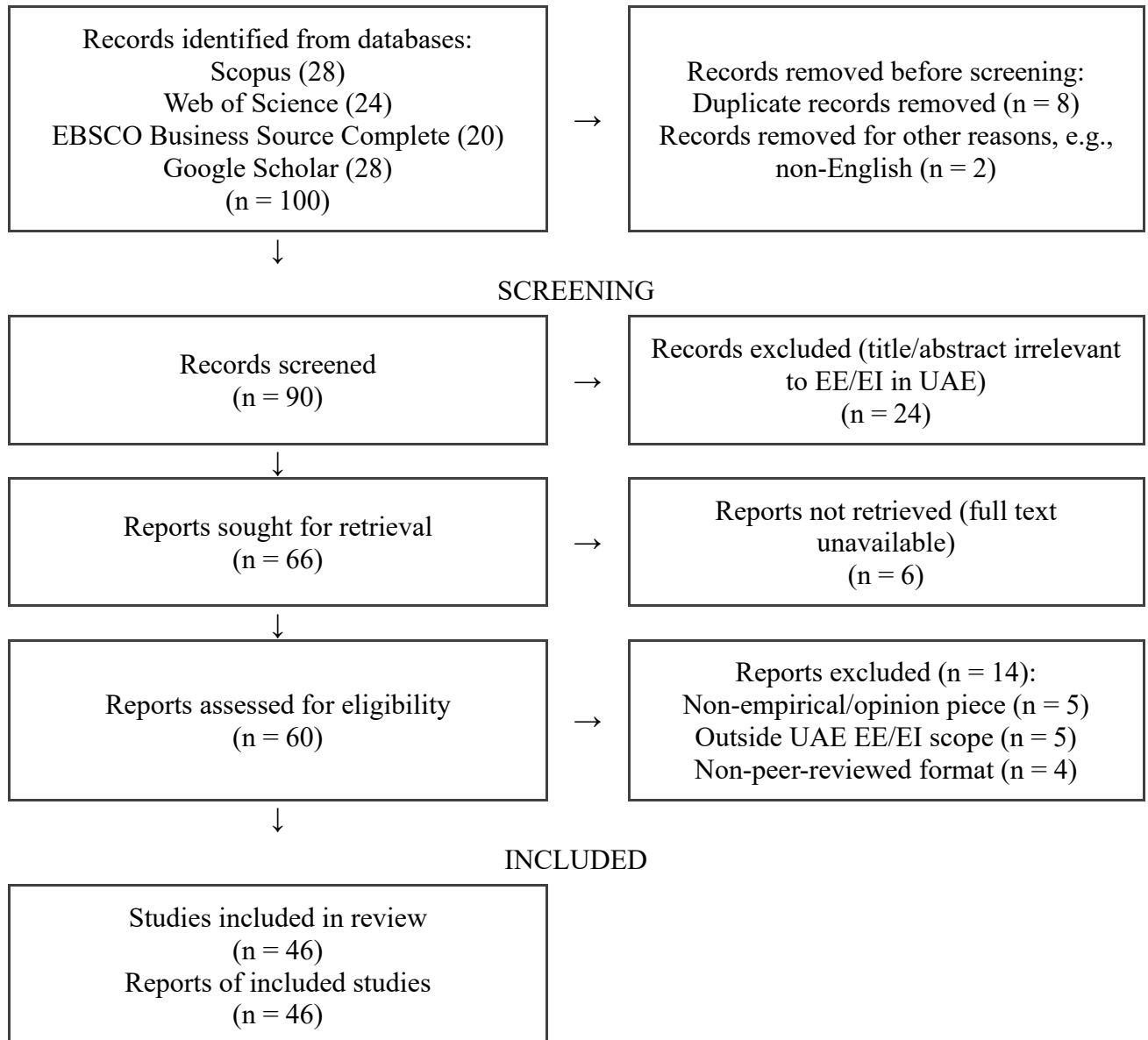


Figure 2:PRISMA Corpus Diagram

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The primary analytical corpus was based on three criteria to include sources in the corpus. First, empirical or conceptual articles with UAE specifics were selected in which they directly reflected on EE, EI, entrepreneurial mindset, or entrepreneurial competency with UAE university students or in UAE higher education institutions. Second, international theoretical or empirical articles were incorporated, and they offered elucidatory models of processes that had been reported by the UAE-specific evidence, but conceptualized inadequately, namely the processes of self-efficacy development, gender moderation, cultural conditioning, and ecosystem amplification of EI. Third, regional Middle East and Gulf Cooperation Council research was added where their contextual proximity to the UAE meant the findings of the study was analytically relevant, subject to careful recognition of the contextual differences.

