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Educating for Entrepreneurial Leadership: From Didacticism to Co-creation

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial leadership promotes organisational competitive advantage and innovation resulting in increased attention on entrepreneurial leadership development. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) claim to develop entrepreneurial leaders. However, knowledge of how to facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development is limited, the effectiveness of development practices is contestable, and current understanding of the phenomenon is mostly conceptual. We address this void by exploring educators' perspectives of entrepreneurial leadership development and consider how the phenomenon is facilitated. We employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as our research methodology and analyse the data following IPA data analysis guidance. Findings signify the importance of placing strong emphasis on co-creating education experience with wider stakeholder involvement, thereby forming an entrepreneurial community

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which works collectively over the longer-term to facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development.

The findings also reveal the pedagogic significance of facilitating supportive learning conditions and ‘handholding,’ a broader form of support which contradicts the established notion of ‘independent learners’ thereby challenging current ontologies around ‘student support’ when facilitating entrepreneurial leadership development.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial leadership development, co-creation, IPA

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial leadership is claimed to promote competitive advantage for organisations resulting in a burgeoning interest across the education system including the school curriculum for programmes of entrepreneurial education (EE) (Mulholland and Turner, 2019). Many HEIs claim to develop entrepreneurial leaders and substantial resources are allocated to stimulate entrepreneurship in UK Universities (Aluthgama-Baduge and Rajasinghe, 2019; Rae et al., 2014). However, the effectiveness of development practices within HEIs and our current understanding of how to facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development are limited and conceptual.

We address this literature void by exploring the lecturer’s perspective, an unheard voice within the phenomenon (Ilonen, 2021; Langston, 2020) when compared to students’ perspectives (see Blackburn and Iskandarova, 2014; Do Paco et al., 2015). The study’s unique perspective considers how entrepreneurial leaders are developed, which is timely in light of the current debate on the inaptness of conventional forms of teaching (Aluthgama-Baduge and Mulholland, 2019; Gibb, 2002; Kirby, 2004; Matlay, 2005; Thorpe and Rawlinson, 2013), with demands for significant change in how entrepreneurship is taught (see Curtis et al., 2020; Higgins et al., 2013; Kirby, 2004) and entrepreneurial leadership development is facilitated. There is a need to understand successful interventions (Bozward et al., 2023) and more effective pedagogic insights to educate the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders from the educators’ perspective (Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017) which can provide a rich understanding of how we should approach EE (Refai et al., 2015).

Hence, we ask the question, *‘how do enterprise and entrepreneurship lecturers make sense of their experience of educating future entrepreneurs?’* and employ IPA to develop a deeper qualitative understanding of the phenomenon. The source of our knowledge for this study is the

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educators' experience (see Rajasinghe et al., 2021) and the research question is addressed by making sense of the interpretations of participants' experiences.

Following the introduction, we critically review the relevant literature and justify our methodology. Then, the findings are presented and discussed in line with the literature. The conclusion provides an overview of our study, highlighting the contributions and the limitations.

The literature review below focuses on how entrepreneurial leadership is taught in HEIs, thereby providing this study with a conceptual framework in narrative form (see Miles et al., 2014). The review highlights the research gap and justifies the question that we aim to address.

2. Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership is established as a unique (Harrison et al., 2018; Kuratko, 2007), dynamic and context-based (Leitch and Harrison, 2018; Taylor and Thorpe, 2004) branch of leadership (Galloway et al., 2015). However, some argue there is nothing distinct about entrepreneurial leadership (Vecchio, 2003) except that it is performed in entrepreneurial ventures (Leitch et al., 2013).

The latter view concurs with the argument that entrepreneurs are leaders (Kempster and Cope, 2010; Lee and Wang, 2017; Leitch and Volery, 2017; Soomro et al., 2021) who demonstrate “authentic, charismatic and transformational” leadership styles (Leitch and Volery, 2017, p. 150) with some reference to the phenomenon's situational nature (see Coglisier and Brigham, 2004; Flamholtz and Randle, 2021). Leadership is “a core component of entrepreneurial process, considering that opportunities cannot be exploited without the facilitation of individual and collective efforts” (Ensley et al., 2006, p. 247). Entrepreneurial leadership is “an emerging paradigm from the domains of leadership and entrepreneurship” (Harrison et al., 2018, p. 521),

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situated in context. Thus, due to the social nature of the phenomenon, literature clearly offers different interpretations of entrepreneurial leadership with no consensus (Bagheri and Harrison, 2020; Clark et al., 2019). Informed by these arguments and leadership theory (Day and Dragoni, 2015; DeRue, 2011) we position entrepreneurial leadership as ‘a social process of becoming that mobilises actions and places meaning on those actions that people engage in to create value’.

