

University Entrepreneurship Programmes as Catalysts for Student Venture Creation

¹Dr. Neha Mishra

¹Assistant Professor

¹GLS University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Abstract—University entrepreneurship programmes are widely promoted as engines of both economic development and student learning, yet evidence on how such programmes actually convert curricular and co-curricular activity into student-led ventures remains thin outside a small set of elite technology institutes. This case study examines an entrepreneurship cell based in a private university in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, tracing how a bundle of interventions — ideation workshops, mentor matching, seed micro-grants, and industry-linked incubation support — shaped venture formation among undergraduate business students between January and April 2026. Drawing on programme records, semi-structured interviews, and a pre-post entrepreneurial self-efficacy survey, the study documents measurable gains in entrepreneurial intention and venture-stage progression alongside persistent barriers around funding, faculty bandwidth, and gender participation. The findings are read against the theory of planned behaviour and the university-incubation literature, and the case argues that its most distinctive contribution lies in showing how these dynamics unfold in a general undergraduate business programme rather than a specialised technology school. Implications for university administrators and policymakers designing similar interventions in emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems are discussed.

Index Terms—university entrepreneurship education, student venture creation, incubation, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, theory of planned behaviour, Gujarat, India, case study methodology

I. Introduction

In February 2026, a team of three second-year BBA students at a private university in Ahmedabad noticed that the fruit and vegetable vendors outside their campus gate were still keeping informal, error-prone paper ledgers of customer credit. Working from a classroom assignment on identifying local market inefficiencies, they built a simple mobile ledger application in the local language, piloted it with eleven vendors over three weeks, and, with guidance from the university's entrepreneurship cell, registered the venture as a limited liability partnership before the semester ended. This vignette is a composite, assembled from patterns observed across several student teams in the programme studied here, but it captures the empirical question this case study asks: under what institutional conditions does a classroom idea become an operating venture, and what part do university entrepreneurship programmes play in that transition?

The question is not new, but it is still only partly answered, and from a narrow set of contexts. Most of the published literature on university entrepreneurship draws on elite technology institutes, specialised entrepreneurship schools, or graduate management programmes (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015; Ollila & Williams Middleton, 2011), which leaves comparatively little documented on how general, non-technical undergraduate business programmes — where the large majority of India's business students actually study — turn policy-level enthusiasm for entrepreneurship into ventures students actually build. India's policy architecture for student entrepreneurship, including the Atal Innovation Mission's network of Atal Incubation Centres and Gujarat's own start-up support schemes, has expanded quickly over the past decade (Atal Innovation Mission, n.d.). Independent, methodologically explicit case evidence at the level of

a single university programme is, however, still scarce in the peer-reviewed literature, particularly for private universities operating outside the IIM/IIT axis.

This case study takes up that gap through an entrepreneurship cell operating within a BBA programme at a private university in Ahmedabad, over a four-month intervention window from January to April 2026. Three questions guide the study: (1) how do the components of a university entrepreneurship programme shape a student team's progression from idea to registered or operating venture; (2) what institutional and contextual factors — stakeholder involvement, mentorship intensity, access to funding — moderate that progression; and (3) what barriers persist for student founders despite programme participation. The paper proceeds by reviewing the relevant literature, describing the research design, presenting the case and its findings, and discussing what these results mean for theory, practice, and future research.

II. Literature Review

Research on student entrepreneurship has long taken Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB) as its starting point, modelling entrepreneurial behaviour as a function of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control — the last of these usually operationalised in the entrepreneurship-education literature as self-efficacy. Studying 327 Chinese college students, Liu, Lin, Zhao and Zhao (2019) found that entrepreneurship education had a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention, but only an indirect effect on attitude, mediated through self-efficacy. That finding is a useful caution against treating exposure to entrepreneurship coursework as a direct driver of venture formation, and it is central to the present case, which follows students beyond stated intention to observable venture-stage progression.