Sources were also eliminated in which they discussed EI in settings where the institutional and cultural structure of those settings was too different to permit analytical transfer- that is, East Asian vocational education settings and sub-Saharan African higher education settings. The sources that did not have enough transparency concerning methodology were also filtered out to allow critical quality evaluation.

Analytical Framework

The analytical scheme used in relation to the sources that have been included was designed based on three levels of critical interrogation. On the first level, the sources were analyzed in terms of theoretical positioning: what frameworks were used, whether there was any contextual modification of those frameworks, or did the frameworks come in wholesale, and what were the theoretical ramifications of such application in terms of its effects on course content in the UAE context. At the second tier, methodological quality of each empirical source was assessed, and specifically, the research design (cross-sectional or longitudinal), measurement validity (single item vs. validated multi-item EI scales), sampling adequacy, and to which extent the causal claims were justified by the research design applied were considered. In the third level, sources were synthesized in theme form and not sequentially and convergent findings of methodologically varied studies were considered to be more robust than those produced by individual studies and divergent findings were viewed as analytically generative as opposed to contradictions to be overcome.

This 3-level model generated the five findings presented in the next section through a cumulative, rather than parallel, process. Where UAE-specific studies diverged with the unaltered prognostications of TPB and SCT was first identified at Level 1 (theoretical positioning). This departure provided the diagnostic essence of Findings 1 to 3, the misalignment between the content of the courses in declarative memory and the structural elements in the development of self-efficacy, the weakening of the normative and control antecedents when culturally non-calibrated, and the structural and not incidental quality of gender-differentiated content effects. Level 2 (methodological quality appraising) identified the amount weight each source could carry, such that those claims that used validated multi-item scales and larger more representative samples enjoyed greater weight than those that used single-item measures or small convenience samples; it is this weighting that now enables Finding 5 to reach a provisional, but not an definitive, conclusion that the limits of curriculum reform on the intention-behaviour gap could depend on. Level 3 (thematic synthesis) next sliced across the included sources, testing the consistency of the theoretically based pattern of Level 1, with the methodological weighted evidence of Level 2, across independent studies that draw different samples, institutions, and measures: patterns that passed this consistency test on three or more methodologically sound sources were then retained as one of the five findings, and single-study observations were regarded as illustrative, but not load-bearing. Any finding is then the collective action of all three levels acting upon the same body of evidence, and not the production of any single level.

Findings

Finding 1: Structural Underdevelopment of Self-Efficacy Antecedents of EI by Structural Dominance of Declarative Content.

The most widespread and impactful structural aspect of UAE entrepreneurship course material that was determined throughout the reviewed literature is the unequal focus on imparting declarative knowledge to the detriment of the procedural and experiential content modalities that the social cognitive theory recognizes as the main agents of ESE evolution. AlDhaheri (2024) recorded that the prevailing pedagogical paradigm in the UAE undergraduate entrepreneurship programs was didactic, and the content design was based on knowledge coverage criteria, instead of competency activation criteria. This result is supported by Jabeen et al. (2019) in a student perspective and by Saji Salim & Nair (2018) in an institutional effectiveness perspective, as well as by A. Van Ewijk and Al-Aomar (2016) in a student experience perspective, whose postgraduate engineering students in the UAE attributed the two main drivers of EI in the education process as inspiration and self-awareness. This indicates that these institutional and phenomenologically based sources all focus on the same structural diagnosis, which is solid evidence of declarative dominance as a systemic, not an incidental, characteristic of UAE EE.