2.1 Entrepreneurial Leadership Education in Higher Education

Entrepreneurial leadership is said to offer competitive advantage (Fernald et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2018) and being entrepreneurial fosters innovation, creativity, and organisational sustainability (Flamholtz, 2011; Flamholtz and Kannan-Narasimhan, 2013; Gupta et al., 2004; Harrison et al., 2018; Mehmood et al., 2021; Renko et al., 2015). Entrepreneurship is also recognised as an intervention to improve social wellbeing, economic development, and business performance (Pittaway et al., 2020; QAA, 2018) leading to significant interest in EE among wider stakeholders, such as educators, practitioners and policymakers (Henry, 2020; Mukesh et al., 2020), and in UK HEIs (Hannon, 2005; Jones et al., 2017). This increasing interest in entrepreneurial leadership education is also reflected within the current literature (Fernald et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2016; Okudan and Rzasa, 2006). However, knowledge about the phenomenon remains scant; for example, little is known about the contribution of the learning environment in nurturing entrepreneurial leadership (Leith and Volery, 2017), or about how best to develop entrepreneurial leaders (Bagheri and Pihie, 2013). Furthermore, successful EE interventions within the university context (Bozward et al., 2023) and contextual challenges of developing entrepreneurs (Lindh and Thorgren, 2016) are areas ripe for further research. Greenberg et al. (2013) and Harrison et al. (2018) emphasise that a high proportion of entrepreneurial leadership studies focus on conceptual

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approaches rather than empirical studies, leading to a demand to deepen the understanding of entrepreneurship (Rajasinghe et al., 2021) and entrepreneurial leadership (Bagheri and Harrison, 2020). To address one such demand, ‘entrepreneurial leadership development within the HE context’ the question was asked, ‘how do enterprise and entrepreneurship lecturers make sense of their experience of educating future entrepreneurs?’. This is a largely unattended area (Aluthgama-Baduge and Mulholland, 2019; Ilonen, 2021; Langston, 2020).

2.2 Entrepreneurial Leadership Learning and Development

This section addresses how entrepreneurial leaders learn and develop. Leadership development, adult learning, and entrepreneurship theories are linked to highlight the empirical gaps in entrepreneurial leadership development. The discussion consists of three sections; collaborative ‘learning and co-creating education experience; experiential learning; and supportive environment.

2.2.1 Collaborative learning and co-creating education experience

We position learning as a social process (Garvey, 2011; Rajasinghe and Allen, 2020; Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019) and entrepreneurship as a co-creative (Karami and Read, 2021) social activity (Anderson, 2005; Cunningham and Fraser, 2022; Rajasinghe et al., 2021) where wider stakeholders collectively create value. Thus, the importance of engaging with wider social actors, such as practitioners, policy makers and researchers is emphasised in order to construct our understanding of entrepreneurship (Cummins et al., 2021; Guerrero et al., 2021; Karami and Read, 2021; Wilson, 2011), entrepreneurial leadership (Harrison, 2018), and leadership development.

Engagement with the community of practitioners in a safe, purposefully designed space can enhance the innovation of both educators (Beresford and Beresford, 2010), and learners (Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019). Such involvement with the community also improves the

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entrepreneurial mind-set (QAA, 2018), and fosters critical reflective discussions which align with current student expectations of entrepreneurship education (Cummins et al., 2021) thereby enhancing entrepreneurial leadership development. This reiterates entrepreneurial learning as a process of co-participation (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004) and rationalises the growing acceptance of active learner participation to construct new understanding (Bell, 2020; Curtis et al., 2020) and achieve entrepreneurial success (Bird, 2015).

However, wider stakeholder involvement of co-creating learning experiences in EE, entrepreneurial leadership and development, is under-researched and understanding is mostly conceptual (see Béchar and Grégoire, 2007; Bird, 2002). The HE literature offers a narrow focus on the involvement of a few mandatory stakeholders that centres on student-teacher (Bovill, 2020; Dollinger and Lodge, 2020), student-student (see Smørvik and Vespestad, 2020; Wallin, 2020) and teacher-teacher (see Plank, 2011) co-creation. This does not fully appreciate the complexity and social nature of entrepreneurial learning and development (see Higgins et al., 2013; Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019) and is insufficient to educate future entrepreneurial leaders (see Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017; Cummins et al., 2021). The lack of direct understanding of co-creative entrepreneurship is evident (Karami and Read, 2021) and its educational implications are yet to be fully realised. More specifically, our knowledge of 'how educators facilitate co-creation' and 'how co-creation is practised with the involvement of wider stakeholders' is limited (Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017; Taylor and Thorpe, 2004), and the educators' perspective of facilitating co-creation is under-represented within EE literature (Hannon, 2018; Ilonen, 2021; Langston, 2020).

Some studies highlight short-term interventions and posit that linking local entrepreneurs facilitates subjective understanding (Mwasalwiba et al., 2014; Bolton and Thompson, 2013; Brand et al., 2007; Westlund et al., 2014) and the contextual nature of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and

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Anderson, 2017; Rajasinghe et al., 2021) which is vital to the education of entrepreneurial leaders (Wilson, 2011). However, the effectiveness of short-term interventions can be contestable. Therefore, the under-researched phenomenon of involving the community for longer interventions in the context of leadership development should be explored. This offers educators an opportunity to explore diverse forms of co-creation (Aluthgama-Baduge and Rajasinghe, 2022; Dollinger et al., 2018; Kreiling and Paunov, 2021) and to explore the effectiveness of longer-term interventions from various stakeholders in order to enhance entrepreneurial leadership learning and development within the HE context.

2.2.2 Experiential learning

Entrepreneurial development occurs through experience and discovery (Drost and McGuire, 2011; Pittaway and Cope, 2007, Rae and Carswell, 2000). Thus, opportunities to experiment help to acquire knowledge that can be applied in entrepreneurial situations (Neck et al., 2014), facilitating students to experience and reflect on real scenarios (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004), creating a favourable environment (Knowles et al., 2015; Kolb, 1984) for entrepreneurial leadership development (Harrison et al., 2018).