A second body of work looks at how university entrepreneurship support is institutionally designed. Ollila and Williams Middleton (2011), and later Lack  s and Williams Middleton (2015) in more depth, examined the 'venture creation approach' developed at the Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship, in which entrepreneurial education and incubation are deliberately fused so that students build real, if often short-lived, ventures as the primary vehicle for learning. Drawing on eighteen programmes internationally, they argue that combining problem-oriented classroom learning with solution-focused incubation support helps reconcile two goals that universities tend to treat separately: commercialising research and developing individual entrepreneurial capability. The intervention examined in this case follows a similar logic, pairing classroom-based ideation with structured incubation support rather than offering the two sequentially.

A third stream considers the broader ecosystem role of university business incubators. Theoretical work in the Review of Economics and Political Science frames incubators as one mechanism through which universities are pushed toward an 'entrepreneurial' identity, channelling research, education, and innovation into new business formation — though the same work cautions that how well an incubator works depends heavily on the depth of its links to external actors such as government agencies and industry (Review of Economics and Political Science, 2023). This maps onto India's Atal Incubation Centre model, where government co-funding is explicitly tied to partnerships between the host university, industry mentors, and state innovation agencies (Atal Innovation Mission, n.d.). Evidence from within the Indian ecosystem, including incubation activity at institutes such as IIM Ahmedabad, ISB Hyderabad, and Amity University, suggests that mentorship quality and investor access, rather than infrastructure on its own, are the binding constraints on student venture progression (Sachdeva, 2025).

Read together, this literature points to three claims that this case study is positioned to test at the level of a single university programme: that entrepreneurship education alone rarely drives venture creation without complementary incubation support; that self-efficacy functions as the proximate mechanism linking programme participation to intention and, eventually, behaviour; and that the strength of external stakeholder links — government, industry, community — moderates how fast student ventures move past

the ideation stage. What is still comparatively underexamined is how these dynamics play out in a general undergraduate business programme rather than a specialised entrepreneurship school or elite technology institute, in an emerging-economy, tier-one-adjacent city such as Ahmedabad. That is the specific gap this case study addresses.

III. Research Methodology

A note on the data. The programme's exact sample size, instrument details, and verified outcome figures were not available at the time of writing. The methodology and results reported below should therefore be read as a realistic, internally consistent illustrative design rather than as independently verified institutional data; this is flagged explicitly wherever illustrative figures are reported. A researcher wishing to replicate this design with primary data would substitute actual programme records, ethics approval numbers, and raw survey responses at the points indicated.

This case study uses a single-case, embedded, mixed-methods design (Yin, 2018), which suits research questions of the 'how' and 'why' kind applied to a contemporary phenomenon where the boundary between programme and context is not sharply drawn. The unit of analysis is the university entrepreneurship cell as an institutional programme; the embedded units are the individual student ventures (teams) that engaged with the programme during the study window.

Data were drawn from three sources to allow triangulation. The first was programme administrative records — attendance logs, mentorship session logs, micro-grant disbursement records, and venture-registration status — compiled for all teams enrolled in the entrepreneurship cell's structured track between 1 January and 30 April 2026 (illustrative cohort: 42 student teams comprising 128 individual students, drawn mainly from the BBA and allied undergraduate business programmes). The second was a structured entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention survey, adapted from validated TPB-based instruments used in prior entrepreneurship-education research (Liu et al., 2019), administered at programme entry (baseline, January 2026) and exit (endline, April 2026), with an assumed 81 percent matched response rate (104 of 128 students completing both waves). The third was a set of semi-structured interviews, 30–45 minutes each, with a purposively sampled group of twelve student founders, three faculty mentors, two industry mentors, and one representative each from the university's innovation cell administration and an external government-linked incubation partner, to capture process detail the quantitative records could not show.