The implications of this domination on the development of ESE are theoretically foreseeable and empirically recorded. Khalil et al. (2024) observed that entrepreneurship education forecasted EI in UAE university students, but this was mediated by individual entrepreneurial orientation in a manner that the course material was not sufficiently activated to produce sizable effects compared to other studies. This process aligns with the Bandura logic of mastery experience: the content of the course that lacks systematic ways of offering students the chance to take entrepreneurial challenges, and succeed, will not produce the efficacy beliefs that intention demands. The counterevidence was given by Alkaabi (2023), who reported that when the UAE university students were put in a flipped classroom design, a business simulation and a prototype development platform, measurable competency gains in risk assessment, opportunity recognition, and resource planning were recorded, which cannot be achieved with standard declaration UAE course content. Alkaabi and Senghore (2024) went further to show that education, role models, and the design of pedagogy worked in a multiplicative, but not an additive manner to generate entrepreneurial mindset, and that the procedural content cannot be replaced by declarative content of the same volume without cost to EI.

Importantly, the declarative dominance result is not limited to traditional course content but also applies to the digital entrepreneurship content that UAE institutions have developed in response to the demands of the digital economy policy. Syed et al. (2024) discovered that digital EE materials in UAE universities were still epistemologically declarative, meaning students studied about digital business models but did not develop the procedural skills of entering the digital market, since the preparation of educators did not allow them to transform the content conceptual into practice. With digital platforms the most accessible entrepreneurial access point available to young graduates in a UAE economy, and a positive relationship between digitalization and EI observed worldwide, the structural foreclosure represented by the maintenance of declarative digital content is a barrier to the creation of the entrepreneurial paths that UAE digital economy policy aims to open with course content.

Findings 2: The Normative and Control Antecedents of EI are weaker with Cultural Non-Calibration

The second analytically strong result is that the content of UAE entrepreneurship courses has been developed in a manner that is not systematically calibrated to the cultural architecture in which Emirati and UAE-resident students constitute their entrepreneurial intentions and that results in a content-culture mismatch that can be mitigated by pedagogically sensitive content design. Facchini et al. (2021) determined the initial cultural parameters: the entrepreneurial activity of the UAE is conditioned by collectivist orientations of value, norms of risk-aversion based on social reputation concerns, and structural inclination towards secure institutional employment in which incentives of public-sector career promote. These parameters do not make Emirati students entrepreneurially ineffective. Al Saiqal et al. (2019) discovered that youth in the UAE had their own drivers of entrepreneurial intentions that were not shared with Western student groups, such as strong opportunity recognition orientations in the technological and trade domains. It is not the disposition of students but the design of the curriculum: content that corresponds to individualistic, Western entrepreneurial archetypes activates intention in students whose cultural orientation is proximate to said archetypes and attenuates it in students whose is not.

This attenuation process was empirically recorded by Smail et al. (2025), who discovered that exposure to course content was moderated by environmental factors, social factors (measured in terms of family approval signals, institutional career pathway norms, and peer entrepreneurship attitudes), which explained the relationship between course content exposure and EI in a way that could not be explained by traditional EE curricula. Pauceanu et al. (2019) in their samples of UAE universities confirmed this observation and found that the social environment variables were one of the most potent predictors of student intention to start a business, and worked with an effect size similar or higher than formal course material. All these findings, taken together, suggest that the content of UAE entrepreneurship courses is in a struggle with a strong group of cultural and social intention-suppressors that cannot be overcome by the transmission of knowledge alone and the redesign of the material to explicitly acknowledge, legitimize, and offer analysis tools to negotiate them would activate the normative antecedents of EI more efficiently than that which does not.

Finding 3: Gender-Differentiated Content Design Is a Structural Requirement and Not an Equity Choice.

The analyzed evidence demonstrates analytically consistent results that the processes in which course content produces EI in female UAE students are structurally different to processes that work with male students, and that curricula developed without these distinctions are systematically ineffective in half of their students. It is not an argument of equity, but an EI effectiveness argument: gender-blind course content creates a structural loss in EI which UAE institutions are currently incurring, but without analytical recognition. The original UAE evidence was set by Majumdar and Damodharan (2013) and found that female students in Dubai had similar ATB as male students, yet they demonstrated systematically lower PBC which is the TPB antecedent the most sensitive to course content. It is not an unalterable attribute of female UAE students, but a pedagogically created margin that could be reduced by content designed to develop female students into entrepreneurs, through the calibration of content.