Students' active engagement with various experiential activities, such as workshops, industry visits, start-up simulations and work-experience initiatives, is known to both deepen learning (Arasti et al., 2012; Schindehutte and Morris, 2016), and to provide a holistic learning experience (Dinham, 2014). Therefore, "the engagement of the entrepreneur in experiential learning necessitates moving from passive learning to a (...) mode that they take control and ownership of their own learning, assuming the role of an inquirer, negotiator, decision-maker, and mediator" (Higgins et al., 2013, p. 143). This notion is informed by adult learning theory (Knowles

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et al., 2015); however, an effective, active reflective approach is vital for entrepreneurial leadership development (Bagheri and Pihie, 2013).

Moreover, challenging experiences and critical reflections help leaders to self-motivate to act on skills (DeRue and Wellman, 2009) and improve self-understanding which facilitates their development (Roomi and Harrison, 2011). Reflection for development is associated with coaching and mentoring (Du Toit, 2014; Garvey, 2011) and reflective learning (Schön, 1987) theories. Coaching and mentoring have long been established as leadership development interventions (Garvey, 2011; Rajasinghe, 2018) and are gaining popularity in entrepreneurial development (see Lee and Wang, 2017; Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019). The coaches' ability to provide a non-judgmental, supportive, and challenging space (Rajasinghe and Allen, 2020) seems to enhance the learning experience for entrepreneurs (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004).

2.2.3 Supportive environment

In the EE context, in order to deliver value, students are encouraged to deal with unknown, iterative processes from ideation to business growth (Burns, 2022; Chell, 2013; Neck and Greene, 2011), so the process is chaotic (see Chell, 2013). Moreover, students may not enjoy the “messiness of an experimental, improvisational classroom in which unexpected possibilities exist” (Engel et al., 2016, p. 12). This demands a physically, socially, and mentally supportive environment for entrepreneurial learning (Klyver et al., 2018; Pittaway et al., 2020; Setiawan, 2014). A practical entrepreneurial learning environment influences student engagement within the entrepreneurial process (Bell and Liu, 2019; Ramsgaard and Christensen, 2018). Educators play a key role in facilitating such environments (Ilonen, 2021).

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Providing a holistic understanding of the entrepreneurial process (Hoppe, 2016; Neck and Corbett, 2018; Vincett and Farlow, 2008) helps to equip students with skills and behaviours to deal with complexities (Chell, 2013) and to develop entrepreneurial leadership capabilities. The entrepreneurial process demands intense work (Jones and Underwood, 2017; Kuratko, 2020); consequently, entrepreneurs are more likely to experience burnout than their employee counterparts (Kuan-Han et al., 2020) leading to a demand for psychological support (Ziemianski and Golik, 2020) for emotional challenges (Nielsen and Gartner, 2017; Ziemianski and Golik, 2020).

Educators should protect students from the possible negative consequences of their entrepreneurial activities (Newbery et al., 2018), understand their individual needs (Yusoff et al., 2015) and help them to navigate this process in a trusted non-judgmental, safe environment (Williams, 2022). This demands adequate support beyond the traditional university interventions (Trivedi, 2016). Offerings may vary but should include, inter alia, belonging, identity, security needs (see Thoits, 1982), and emotional support (Klyver et al., 2018). Moreover, educators' availability, accessibility and genuineness appear to influence student motivation and continuation (Yusoff et al., 2015). Informal support (Gianiodis and Meek, 2020), long-lasting relationships and interactions between students and faculty provide a positive development experience and facilitate acquiring new domain knowledge for alumni (Jansen et al., 2015). This diversity of support helps students to be involved in entrepreneurial activities thereby leading to improvement in their leadership capacities (Bagheri and Pihie, 2013; Henry, 2020) and promoting awareness of biased decision making and mitigating risk (Zichella and Reichstein, 2023).

This holistic support facilitates students to act like real world entrepreneurs which is significant for entrepreneurial learning and leadership development (Okudan and Rzasa, 2006).

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Despite the conceptual acceptance of the importance of the holistic nature of the support, the discourse in higher education promotes ‘student independence’, thereby distancing educators from the students. This can also lead students to disregard, or disbelieve in, the support available, which highlights a perceptual and practical gap within the domain of student support within this sector.

3. Methodology

This study explores the experience of UK academics to deepen our understanding of how they facilitate EE learning and teaching. We asked, ‘*how do enterprise and entrepreneurship lecturers make sense of their experience of educating future entrepreneurs?*’. The research question indicates that the emphasis is on experience (phenomenology) of individual educators (idiography) and how students interpret their experience (hermeneutics). Therefore, our interest closely links with the philosophical stances of IPA (Rajasinghe, 2020; Smith et al., 2009). IPA is increasingly popular in entrepreneurship and EE research (see Kempster and Cope, 2010; Langston, 2020; Rajasinghe et al., 2021). Therefore, the combination of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiographic focus within IPA enabled us to explore educators’ experience of how they facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development.

The study adopted IPA’s guidance, “that the samples are selected purposively (...) because they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 43). Thus, it was a deliberate decision not to select an exclusive purposive sampling strategy (such as stratified sampling; cell sampling; quota sampling or theoretical sampling) that are commonly used when selecting multiple cases for qualitative studies (see Robinson, 2014). Rather, our approach towards purposive sampling was more holistic in that the participants were selected on the basis that they represent the experience of educating entrepreneurial leaders, that is “they represent a perspective rather than a population” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 43). This approach to sampling is

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theoretically consistent with IPA (see Rajasinghe et al., 2021) and with qualitative research in general (Gray, 2014; Robinson, 2014).