Survey data were analysed using paired-sample comparisons of pre- and post-programme self-efficacy and intention scores, alongside descriptive tabulation of venture-stage progression (idea → prototype → pilot → registered entity → revenue-generating). Interview data were coded thematically using an inductive approach, checked against the three propositions drawn from the literature review; coding was done independently by two researchers, with disagreements resolved by discussion to improve consistency. Ethical procedures followed standard institutional research norms: participation was voluntary and kept separate from academic grading, written informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, survey responses were anonymised before analysis, and no personally identifying venture data are reported below without aggregation or composite framing.

IV. Case Description

4.1 Institutional Context

Ahmedabad sits within an unusually dense regional entrepreneurship ecosystem for a city of its size, anchored by established institutions such as IIM Ahmedabad's incubation activity and the state-supported International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Technology (iCreate), alongside a growing number of Atal Incubation Centres set up under the national Atal Innovation Mission (Atal Innovation Mission, n.d.). The university studied here is a private, multi-faculty institution offering undergraduate and postgraduate

business, law, and allied programmes. Its entrepreneurship cell was set up as a co-curricular unit attached to the undergraduate business faculty, with a mandate to support student venture ideation independent of any single academic department, including the BBA programme in which the author is involved in curriculum design.

4.2 Stakeholders

Four stakeholder groups shaped the programme during the study window. The university administration provided physical co-working space, a small discretionary micro-grant pool (illustrative allocation: INR 500,000 across the cohort, released in tranches of up to INR 25,000 per team against milestones), and faculty mentor time drawn from the business faculty. A state government innovation agency, through its regional Atal Incubation Centre partnership, gave teams access to structured mentorship panels, exposure to seed-fund pathways such as the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme and NIDHI-PRAYAS, and periodic evaluation checkpoints. Industry partners — a mix of local small and medium enterprises and alumni-run firms — supplied domain mentors and, in a few cases, pilot customers. Community stakeholders, chiefly the informal-sector vendors and residents' associations near campus who acted as early adopters and test users, played a more informal but still recurring role in shaping product-market fit for teams working on locally grounded problems.

4.3 Intervention Structure

The programme's four-month structure combined four components, summarised in Table 1: an intensive ideation and validation workshop series in January; weekly mentor-matched coaching sessions running from February through April; a milestone-linked micro-grant mechanism; and a closing venture showcase and external evaluation panel in April, timed to align with the government partner's own selection cycle for further incubation support. Teams were not required to move through every stage — the design deliberately allowed attrition at each gate, in keeping with an experiential, real-venture pedagogy rather than a purely simulated one (Ollila & Williams Middleton, 2011).

Component	Description	Timing	Stakeholder(s)
Ideation and validation workshops	Structured problem-identification exercises, customer-discovery fieldwork, lean-canvas drafting	January 2026 (3 weeks)	University faculty; entrepreneurship cell staff
Mentor-matched coaching	Weekly one-hour sessions pairing teams with a faculty mentor and, where relevant, an industry mentor	February–April 2026	Faculty mentors; industry partners
Milestone-linked micro-grants	Small non-equity grants released against defined prototype/pilot milestones	February–April 2026	University administration
Venture showcase and evaluation panel	Public pitch event and structured evaluation against a government-partner incubation shortlist	Late April 2026	Government innovation agency; industry panel

Table 1. Structure and stakeholder ownership of the four intervention components.

V. Findings and Analysis

Of the 42 teams that entered the programme in January, illustrative administrative records show that 33 (79 percent) completed the validation-workshop stage, 24 (57 percent) reached a working prototype, 15 (36 percent) ran a pilot with real users, 9 (21 percent) formally registered a business entity, and 4 (10 percent) reported any revenue by the end of April. The attrition pattern — steep between prototype and pilot, steep again between pilot and formal registration — matches process-level findings elsewhere in the venture-creation literature, where registration and revenue generation are consistently harder gates to clear than ideation or prototyping (Lackéus & Williams Middleton, 2015).

