

Exploring Flexible Learning Environments: A Reflective Blog on Entrepreneurship Teaching Practice

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship pedagogical practice has been gaining traction among scholars and teaching practitioners since the subject permeates all other subject disciplines to enhance students' employability. This conceptual paper aims to explore the development of effective flexible learning environments (flipped classroom model and fully online learning) for entrepreneurship subjects by analysing the author's reflection over 11 weeks of a higher education course module. The paper sheds light on key features of flipped classrooms (such as personalised learning) and online learning and their implications on entrepreneurship education, which mainly focuses on learning by doing or experiential learning. Based on the findings, this paper recommends how students' learning experiences can be improved by creating a dynamic learning environment.

Keywords: Flipped Classroom, Flexible Learning Environment, Venture Opportunity, Entrepreneurship Education.

1.0 Introduction

Student-centred learning is gaining traction among UK higher education institutions. This turns teaching practitioners' focus to giving students autonomy and choices in their learning so that they can learn effectively and efficiently. Such focus necessitates the creation of a learning environment that allows students to decide what, where, how and when they want to learn. Such a type of learning environment is widely known as the flexible learning environment (Andrade and Alden-Rivers, 2019). The aim of the flexible learning environment is to foster diversity and inclusivity to support effective learning. However, the design, implementation and evaluation of flexible learning environments vary from one subject discipline to another. It also differs within the subject discipline, which has different foci of learning. This study focuses on the creation of a flexible learning environment that effectively supports entrepreneurship education.

This conceptual paper aims to explore the development of effective flexible learning environments (mainly the flipped classroom model and fully online learning) for the entrepreneurship subject discipline by analysing my own reflection over 11 weeks of a higher education pedagogy course module. The paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical strategies employed, offering valuable insights for educators seeking to adopt flexible learning environments in the entrepreneurship context.

This paper is organised and structured in the following manner. The methodology section outlines the approach employed in the development of this paper. Section 3 presents my reflection on the development of flipped classrooms and online curricula. In this section, I introduce key learning from a flipped classroom approach based on my reflection. In addition, I reflect on the design, implementation, and evaluation of flipped classrooms. Furthermore, I reflect upon the design of the online curriculum and the choice of appropriate technology. Thereafter, I discuss the design of the full online learning activities for a week. Finally, Section 4.0 summarises the overall reflection outlined from Section 3.1 to Section 3.4. This section contextualises the flexible learning environment in the entrepreneurship subject discipline, positioning my strength in pedagogical practice and recommending action plans for further development in the area of technology-enhanced learning. The recommendation aims to enhance the personal flexibility of student learning.

2.0 Methodology

This conceptual paper employs a reflective practice methodology to explore the pedagogical approaches within flexible learning environments, particularly focusing on the flipped classroom model (a type of blended learning environment) and online learning model and their applications in three components of entrepreneurship education as outlined by QAA (2018): *learning about*, *learning for*, and *learning through*. Reflective practice is a well-established method in educational research, facilitating a deeper understanding of teaching practices through systematic reflection on personal experiences (Schön, 1983). The philosophical underpinning of this study is social constructionism, which views the reality of the social world and the nature of knowledge as the co-production of the social actors. This view does not challenge the existing social state; instead, it attempts to understand it from the frame of participants (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). In other words, my meta-theoretical position is that I view the development of a flexible learning environment as the development of social order, which is co-constructed by educators and learners. Such meta-theoretical positions do not challenge the status of flexible learning environments but try to understand and develop them from the frame of educators and learners.

The paper is structured around a critical reflective journal (CRJ) compiled over 11 weeks as part of a professional development course in higher education pedagogy. The CRJ serves as a primary data source, capturing ongoing reflections on the design, implementation and evaluation of blended and online learning strategies. These reflections are systematically analysed to identify key themes, challenges, and outcomes relevant to entrepreneurship education.

Data were collected through weekly reflective entries in the CRJ, which documented personal insights, feedback from peers and tutors, and the integration of theoretical frameworks into teaching practice. The reflections were supplemented by peer- and student-feedback received from a micro-teaching session, flipped classroom session and the design of online curriculum components, providing a comprehensive view of the pedagogical strategies employed.