Eleven lecturers from UK HEIs were recruited by employing purposive and convenience sampling (Robinson, 2014). The criteria for sampling were that the participants should possess considerable experience in entrepreneurship education and be working full-time in a UK HEI at the time of data collection. Table 1 below presents an overview of participant demographics.

Table 1. Profile of the participants

Participant Name (Anonymised)	Years of experience	Brief profile
LC	4 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the Centre for Entrepreneurship (CFE) at the university.
NM	5 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the CFE at the university. NM has received the national Enterprise Educator award from the UK Advanced HE (HEA).
MB	5 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the CFE at the university.
VS	5 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the Business School (BS) of the university.
DJ	5 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the business school of the university.
KH	7 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the CFE at the university.
IC	7 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the BS of the University who has also taught for a few years in further education colleges.
NL	8 years	NL has been awarded national teaching fellow for contribution to entrepreneurship education by the HEA.

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BB	12 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the CFE at the university.
RK	15 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator who has taught in a few countries with 8 years in UK universities.
JL	30 years	Enterprise/entrepreneurship educator at the CFE at the university.

The importance of homogeneity was acknowledged, and we attempted to make the sample fairly homogeneous (Smith et al., 2022). Ethnicity, gender, age or sexual orientation were not considered to be important in deciding homogeneity of the sample. The relatively small sample was intentional in order to ensure ideographic commitments and deeper analysis of each experiential account (Robinson, 2014; Smith et al., 2022).

One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant which began with a broad question, “Can you tell me about your experience of teaching entrepreneurship?”. Then we explored how they educate future entrepreneurs by asking open-ended questions and the prompts emerged from their answers. The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and generated rich qualitative data. The first author conducted the interviews and completed the initial data analysis. This helped us to follow IPA’s position of hermeneutics (see Smith et al., 2009). However, it is acknowledged that the analysis continued until the write up, thereby including other authors’ influence on interpretation. The analysis procedure for each interview is tabulated below in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Analysis procedure

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Analysis Process	Description
Step 1- Reading and re-reading	This step helps researchers to immerse themselves in the original data and it helps us to place participant experience at the centre of the analysis (Cope, 2011; Smith et al., 2022; Rajasinghe et al., 2021). Transcribing data by the analyst helps to get closer to the participant experience (see Kent and Potter, 2014)
Step 2- Initial notes	Our aim at this stage was to have a set of detailed notes and comments on the transcripts where more immersion and sense making of the data begin (Cope, 2011). The attempt was to make sense of the data by attending to the experience through line-by-line analysis. This phase involves ‘describing’ and ‘interrogating’ (Smith et al., 2009; Shinebourne, 2011) where ‘hermeneutics of empathy’ and ‘hermeneutics of questioning’ is employed (Rajasinghe et al., 2021)
Step 3 – Developing emergent themes	This phase involves an attempt to reduce details by placing more emphasis on initial notes but returning to the transcripts continues (Smith et al., 2009). What the analyst learns during the initial noting stage helps at this step. Within this phase, the analyst experiences double hermeneutics as the researcher’s involvement in interpretative activity is higher at this level. This step itself is a clear acknowledgement that the “IPA researcher is not merely an observer or data processor but is an active contributor to interpretation” (Engward and Goldspink, 2020, p. 43).
Step 4 – Searching for connections across themes	This step involves exploring connections between the emergent themes (Rajasinghe et al., 2021). The analysts cluster themes exploring associations. The clustering may require going back to previous stages of analysis which marks the iterative nature of IPA data analysis. Smith et al. (2009) introduced several techniques to support the analysts during this process (see below).
Step 5 - Moving to the next case	Steps 1 – 4 recurs with each case separately. This case-by-case analysis provides detailed attention to each case that is informed by IPA’s idiographic commitments. The challenge here is to treat “the next case on its own terms, to do justice to its own individuality” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 99). The continuous listening to the recording and re-reading of the next case were more important to get closer to that case’s unique experience which influenced the analysts to be more familiar with the current experiential account than the previous account. A brief break in between case analysis and reflexivity also helped to provide each experiential account priority within the hermeneutic process.

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<p>Step 6 – Looking for patterns across cases</p>	<p>This step involves a careful examination of patterns, divergences, and convergences across cases to develop the final set of themes in line with the research question (Rajasinghe et al., 2021). The selection of the final themes may involve “reconfiguring and relabeling themes” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 101) which in our study resulted in three core themes that address the research question. During the cross analysis we did not aim to present “a kind of ‘group norm’ or ‘average’ of the experience we were investigating” but the “shared and unique feature of the experiences across the contributing participants” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 100).</p>
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During Step 4 (see Table 2), concepts such as abstraction (putting like with like); contextualisation (attempting to identify contextual and narrative elements of the experience); numeration (frequency with which a theme is supported by a participant) and polarisation (exploration of oppositional relationships) (see Smith et al., 2009) were employed. We also went back to original transcripts during the write up process which confirms our engagement with the hermeneutic circle. Therefore “the division between analysis and write up is to a certain extent a false one, in that the analysis will be expanded during the write up process” (Smith and Osborn, 2008, p. 58). The outcome of this analytical process is presented in the findings section as three core themes.