Damodharan and Asraar Ahmed (2022) further refined this study by showing that EI of Emirati female students were more affected by subjective norms as compared to male students and that the normative legitimization role played by course content was disproportionately significant in female student cohorts. Sandhu et al. (2021) determined via UAE-wide benchmarking that female entrepreneurial intention was not necessarily low but dependent on the quality of institutional and educational support, shifting the explanatory load on the curriculum design, and not the student motivation. Gallant et al. (2010) discovered that the entrepreneurial orientation of female business students in Dubai was being failed to transfer to intention by institutional course design, a failure of translation with both a pedagogical and structural aspect. Passavanti et al. (2024) based their conclusions on global literature that female students get much greater EI returns after exposure to female entrepreneurial role models integrated into course materials, which can be directly applied to UAE curricula where female Emirati entrepreneurs' representation in case studies and guest speaker's programs is systematically sparse. The pedagogical design implication presented by A. R. van Ewijk and Belghiti-Mahut (2019) is as follows: active, collaborative, and participatory course content makes female students more responsive to EI when compared to courses delivered in a declarative, competitive, or individual way, which is the opposite of the predominant UAE pedagogical style. The cross-generational reproduction mechanism has been identified by Maharaj (2026), according to which in the cultural contexts of collectivism, the barriers to female entrepreneurship are reproduced on the intergenerational level, unless the educational content serves a counter-narrative function, which UAE EE currently does not fulfill in a systematic manner.

Finding 4: Ecosystem-Content Misalignment Makes Isolated Course Interventions Structurally Inadequate

The fourth analytically valid result is that the EI impacts of the UAE course content are systematically moderated by the structural distance between delivering the formal curriculum and the extracurricular and institutional ecosystem infrastructure that enhances gains on course-generated intentions. This result speaks to the implicit curriculum design assumption that course content may have an independent EI intervention effect; the evidence examined confirms that the effects of course content are conditional on the quality of the ecosystem and that ecosystem-content integration is a precondition for EI effectiveness rather than an optional supplement. In a study conducted by Jabeen et al. (2019), this mismatch was observed in the UAE case, whereby the universities were recognized to be prospectual strategic influencers of entrepreneurial mindset, but not actualized as such due to the lack of institutional strategy being translated into course-level design choices that architecturally linked formal learning with entrepreneurial infrastructure. The mechanism that Ratkovic et al. (2025) developed on the international level is: the quality of support of entrepreneurship of universities mediated the course engagement-to-EI correlation, and the course content effects were strengthened and weakened by strong and weak support, respectively.

The Middle East evidence given by Bodolica et al. (2021) allowed placing this finding into a regionally applicable context: the extracurricular entrepreneurship activity in regional universities was not only additive to the formal course effects but also functionally dependent on them, and students with course content but no co-curricular application opportunity had smaller and less enduring EI gains than those with both. This was supported by Ayed et al. (2026) who provided evidence indicating that extracurricular involvement predicted EI independent of the formal course exposure and, therefore, the co-curricular boundary was

identified to be functionally relevant. Nair et al. (2023) carried the ecosystem argument to the human capital development framework by arguing that socially embedded educational practices yield qualitatively different entrepreneurial orientations as opposed to classroom-confined instruction. This result means that in the case of UAE institutions with extracurricular entrepreneurship infrastructure, such as incubators, student enterprise competition, and industry mentoring programs, but no systematic embedding of these in a systematic architecture of course learning outcomes, the research indicates a significant and measurable EI amplification opportunity that is not being achieved through existing curriculum design frameworks.

Finding 5: Intention-Behavior Gap Is an Indication Of a Systemic Restriction That Curriculum Reform Should Take into Account

The fifth, and most structurally important conclusion is that post-educational factors that cannot be captured by course content no matter how pedagogically sophisticated it is and which leads to a systematic constraint of the translation of course-generated EI into actual entrepreneurial behavior, generates a false-positive signal in EI-as-outcome evaluation that hides the true behavioral impact of UAE EE investment. The intention-behavior gap in the UAE was also empirically reported by Mohammed (2019) as the measured level of EI was relatively high among the Abu Dhabi students, but the actual levels of entrepreneurial activity among graduates were lower. The mechanism was developed by Mohebi and David (2024): even Emirati students who made an entrepreneurial intention regularly mentioned access to finance, the complexity of regulations, the disapproval of family and the continued appeal of public-sector employment packages as the obstacles to transferring intention into action. These obstacles cannot be addressed by course content and this brings up an interesting analytical question: whether the post-course environment is inherently designed to inhibit entrepreneurial action independent of the level of intentions, then is EI a valid intermediate outcome variable in assessing UAE EE effectiveness, or is it creating aspirational inflation that fulfills institutional legitimization functions but not economic development outcomes?