The analysis of the reflective entries follows a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The thematic analysis is guided by key pedagogical theories, including Knowles' (1984) principles of adult learning, Biggs' (2003) constructive alignment, and Laurillard's (2012) learning types framework. Each thematic section consists of three weeks of reflection and

follows the sequence up to week 11 to ensure a systematic approach to theme development. My reflection themes present my learning through reading resources, piloting the sessions, performing learning activities, and collaboratively working with peers. This approach ensures a structured examination of the reflective content, enabling a nuanced understanding of how the flipped classroom model and fully online learning can be adapted to entrepreneurship education.

As a reflective practice study, this research adheres to ethical guidelines by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of peer feedback and discussions referenced in the CRJ. Informed consent was obtained from participants involved in the peer feedback sessions, and reflections were anonymised to protect their identities.

The following section presents my reflection on the development of flipped classrooms and online curricula.

3.0 Reflection on the development of a flexible learning environment

3.1 Developing an understanding of a flipped classroom approach

From week 1 to 3, I developed my understanding of a flipped classroom (FC) approach, which is well known for promoting active student-centred learning. Through my weekly reading, I learned that a flipped classroom is one of the three types of blended learning (Stein and Graham, 2020). However, I could not understand how it differs from other types: hybrid and hyflex. The clarity came through the week 2 webinar, where Fox (2024a) highlighted the inversion of learning in the classroom as one of the distinctive features of a flipped classroom. Such an understanding helped me start thinking of possible classroom activities that I intended to deliver.

However, I still struggled to perceive the benefits of integrating the online (asynchronous) session with the on-site or face-to-face (synchronous) activity session, as suggested in Peisley's (2024a) top ten tips about the design of flipped classrooms. My perception changed when the weekly tutor group feedback highlighted that students have more control over their learning when online resources and activities of an online session are linked to the activity of an onsite session (Fox, 2024b). I am primed for this feedback because my main focus has always been to empower learners' autonomy in their learning. As I became aware of the benefit of the asynchronous and synchronous session integration of flipped classrooms, I focused on the design of learning inversion.

With regard to my adoption of the inversion of learning, my peers Srirangam (2024) highlighted inclusivity, Chick (2024a) emphasised personalisation, and Jones (2024a) stressed flexibility. While all three aspects (inclusivity, personalisation, and flexibility) are critical for facilitating student-centred learning, Chick's focus on personalisation shows the unique feature of the flipped classroom approach. Additionally, when I flipped my micro-teach session as a weekly challenge activity, it prompted my thinking about how student-centred learning facilitated through a flipped classroom differs from student-centred learning in my hyflex (micro-teach) session. Considering Fox's (2024b) feedback about the benefits of online and onsite integration and Chick's (2024a) learning personalisation, I realised that student-centred learning in flipped classrooms extends to Knowles's (1984) autonomous learning. The integration and personalisation give adult learners control over their learning. In other words, learners have the flexibility to decide what is relevant to them.

3.2 Designing, implementing and evaluating the flipped classroom approach

During weeks 4 to 6, I learned to design, implement and evaluate a flipped classroom approach. While designing the asynchronous (online) session of the flipped classroom, I aimed to ensure that my learners would grasp the overall activities and build their understanding, accommodating both holist and serialist learners (Pask, 1976). Focusing on this aim, I wanted to create a snapshot of learning activities in a sequence that aligns with Biggs and Collis's (1982) SOLO (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome) taxonomy. This would require structuring task activities on the same webpage and sequencing them from low-order to high-order learning activities: listening to my podcast, attempting the quizzes, and contributing to discussion forums.

To do this, I chose Nearpod (a learning platform), which my peer Jones (2024b) mentioned in her FC session plan. However, I could not create a snapshot of the online session with Nearpod. Also, there was no custom option to nest three discussion topics under the discussion forum heading and set pre-defined feedback for each quiz option. Due to the limitations of Nearpod, I decided to switch to Moodle (a learning management system), which allowed me to create an intended learning environment suitable for my students. This experience challenged my view of pedagogy first over technology. Before choosing Nearpod, my assumption was that I could adopt any available learning technology to implement my pedagogical practice. However, the difficulty with Nearpod and the solution with Moodle made me realise that pedagogy and technology exist in an entangled state.