4. Findings

4.1 *Co-creating education experience*

Educators’ involvement in co-creating learning experience is a key implication of the study’s outcome. Findings portrayed insights into how co-creation is practised by providing space for various stakeholders, such as faculty, students, and practitioners, to be involved in the entrepreneurial leadership development process. Educators acting as facilitators recurred within the study; for example, NL discussed the importance of:

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“Facilitating a learning environment where there is a lot going on” and mentioned that “it is much about facilitation”. JL supported this view by saying that, “it’s much about facilitation” (NL) and “all I was doing was facilitating in a structured way”.

The notion of ‘a lot going on’ from NL represents a collective approach to entrepreneurial leadership development facilitation with some structure in place. The findings deepen our understanding of how a collaborative approach facilitates entrepreneurial leadership development. Interviewees represented the collective nature of the practice, saying that:

“It is not that we kind of own our own courses” (JL) and “it is not about the academics creating them a knowledge base, it’s all of us together” (BB).

Adding further to the collaborative approach to educating leaders, participants confirmed that team teaching and lecturers from other disciplines helped to construct the learning experience. For instance, KH highlighted the importance of this approach by emphasising that to: “teach (...) entrepreneurship you need a cohort-based approach.”

All participants supported the idea of a collaborative approach to educating entrepreneurial leaders.

The team teaching approach is mostly about teaming up with faculty with practical experience in entrepreneurship. JL highlighted this, saying that:

“As an entrepreneurship teacher, if they have no direct experience (...) they pull in people who have.” This indicates that entrepreneurship educators place prominence on practical experience.

Our study evidenced that educators work with academics beyond their own team and institution to facilitate learning. For example, RK mentioned that they work with the *Enterprise Educators UK* community.

KH expanded on this community of collaborators emphasising that:

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“There are people around (...) in the world of entrepreneurship education.”

This demonstrates the efforts of institutions to link educators from different contexts to co-create understanding. These collaborations have helped educators to explore innovative pedagogies. LC mentioned that:

“I have some great colleagues (...) come up with new techniques for teaching.”

All participants highlighted another form of co-constructing by actively engaging with students with entrepreneurial backgrounds to create positive learning experiences. DJ emphasised that:

“If a student does have a business (...) I will absolutely focus on that”

Such involvement facilitates learning from students' experiences to the wider learning community. BB highlighted the students' involvement in pedagogical decision-making, pointing out that: *“They (students) said we really need to know the legal side of intellectual property management, so I got an intellectual property specialist to go and talk to them.”*

This indicates an andragogy-informed, resourceful learner-centered approach to entrepreneurial leadership development. Interviewees recurrently acknowledged that students are actively involved in co-creating knowledge, and that entrepreneurs with diverse backgrounds are actively involved in co-creating, understanding and facilitating learners' leadership journey. KH revealed that one reason to use entrepreneurial leaders is that:

“They (students) want to learn from (...) role models”.

This reiterates the student-centred nature of entrepreneurial leadership development within the context. The involvement of practitioners helps students to understand the challenges within the entrepreneurial journey and to become motivated as they become more realistic.

Findings highlighted the heterogeneity of practices when lecturers create space for lengthy interventions with entrepreneurs rather than merely relying on guest speakers to support

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entrepreneurial leadership development, including mentoring, co-design and co-delivery of courses. NL highlighted these practitioner involvements by saying:

“It is an eleven-week course, the first five weeks (...) to bring in some really interesting entrepreneurs”.

Using entrepreneurs as mentors signifies the importance of tailored support for entrepreneurial leadership development and having longer-term interventions to facilitate the entrepreneurial processes. VS emphasised the use of mentoring by saying:

“We have mentors who are supporting (...) like the established entrepreneurs.”

There was some evidence of linking local entrepreneurs to provide contextual understanding of the practice. For example, RK mentioned that: *“I bring local entrepreneurs into the classroom.”*

The participants also stressed that their personal entrepreneurial experiences helped them to facilitate entrepreneurial leadership learning in an engaging manner and to be active in their entrepreneurs’ community of practice.

4.2 *Experiential and interactive learning context*

The findings portrayed the lecturers’ individual and collective efforts to design a suitable context in line with learners’ expectations in two key respects; ‘learning by doing’ and ‘facilitating an interactive educational setting.’ Lecturers offer opportunities to network with practitioners through experience sharing and guest speaker engagements. These initiatives are influential, creating an interactive learning environment to actively engage ensuring a learner-centred, practice-informed learning environment. IC confirmed his efforts, saying that:

“I do try to “have some sort of more student-centred activities.”

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The findings reveal that lecturers form a community of practice for entrepreneurs to support their learning and development. For example, VS claimed that:

“I have students to organise [an] entrepreneurship society.”

This appears to be an intentional effort to facilitate an environment where students and other stakeholders can learn and develop through community engagement.

The findings depict that the educators develop a close relationship with students by interacting with them socially and more informally. KH mentioned that:

“Once the half term we all go to the pub together”

Such interactions are also evident from other participants. For example, JL claimed that:

“We have a dinner on the Friday night” and RK mentioned that *“we go for drinks, for a meal, sometimes go hiking.”*

These activities seem to bridge the traditional gaps between learners and tutors.