More importantly, this discovery does not refute the curriculum reform agenda being pursued in this article; EI is a theoretically required albeit empirically inadequate precondition to entrepreneurial action, and courses that do not instil it cannot lead to behavioural results no matter how good the ecosystems are. It does, however, set the analytical limit of what reform in course content can accomplish alone: courses can generate intention, but to turn that intention into the creation of ventures, a post-educational support architecture - access to capital, continuity of mentoring, facilitation of regulatory capacity, and family-based normative legitimization - must be engineered in conjunction with, not in lieu of, curriculum design. Zhang et al. (2022) determined on the global level that the EI-to-entrepreneurial-behaviour route was bidirectionally mediated by ESE and government support, which created both the individual psychological and the institutional structural conditions of intention to generate action. The institutional mediation of the intention-behavior pathway in the context of the UAE, where the government support mechanisms are present, but non-Emirati and first-generation entrepreneur students do not always have access to them, is both empirically important and curriculum-designable. The course content can be designed to provide the student with the knowledge and network access necessary to interact with the available support mechanisms, changing the government infrastructure into a background variable to an actively curriculum-integrated one rather than a resource students are left to discover independently.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the thesis based on a systematic critical review of the grounded and theoretically applicable UAE-based global literature that the underlying cause of the endemic failure in investment of the UAE entrepreneurship education curriculum and the subsequent lack of measurable EI results is a failure of the curriculum content design, as opposed to an issue of student disposition or a lack of institutional commitment. Five analytically supported results come to a consistent diagnosis: the architecturally mismatched nature of UAE entrepreneurship curricula with the psychological processes by which EI is developed in the unique cultural, institutional, and demographic environment in the UAE. ESE is systematically underdeveloped by declarative content dominance. The attenuation of normative and control antecedents of intention by cultural non-calibration is particularly evident among Emirati students. The loss on structural EI is created on female students due to gender-undifferentiated content. The amplification of course-level intention gains is not possible due to ecosystem-content misalignment. And the intention-behaviour disjuncture is an indication that curriculum reform, however well-formulated, cannot produce the behavioral entrepreneurial results the policy of the UAE requires without corresponding investment in post-educational support infrastructure.

The implications of these findings go beyond the UAE higher education. They show that the analytical approach of the global EE-EI literature of viewing the contents of a course as a monolithic variable that has an identical effect is unsustainable: the type of content, the modes of pedagogical delivery, the calibration of the course to culture, the differentiation of gender, and the integration of the ecosystem are all independent determinants of EI that interact with each other to produce the observed magnitude of EI outcomes, rather than any one element acting alone. They also show that the intention-behavior gap, which is recorded in the UAE, but is observed in most developing economy settings, cannot be bridged by EI measurement, but instead requires implementation of behavioral outcome tracking systems that can track graduates into the post-educational setting. And they conclude that the implementation of internationally designed EE curricula that have not been carefully contextualized is not a cost-effective expedient but a theoretically unsustainable strategy that yields systematically worse EI results than contextually based curriculum development. Therefore, these findings reposition curriculum design as a necessary but insufficient lever for entrepreneurial intention formation in the UAE, one that must be paired with the post-educational infrastructure and normative conditions capable of converting that intention into venture creation. This repositioning has practical implications on the UAE higher education institutions and policymakers; this is outlined in the following recommendations.

Suggestions to UAE Higher Education Institutions

The UAE universities need to conduct a methodical curriculum audit to analyze the current content of entrepreneurship courses against the criterion of content validity the level to which the content reflects the cognitive and operational requirements of entrepreneurship in the UAE context as opposed to content coverage, which measures the breadth of the topic and not the depth of the competencies activated. This audit needs to be done directly involving Emirati entrepreneur practitioners and new graduate entrepreneurs, the practical understanding of the disconnect between course preparation and venture creation should offer the most analytically sound foundation of the content redesign. According to the audit results, declarative content elements need to be restructured, incorporating mastery experience opportunities: business

simulation platforms, as in the case of Alkaabi (2023) at UAE University, prototype development exercises, live client consultancy projects, and structured practitioner mentoring should be integrated into the core, not the optional components of the courses.