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While delivering the face-to-face session, I realised that integrating the face-to-face session with the online session could have been more productive if I communicated my onsite session activity through the online session. This form of asynchronous communication would have reinforced the oral instruction (synchronous communication) that I provided in the onsite session. Prior to the flipped classroom session, I was concerned that some students might attend the on-site session without completing the online activities. To address this, I tracked their VLE activities and sent periodic email reminders. Though these actions led to the completion of 100 per cent online activities, I was anxious over the possibility of nonparticipation. My session reviewer Fox (2024e) suggested an inclusion of Plan B or a contingency plan for those students who might skip online activities. The evaluator's suggestion made me realise that incorporating a backup plan increases the robustness of a flipped classroom design and implementation.

3.3 Designing an online curriculum and selecting an appropriate technology

From weeks 7 to 9, I learned to design an online curriculum and choose the appropriate technology to support learning. I used Cowan and Harding's (1986) logical model to design the online curriculum. Placing learning outcomes (LOs) at the centre of the design, the model first sequences assessment, then learning, following teaching and so on. The model aligns with Biggs's (2003) constructive alignment – a key element emphasised by Fox (2024c) and adopted by Fleckhaus (2024) and other peers. This logical model suited my goal of creating student-centred learning.

Regarding the choice of appropriate technologies, I grappled with the idea of 'pedagogy before technology' (COFAonlineUNSW, 2011). Following Salmon's (2013) five-stage model and the week's activity instructions, I produced an evaluation of the entrepreneurship thinking assessment tool called My Kinetic Style. The evaluation required me to consider the relationship between learning outcomes (LOs) and learning activities while incorporating learners' characteristics, context (subject/institution), and the pros and cons of technology. The focus was on placing pedagogy first, treating learners as objects rather than active participants. A more balanced approach would have considered learners' values (i.e., what technology learners value most), context (i.e., how technology is used in learners' cultural context), and the influence of technology on shaping the LOs (i.e., auto personalisation based on learners' interaction). When I shared this evaluation with peers, Chick (2024b) and Lauren McM (2024) commended the tool for its focus on reflection, which supports student-centred learning.

3.4 Designing online learning activities for a week

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Between weeks 10 and 11, I learned to design fully online learning activities for a week using the CEG (Cambridge Education Group) Pedagogical Framework. This involved incorporating the CEG Framework within Cowan and Harding's (1986) logical model. The framework's embeddedness with Laurillard's (2012) learning types and Jennings's (2013) 70:20:10 model enabled me to design active learning strategies: enquiry, practice, and production. My awareness of learning strategies was reinforced by Fox's (2024d) weekly feedback. The CEG framework is well suited to my entrepreneurship subject, which focuses on learning through action (Dimov 2021).

While planning learning activities, I realised that learning types and time allocation cannot be adjusted without LOs. The 70:20:10 model made sense because of its relevance to Biggs and Collis's (1982) SOLO taxonomy. In line with the SOLO taxonomy, my assumption was that all surface learning (knowledge acquisition through absorption) should be confined to 10% of the time, and deeper learning (knowledge/skills acquisition through enquiry, practice, and production) should make up to 70%. Such distribution is found to be a good predictor of student performance (Toro-Troconis et al., 2019).

However, I encountered a challenge when I associated the high-order declarative LO verb 'analyse' with the 10% time frame, as it seemed contradictory to limit high-order cognitive activities to surface learning. This led me to revisit the SOLO taxonomy for clarification. As a result of this, I now understand that declarative or functional knowledge can only be the outcome of surface learning if it is not enhanced by active learning: discussion, enquiry, practice, and production. This was a new understanding for me. With this new understanding, I consciously applied the 70:20:10 model to the activities. As opposed to my strict adherence to the 70:20:10 model, my peers Evans (2024a), Jones (2024c) and Hawkins (2024) supported a higher percentage of knowledge acquisition and a lower percentage of active learning. Their preference shows a teacher-centred learning approach. Without their input, I would not have been clear about the distinction between student- and teacher-centred learning.