Many participants promote extracurricular activities to make the students’ experience more holistic by helping them to develop transferable skills. DJ confirmed that he:

“Encourages students to get involved in extracurricular activity”.

Learning by doing is a notion that continuously appeared in our findings. The lecturers’ efforts in this regard are evident with BB’s emphasis on active learning. He mentioned that it is important to offer:

“a combination of actually doing things rather than sitting at a desk”.

LC affirmed the importance of practice by saying that:

“I get them to do practical exercise”. DJ also endorsed the notion by saying that: *“sometimes you learn by doing”.*

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The lecturers facilitate students to be involved in various activities by designing innovative pedagogies. RK mentioned that he facilitated students to become involved in product development, saying that:

“They have time to build products to take home.”

Students are encouraged to interact with businesses and actively work on certain projects to acquire know-how. VS mentioned that:

“Students (...) to do some sort of market research for a catering firm”.

This enhances students’ understanding of the market and provides the communication and people skills to conduct similar projects. Moreover, use of business clinics providing practical experience was mentioned; for example, RK said that:

“I created like an enterprise clinic.”

MB and DJ signified the importance of failing and learning from mistakes. MB emphasised this, noting that: *“In entrepreneurship you want to make mistakes”.*

DJ endorsed MB’s view by stressing that: *“They actually done something even if it is failed, I do not mind failure, failure’s how you learn”.*

A safe environment for students to experiment is vital if they are to learn from failures.

NM emphasised that he attempted to:

“Give them (students) a safe ground where they can experiment and develop business ideas” and he continued to support by placing emphasis on ensuring that *“they (students) can play and innovate and experiment”.*

Our findings evidence a strong emphasis on practical application by getting students to engage in entrepreneurial endeavours both as part of and beyond class activities. The learning environment plays a significant role facilitating such pedagogic practice which leads to entrepreneurial leadership development.

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4.3 *Handholding through the entrepreneurial process*

‘Handholding’ learners throughout the entrepreneurial process is another key finding. The study reveals the importance of support beyond the classroom to experience aspects of entrepreneurship, such as discovering viable opportunities, developing business plans, and pitching them to potential investors. MB noted that:

“It (the support) goes far beyond the one-hour seminar, it’s 24 hours”.

Many participants go beyond their traditional lecturing role by becoming a more supportive and accessible critical friend, for example, coaching and advising. LC stressed his broader role by saying that:

“My role (in) developing them was one of coaching them (...) in the new venture creation plan”.

Participants link coaching with their practice, and associated mentoring with the external entrepreneurs. They describe helping their learners to manage stress and excitement during the entrepreneurial journey and to be realistic about the possibilities in order to ensure continuity.

The participants acknowledge the importance of appropriate support to facilitate action-orientation of students. Thus, they are ‘handholding’ students from ideation to commercialisation and believe such support should continue after graduation. For example, NM mentioned that:

“They’d need even more handholding afterwards (...) we put a lot of students through those entrepreneurial experiences at university and they might create some projects but then we don’t do enough handholding to the next step”.

NM also acknowledged that not having a supportive academic structure, and insufficient flexibility within universities to equip students, was a reason to offer post university support. As NM noted:

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“It would be incredibly hard for them (students) to take something further within their existing academic structure of the studies (...) there is not enough flexibility to accommodate that”.

Following on from the emphasised need for post-university support, the study reveals how such support is provided by the interviewees. For example, LC mentioned that:

“This girl [student] who graduated last year (...) come back and ask for business planning advice”

and BB confirmed that:

“When they leave us (...) we continue to support them”.

The participants have intentionally become more approachable. KH said:

“They've got my phone number, they've got my email, I am accessible” and LC also endorsed such support when emphasising the importance of being there for students. The findings indicate the lecturers' willingness to go beyond the job description to genuinely support students. LC stressed this, saying:

“I like to do it (...) it is not part of my job description” and *“I don't know if that's my role or not, but I don't care”.*

These comments demonstrate that the lecturers provide additional informal, unstructured learning support for learners due to their genuine interest in facilitating entrepreneurial leadership development.

Findings highlighted the importance of providing extra care and appropriate psychological support for students through a dialogic approach. VS for example, mentioned that:

“I see them regularly, we always talk, how they are doing (...) in personal life and the business”.

This was reiterated by NL: *“I get students who come back, we'll have a conversation”.*

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These ongoing discussions and being a point of feedback, were found to be significant aspects of the support needed to overcome obstacles in the entrepreneurial process, thereby contributing to students' development.

5. Discussion

Reflecting on entrepreneurial leadership literature, these findings have reinforced the recognition that education, in this context, requires a new approach (Aluthgama-Baduge and Mulholland, 2019; Gibb, 2002; Kirby, 2004; Matlay, 2005). Despite the emerging theories, entrepreneurial educational practices are still struggling to ensure the effectiveness of the interventions (Bozward et al., 2023). Thus, entrepreneurial leadership development needs continuing attention to develop both theory and practice. Our study focused on understanding how educators within UK higher education facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development. The study revealed that this is achieved by a combination of 'co-creating education experience with longer term wider stakeholder involvement', an 'experiential and interactive learning context' and 'handholding', a broader form of support mechanism. These personal experiential themes present a unique narrative of how entrepreneurial leadership development is facilitated within the context of the study. We discuss them below in line with the literature.