Female Emirati entrepreneurship curriculum should be approached as a special curriculum design requirement instead of a minor change of gender-neutral curriculum. Based on the evidence provided by Damodharan and Asraar Ahmed (2022), Sandhu et al. (2021), and Gallant et al. (2010), the UAE institutions will need to incorporate visible female Emirati and regional entrepreneur role models as main case studies and guest speakers and implement collaborative and participatory pedagogical delivery modes. It is not a diversity program add-on, but a mandatory curriculum design requirement towards the realisation of EI effectiveness in the entire UAE student body A. Van Ewijk and Al-Aomar (2016).

The redesign of digital entrepreneurship content should be considered as a strategically important investment into the curriculum, and the educator development gap recorded by Syed et al. (2024) should be under special attention. The UAE institutions are needed to create systematic practitioner-educator alliances which introduce digital entrepreneurs to course delivery practices, substituting or significantly adding the declarative digital content provided by faculty whose practical digital venture experience is inadequate to the procedural competency requirements of digital EE. Instead of being an ad hoc arrangement, these partnerships need to be formalised within course design frameworks to ensure the reliability and scalability of the practitioner-content integration, which the evidence base finds a pivotal driver of digital EI.

Suggestions to the UAE Educational Policymakers

On the policy level, the UAE educational authorities are to shift their focus on the EE effectiveness measurement, based on EI survey data, towards the creation of the system of behavioral outcomes tracking, tracking cohorts of entrepreneurship course participants into the post-graduation environment, and measuring actual venture creation rate, survival and growth, as well as intermediate psychological outcomes. This change is not just a measurement change, but a policy accountability that will ensure that the intention-behaviour gap does not serve as a hidden legitimization process to investment in EE programs with a behavioural payoff that is never confirmed. It also gives the longitudinal data needed to find that certain content interventions, and not others, lead to lasting intention gains, rather than transient ones, as the six-year study by Curtis et al. (2021) had shown to be significant in establishing the effectiveness of EE but had not as yet systematically investigated by the UAE literature.

Policymakers also need to focus on funding the development of UAE-specific EI measurement tools that would attain construct equivalence in the multi-cultural student population of the UAE of Emirati nationals, Arab expatriates, South Asian expatriates, and Western international students instead of trying to apply to the UAE context Western-derived EI scales on which it is neither possible nor advisable to assume measurement equivalence. It is an infrastructure investment in research that is currently lacking and poses a threat to the evidential foundation of all cross-institutional UAE EI comparisons. At the same time, post-educational support mechanisms that respond to the structural obstacles Mohebi and David (2024) found to translate course-generated EI into entrepreneurial action (accessible funding facilities, regulatory facilitation, family-facing entrepreneurship legitimization communications) should be

designed by policy makers so that curriculum reform and ecosystem reform are formulated as complementary policy responses as opposed to mutually exclusive ones.

Future Research Recommendations

Longitudinal pre-post research designs, actively controlled, disaggregated by content type, should be a priority of future scholarship that may plausibly attribute EI change to particular pedagogical intervention and not to selection, maturation or social desirability effects. The field particularly requires research that would trace the same group of students through several semesters of sequenced exposure to entrepreneurship content, to examine ESE, ATB, SN, and PBC separately at each phase, to define the cumulative architecture of intention development over a multi-year curriculum and not just the isolated impact of course exposure. The cultural calibration issue, as well, should be directly tackled by research by creating and testing UAE-specific EE curriculum frameworks based on local empirical evidence, and tested on the basis of behavioural, as opposed to purely intentional, outcomes (Al Adwan et al., 2025). Course content elements are most likely to prepare students to negotiate the structural obstacles hindering intention to action, is the most practically consequential frontier to UAE entrepreneurship education research, as is also most conspicuously unaddressed by the existing literature (Khalil et al., 2024; Smail et al., 2025).

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