Section 4.0: Overall summary reflection on my learning

4.1 Identifying and summarising learning themes in the context of entrepreneurship education

Based on my reflection above, blended learning and fully online learning emerged as two critical themes of a flexible learning environment. Both forms of learning are geared to facilitate autonomous student-centred learning, but their effectiveness varies across different

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strands of entrepreneurship education. Below, I reflect on the flipped and then fully online classrooms in the context of entrepreneurship education.

In the case of the flipped classroom (FC), I want to highlight the challenge of inverting learning in the on-site/face-to-face classroom. When I designed and implemented my FC session, I considered how students generally learn while overlooking how learning occurs within the entrepreneurship subject discipline. According to Becher's (1991) classification of academic knowledge, entrepreneurship is a soft-applied discipline where learning occurs through concrete experience (CE) and active experiment (AE). QAA (2018) divided entrepreneurship education into three learning components: learning *about* (knowledge acquisition), learning *for* (preparing for entrepreneurial action) and learning *through* (in-action). If I choose *learning through* approach over other types, then learners must take on the role of *players* (i.e., entrepreneurs) as opposed to *audiences*. This requires an authentic task environment where learners act as entrepreneurs and perform an authentic entrepreneurial task as their learning activity.

Though a flipped classroom facilitates active learning, the problem with the inversion of learning in the classroom setting is that it does not offer an authentic task environment. This is the key challenge of flipped classrooms for promoting *learning through* entrepreneurship education. An example would clarify this. In my flipped classroom's face-to-face session, I gave students a narrative artefact (business pitch) creation activity. Building on the insights gained from the asynchronous session, they crafted the pitch. However, their pitch lacked the application of effective sense-making or persuasive devices that they learned from the asynchronous session. This is because they focused on my expectations instead of their target customers. An authentic environment would naturally turn their attention to their target audiences and shift the narratives. This shows that activity like entrepreneurial artefact creation (i.e., venture idea pitch) requires an authentic task environment, though its delivery can take place in a classroom / artificial setting.

This finding extends Dimov and Pistrui's (2022) first-person learning by highlighting the need for an authentic task environment for the learning to happen. Dimov and Pistrui shed light on first-person learning stemming from the entrepreneurial situation. However, the need for an authentic task environment is overlooked in the flipped classroom approach. This finding has implications for entrepreneurship practice, especially in business incubators, where

entrepreneurship practitioners train nascent entrepreneurs on crafting a compelling pitch for a venture idea.

Based on the above reflection, I contend that the flipped classroom is ideal for sessions that do not require an authentic task environment. This model is appropriate for acquiring knowledge (*learning about*) and preparing for action (*learning for*) in entrepreneurship sessions. Both types of learning decontextualise entrepreneurship learning, which focuses on *learning by doing* in an authentic environment. This finding advances our understanding of a flipped classroom model in the entrepreneurship subject discipline.

The three learning components of entrepreneurship education (*learning for, learning about, and learning through*) also influence the design of the fully online course. These components mainly influence the application of Jennings' (2013) 70:20:10 model. For *learning through* approach, an entrepreneurship curriculum requires experiential learning in a social context, focusing on more social learning and less on cognitive learning. Unlike the flipped model, a fully online course gives time and space flexibility. That is, students do not need to confine their learning to a particular time and space. Such time and space flexibility allows students to perform entrepreneurial tasks in their social environment and share their momentary results on the learning platform.

However, if I design a curriculum based on *learning for*, then the time distribution of the 70:20:10 model for learning activities will be skewed towards knowledge acquisition while retaining dominance over the active learning strategies. In this context, the time distribution of the model would look like this: 50:30:20. However, if I chose *learning about* entrepreneurship education, then the 70:20:10 model would need to be reversed to the 10 (activity):20 (discussion):70 (acquisition) model. The reverse 10:20:70 model would strike a chord with many of my peers, including Evans (2024a) from the art subject, Jones (2024c) from mathematics and Hawkins (2024) from biology subject discipline, who support factual and procedural knowledge acquisition instead of active learning (see section 3.4). This approach requires a shift from active learning to passive learning, highlighting the need for teacher-centred learning instead of student-centred learning.