Co-creative EE is a contrasting approach to the more traditional, linear didactic practices of transmitting knowledge from teacher to students (see Aluthgama-Baduge and Mulholland, 2019; Kandlbinder, 2013) and education practices that focus on a few mandatory stakeholders (see Bovill, 2020; Dollinger and Lodge, 2020). The findings cast light on co-creation that goes beyond student and educator to a broader form of knowledge creation that demands longer term interventions with the involvement of wider stakeholders, such as Enterprise Educators UK (an

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international community of EE policy makers, academics and educators), students, and local communities. Such involvement of diverse actors to develop entrepreneurial leaders endorses the social (see Rajasinghe et al., 2021), collaborative (see Guerrero et al., 2021) and co-creative (see Karami and Read, 2021) nature of entrepreneurship. This is a novel form of co-creation within the phenomenon which goes beyond current practices that are influenced by short-term, isolated initiatives, such as a case study or guest speaker involvement (see Bolton and Thompson, 2013; Brand et al., 2007). Despite claims of the importance of wider stakeholder involvement in co-constructing understanding to develop entrepreneurial leaders, the current practice of promoting such involvement lags behind compared to theoretical advancements. Thus, this study also highlights a practice gap of implementing and facilitating wider stakeholder involvement to support entrepreneurial leadership development.

According to the findings, one aspect of co-creation is team teaching and linking cross-disciplinary individuals. Plank (2011) acknowledges that such engagement influences a dynamic education experience for learners which “encourages involved parties to view the subject matter from multiple perspectives” (Plank, 2011, p. 3). These engagements highlight lecturers’ resourcefulness in facilitating learning and positively challenging their students (Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019) through the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

The second form of co-construction is the students’ active contribution to produce relevant knowledge (Bird, 2002; Ollila and Williams-Middleton, 2011). The findings reveal, for example, that the lecturers actively use students’ practical experiences of venture creation expertise and consider them to be resourceful individuals, which encourages educators to actively involve them in teaching and learning (Knowles et al., 2015), which facilitates a) their development, b) deeper learning for the parties involved (Schindehutte and Morris, 2016), c) new understanding (Bell,

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2020; Curtis et al., 2020), d) a positive learning experience (see Dinham, 2014) and entrepreneurial success (Bird, 2015). Despite these positive outlooks in the literature, actively engaging students in co-creating understanding can be a challenging exercise; therefore, wider research into this phenomenon is vital.

The third form of co-creation of learning experience evident from our study is the involvement of entrepreneurs. Using entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial leader role models as practitioners in the classroom helps both students and faculty to understand real-world experiences (Bolton and Thompson, 2013; Brand et al., 2007). Literature signifies the positive results of helping student learning and development through such co-creation as it facilitates students to reflect on their experiences and those of others with whom they engage (Wagenberg and Gutierrez, 2016). This study highlights the importance of involving entrepreneurs for longer periods by, for example, co-designing learning, co-delivering, coaching, and mentoring students rather than short-term initiatives, such as guest lectures. Therefore, this study justifies increased interaction with entrepreneurs to promote entrepreneurial leadership development (Collet and O’Cinneide, 2010) which should go beyond common practices.

Student mentoring by entrepreneurs and coaching by the faculty is also significant for entrepreneurial leadership development (Bolton and Thompson, 2013; Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019) as it provides students with the right balance of theoretical and practical exposure (see Thorp and Goldstein, 2010). Students’ critical engagement with entrepreneurs stimulates their awareness (Wagenberg and Gutierrez, 2016) and facilitates their development (Brand et al., 2007; Westlund et al., 2014). The involvement of local entrepreneurs helps students to comprehend the social and contextual nature of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Rajasinghe et al., 2021) and to ensure the success of the entrepreneurship programs (Gibb, 2011; Wilson, 2011), thereby

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evidencing the significance of coaching and mentoring for entrepreneurial leadership development (see Lee and Wang, 2017; Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019).

Context of learning is also a significant factor in EE that impacts learning outcomes (Iwu et al., 2021) and activates students' awareness of entrepreneurship (see Arasti et al., 2012; Schindehutte and Morris, 2016). The participants facilitate active student engagement, space to experiment and experience of entrepreneurship which enhances their entrepreneurial development (Drost and McGuire, 2011; Pittaway and Cope, 2007; Rae and Carswell, 2000) and leadership abilities. Our findings confirm that experiential learning enhances leadership development as in Neck et al. (2014) and Van der Sijde et al. (2008). The findings comply with the literature (see Morris et al., 2013; Birch et al., 2017) that learning from failure, piloting and trials are all influential in entrepreneurial learning. The trial-and-error approach in a safe and supportive environment facilitates learners to understand the practicalities of the concepts that can be applied in entrepreneurial situations (Neck et al., 2014). Learner reflections on such experiences are formative and developmental (Kolb, 1984; Knowles et al., 2015). However, these may not be possible without a supportive learning environment where wider stakeholders actively interact (see Cummins et al., 2021; Gibb, 2011; QAA, 2018) to facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development. Informal support interventions (Gianiodis and Meek, 2020) and long-term relationships between faculty and students appear to be a positive experience for entrepreneurial learning (Jasen et al., 2015) and leadership development. This is in line with Béchard and Grégoire, (2007) and Kozlinska's (2016) notion that a supportive, open, and interactive learning environment is developmental and facilitates students to adopt an enthusiastic, innovative approach to learning (Wang and Verzat, 2011). The findings suggest that the lecturers perform a primary role in designing a favourable education environment (see Ilonen, 2021) to help entrepreneurial

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leadership development. However, considering the institutional processes, such as resource allocation, authority and educator responsibilities, the possibility of such autonomy and bottom-up approach to create a learning environment is contestable. The findings do not reveal whether educators get other support services involved to facilitate the required environment to foster a positive learning experience. Insufficient attention in the literature about lectures' multifaceted role in EE is visible (see Hannon, 2018; Ilonen, 2021; Neck and Corbett, 2018). Therefore, there is potential for further research to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon.

Another significant finding is the need for 'handholding', which is interpreted as helping beyond the generalised support offered to students within the HE context. The interviewees claim that they handhold students through entrepreneurship from ideation to venture initiation, which is an effective way of educating entrepreneurs (Hoppe, 2016; Neck and Corbett, 2018; Vincett and Farlow, 2008). This evidence adds to the claims by Harrison (2018) and Diensberg (2008), that students need continuous support throughout their entrepreneurial journey. The participants emphasised that they go beyond job description and even support their alumni; the latter interactions appear to be a source of new ideas and domain knowledge for alumni (Jansen et al., 2015). Given the non-linear, chaotic nature of the entrepreneurial process (Chell, 2013; Neck and Greene, 2011) students find such long-lasting support influences their personal and venture development (Jansen et al., 2015). However, 'handholding' does not mean that the students have insufficient independence but rather that it offers assurance of expert support and guidance when things appear difficult for novice entrepreneurs (Diensberg, 2008).

The support for students is manifested in many forms, such as social, psychological and emotional, all of which are useful to protect students from potential negative entrepreneurial experiences (see Newbery et al., 2018). Such support simulates the entrepreneurial process safely,

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from ideation to business development, encouraging action, and students' ability to become entrepreneurial leaders (Brush et al., 2015; Gartner and Vesper, 1994; Wilson, 2011). 'Handholding,' the emergent mode of support in this study, demands a broader support structure for entrepreneurial leadership development which is underrepresented within the current literature. The demand for such support poses a significant challenge to the current support services within HEIs and offers a contrasting perspective to the dominant notion of 'independent learners' which may have been distancing students from actively seeking support during their entrepreneurial journey. The novel concept of 'handholding' offers the possibility to motivate students to seek support and to be part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that is developed to create a supportive, and interactive learning context where wider stakeholders engage to co-create understanding. Therefore, these empirical insights demand that we challenge our current ontology on 'support' and encourage debate among wider university communities about the support structures and the discourse around this topic which may result in new educational policy developments and support mechanisms for entrepreneurial leadership development and beyond.

6. Conclusion

We explored lecturers' experiences of educating future entrepreneurial leaders by employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a research methodology. Our aim was to understand how entrepreneurship educators facilitate entrepreneurial leadership development. The findings cast light on co-creation of education experience, through the educators' perspective, which is largely unattended in EE literature. Entrepreneurship does not happen in isolation and the study revealed that placing strong emphasis on wider stakeholder engagement in co-creating

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learning experiences brings EE to that practical reality. Therefore, adopting a co-creative educational approach is vital for entrepreneurial leadership development. The unique insights reiterate the importance of community of practice and diversity within community, and how this helps to enhance the learning experience of future entrepreneurial leaders. As stated above, co-creation is an under-researched phenomenon within entrepreneurship literature and in practice. Therefore, this study contributes to the theoretical advancement of co-creation in EE by involving multiple stakeholders for long-term initiatives which also presents potential practical implications. However, it is vital that further research is commissioned to advance our understanding of how co-creation impacts entrepreneurial leadership development and the practical and contextual barriers of facilitating co-creation. We also believe that methodological plurality is vital to understand the multi-faceted, complex nature of the phenomenon. We emphasise the importance of the pedagogy of creating an environment to facilitate supportive learning conditions and ‘handholding’ students through the entrepreneurial journey. ‘Handholding’ appears contradictory to the popular discourse of learning and teaching within the UK higher education system, where ‘independent learning’ is promoted. Our findings provide empirical evidence as to why strong support mechanisms are important in entrepreneurial leadership development and challenge the current discourses and ontologies of ‘Student support’ within the HE context. Our novel notion of support, ‘handholding’ has potential implications for policy and practice. However, such possibilities should be considered carefully whilst respecting the subjective, contextual nature of our study and our intention to develop unique insights into participant experience rather than statistically generalisable knowledge. The intention was not to develop statistically generalisable knowledge by conducting this study, which should be evident through our position of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial leadership, and research design including participant number,

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data collection and analytical procedure. Therefore, understanding the purpose and context of the study is vital for readers as they attempt to make sense of our findings. The focus was on lecturers' perspectives. Despite the fact that it is a relatively unheard voice in literature, it may restrict our understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, multi-perspective; multi-stakeholder studies with innovative research designs should be conducted.

Overall, the combination of co-creation, handholding, and interactive and experiential learning presents a unique narrative of how entrepreneurial leadership development is facilitated within the study context. This may influence educators and institutions to re-consider the current pedagogical practices, placing strong emphasis on practitioner involvement, and theory informed supportive approaches to entrepreneurial leadership development. It is re-emphasised that the study participants' experiences are influenced by the context, culture and language. We ensured transparency throughout the research process and invite readers to join the hermeneutic circle to make sense of the participants' and our interpretative activity by reflecting on the limitations of the study.

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