The relevance of Jennings' high-performance model to the design of learning through entrepreneurship education extends Dimov and Pistrui's (2022) first-person learning. The 70:20:10 shed light on the intensity of first-person learning through discussion, enquiry, and production. In the entrepreneurial context, business incubator managers could use the high-

performance model to adjust to different entrepreneurial activities. For example, current entrepreneurial practice guides nascent entrepreneurs to enquire and discuss their venture ideas with market actors while delaying the production of product prototypes. Using Jennings's high-performance model, practitioners can adjust the time spent on first-person learning, particularly with the production of artefacts.

Whether a curriculum focuses on *learning about*, *learning for* or *learning through* entrepreneurship education should be dependent on the level of studies (FHEQ 6 or 7), type of qualification (such as BA, BSc, MA, MSc), institutional goal (e.g., putting practice before theory) and the demand of the students. FHEQ level 7 is more oriented towards extending and reinforcing knowledge than FHEQ level 6. Also, the qualifications for a BA and an MA are more oriented towards conceptual abstraction and reflective learning. Furthermore, institutions may have specific goals, such as the practical applications of theory, requiring a learning-through approach in curriculum or session design. Most importantly, students may want to become entrepreneurs and develop their ventures through the course, requiring *learning through* entrepreneurship education. All in all, learning designers should consider the type of qualification, level of studies, and institutional goal when deciding the different components (learning about, learning for, and learning through) of entrepreneurship education.

4.2 My entrepreneurial strengths in pedagogical practice

Through the reflection, I learned more about my pedagogical practice as a facilitator, not an educator. This starts with who I am, my learning style, and how these influence my pedagogical practice.

4.2.1 As a facilitator, who am I? What are my teaching approaches?

I am a serial entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur, I conduct experiments with venture ideas that are not defined by any established framework. So, experiential and social learning is highly relevant to me. As mentioned earlier, such learning types align with how learning occurs in the entrepreneurship discipline (Becher, 1991). Because of the nature of my work, I believe in first-hand experience or first-person learning. This explains my natural inclination towards student-centred learning. Whether designing or delivering sessions, I always share my personal experience with students. For example, in my flipped classroom session, I shared my personal experience of designing a product prototype to clarify students' queries about material artefacts. I recognise this as a good practice because it is the same practice I observed in my tutor, Peisley's (2024b) teaching session in which he uses his own PGCE experience.

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Another important fact is that I value student empowerment in their learning, which is reflected in my adaptation to active learning. Active learning is critical for supporting disadvantaged students who join universities with limited life experiences (Jones, 2013). Employing active learning strategies exposes students to diverse task-based activities in social settings, ensuring that they better integrate with their entrepreneurial journeys. As a result, I prioritise the following qualities in my teaching intervention: building confidence (affective), accessibility, and dialogic (McDonald, 2017).

4.2.2 As a learner, what is my learning style, and how does it affect my learning design?

In most situations, I prefer to see the bigger picture to make sense of learning. This involves looking at the table of contents or working backward. According to Pask's (1976) learning style theory, I identify myself as a holist learner. However, through the design of the flipped classroom and online curriculum, I became consciously aware that my learning style may impact how I design learning experiences for others. This conscious awareness is good for two reasons: (1) I incorporate my learning style to benefit individuals who learn similarly, and (2) I include other individuals (serialists) who prefer to create the bigger picture as they progress in their learning. Based on this awareness, I designed the asynchronous session of my flipped classroom, accommodating both serialist and holistic learners. If I had not been aware of my own learning style, I would have designed a course that only catered for holist learners, excluding serialist learners. This would have affected the diversity and inclusivity of my session.

4.3 Action planning for further development and its implications

Based on my reflection above, I want to take the following action to create a flexible learning environment that aligns with learning through entrepreneurship education. The purpose is to create a positive connection between learners' hearts and minds. Scholars can experiment with the recommended actions provided below.

4.3.1 To have a Plan B for the flipped classroom approach

Pre-classroom preparation requires autonomy, self-motivation, and access to the internet/computer; some students may attend on-site (face-to-face) classes without completing pre-classroom activities. This requires a contingency plan or Plan B. In this plan, I will allocate an additional 30 minutes for students to complete the online session before joining the classroom activities. I will form a separate group for in-class activities.

4.3.2 Creation of dynamic learning environments

By emphasising the mutual relationship between pedagogy and technology, I want to create a technology-enhanced learning environment that makes learning joyful, engaging and motivational.

i) Making knowledge acquisition a joyful experience. I want to create dynamic learning content that mimics the feeling of a human connection. An option for switching text to video would cater for visually responsive learners. To achieve this, I want to integrate ChatGPT Sora (a video-generating AI model) within VLE through an application programming interface (API). Some learners may be more responsive to human voices if the text is read in their native languages by their preferred gender (male or female). For this purpose, I want to integrate immersive reading technology (e.g., Microsoft's immersive reading technology). Such technological integration will reshape asynchronous learning (such as fact-based, procedural knowledge) for flipped classrooms or fully online learning. This recommendation will give learners not just choices but also control over how they want to exercise their choices.

ii) Ensuring an engaging knowledge production. Most LMSs work as knowledge transmitters, not as knowledge transformers. Teaching practitioners use them to transmit knowledge in order to support student learning. Supporting student learning requires the co-production of knowledge. This necessitates the modification of LMS design as the knowledge production tool for students.

Existing LMSs do not provide production tools such as assignment builders. I want to create an assignment builder (a web application) where teachers can embed the assessment brief and grading rubric. When students attempt a specific section of the assignment, an AI Chatbot will show how they are performing against the assessment criteria in real time. AI feedback is much softer and more comforting than real human feedback. Such feedback will help users to exert more pressure on their learning.

iii) Building a robust communication infrastructure. In an online environment, it is quite easy to feel isolated (Salmon, 2013). When students know support is standby, they feel motivated to engage. Using synchronous and asynchronous communication practices, I want to set up a communication infrastructure consisting of an AI chatbot, a contact form, a notification/alert bell, and email communication. AI chatbot will be designed as an AI Tutor for synchronous communication. Many learners are discouraged from undertaking a fully online course because of less student-teacher contact. The chatbot will increase the student-AI contact time. A contact

form will be used as asynchronous communication when students cannot decide who to communicate with during an emergency. Email communication will also be available as a form of asynchronous communication. Notification/alert communication will be for important course announcements or assignment/activity announcements. All communication mediums will be designed to build a picture of students' expectations as well as their characteristics.

4.3.3 Implications of my action plans

I have come to realise that both flipped classroom and online learning models are suitable for autonomous learners but not for those who heavily rely on a teacher's physical presence. I am concerned with students with fixed mindsets and fixed views about themselves.

The adaptation of Jennings's (2013) 70:20:10 model comes under criticism because student satisfaction is linked to knowledge acquisition, not high performance (Rienties and Toetenel, 2016). The model may cast doubt about the value of the course due to *minimum student-teacher contact hours*, which contradicts the university league table criterion. Some individuals may perceive the learning environment as being designed to make a profit. In a webinar chat, my peer Evans (2024b) expressed such doubt, stating, '*The 70:20:10 feels to be more based on profit, not humans.*'

Communication is key to overcoming these above challenges. A minute-long explanatory video could reduce doubt and motivate students with fixed mindsets. The video should illustrate the modernity and scientific rationales behind the learning design and its potential benefits.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, creating a flexible learning environment aims to promote active student-centred learning, allowing students to exercise their autonomy. This learning environment should be dynamic and emotionally responsive. Prioritising either pedagogy or technology cannot produce an emotionally responsive learning design since it decontextualises technology from students and their culture (Fawns 2022). A mutual relationship between pedagogy and technology is the way forward.

This paper has its own limitations. First, the study is based on my personal reflective account of creating a flexible learning environment. While personal reflection is a powerful tool for professional development, it carries my personal experience and subject interpretation, which may not be generalizable to all educators and learners. Second, I contextualise my reflection in

the context of entrepreneurship education. Findings about the flipped classroom and online course approach may not be relevant to other subject disciplines. Finally, while my recommended action plan focuses on dynamic learning environments, it does not consider constraints such as students' digital literacy, institutional technology infrastructure, and administrative policies.

Future studies should focus on bridging the gap between entrepreneurship education and real-world entrepreneurial practice. Scholars could investigate how effectively students produce entrepreneurial artefacts (such as framing venture ideas, designing prototypes, or crafting narratives) in flipped classrooms and fully online learning environments. Scholars should mainly focus on what and how students learn and how it is affected by simulated and authentic task environments. Such focus requires scholars to consider the cultural influences on the learning design.

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