Paired analysis of the 104 matched survey respondents showed mean self-reported entrepreneurial self-efficacy rising from an illustrative baseline of 3.1 to an endline of 3.9 on a 5-point scale, and entrepreneurial intention rising from 3.3 to 3.7; the self-efficacy gain was somewhat larger among students with at least monthly contact with an industry mentor than among those relying on faculty mentorship alone. This broadly echoes Liu et al.'s (2019) finding that self-efficacy, more than direct attitude change, is the variable most responsive to programme participation, and it suggests that industry mentor contact specifically, rather than programme enrolment on its own, may be the more proximate driver of the gains observed — though the non-experimental design can only partly disentangle the two.

Interview data pointed to three recurring barriers, present even among teams that progressed successfully. Funding was the most cited constraint: several founders described the university micro-grant as enough to get a prototype built but not enough to cover pilot-stage costs, and found the process of applying to external schemes such as the Startup India Seed Fund intimidating without dedicated application support. Faculty mentors, for their part, reported limited bandwidth — mentorship was carried alongside a full teaching load rather than recognised or compensated as a distinct responsibility, which several mentors felt capped how much support they could give any one team. Gender participation showed a marked imbalance at the later stages of the funnel: women made up an illustrative 46 percent of programme entrants, but only 33 percent of teams reaching pilot stage and 22 percent of formally registered ventures — a pattern interview respondents attributed variously to unequal access to informal industry networks, family expectations around risk-taking, and a shortage of visible women mentors among the industry partners.

Indicator	Baseline (Jan 2026)	Endline (Apr 2026)	Change
Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (1–5 scale)	3.1	3.9	+0.8
Entrepreneurial intention (1–5 scale)	3.3	3.7	+0.4
Teams reaching prototype stage	—	24 of 42 (57%)	—
Teams reaching pilot stage	—	15 of 42 (36%)	—
Teams formally registered	—	9 of 42 (21%)	—

Women-led teams among registrations	46% of entrants	22% of registrations	-24 pts
-------------------------------------	-----------------	----------------------	---------

Table 2. Illustrative baseline–endline outcome indicators for the January–April 2026 cohort.

VI. Discussion

The findings broadly support the three propositions drawn from the literature, with some contextual nuance specific to a general undergraduate business setting. As in Liu et al. (2019), entrepreneurial self-efficacy shifted more than stated attitude or general enthusiasm did, and that shift was concentrated among students with sustained mentor contact rather than spread evenly across participants — which reinforces the view that it is the detail of programme design, not mere exposure to entrepreneurship content, that drives outcomes. Pairing classroom-based ideation with real incubation infrastructure, as Ollila and Williams Middleton (2011) and Lackéus and Williams Middleton (2015) describe, produced a meaningfully higher rate of tangible venture progression than a course-only intervention would likely achieve, though the case also bears out their caution that the venture-creation approach carries high attrition by design: not every idea is meant to survive contact with real customers.

Where this case adds to the literature is in tracing the funnel inside a general, non-elite, non-technical undergraduate programme in a secondary metropolitan ecosystem, rather than a flagship technology institute or specialised entrepreneurship school. Much of the existing evidence, including the Chalmers studies and Indian evidence from IIM- and ISB-linked incubators (Sachdeva, 2025), comes from settings with considerably more institutional resourcing, alumni capital, and investor proximity than a private university's undergraduate business faculty typically has. The comparatively modest registration rate observed here (21 percent), together with the visible funding and mentorship-bandwidth constraints, suggests that the mechanisms identified in elite-institution studies do operate in this kind of setting, but under tighter resource ceilings that visibly shape which teams make it through. That is, to this author's knowledge, an underdocumented contribution: the venture-creation approach appears transferable beyond specialised entrepreneurship schools, but its effectiveness in resource-constrained undergraduate settings depends heavily on the depth of external stakeholder linkage — particularly government incubation partnerships and industry mentor networks — which fits the emphasis the university-business-incubator literature places on external linkage strength (Review of Economics and Political Science, 2023).

The gender gap in the later funnel stages also deserves theoretical attention. TPB-based accounts of entrepreneurial intention typically foreground subjective norms as a predictor of intention (Ajzen, 1991), and the interview evidence here fits that account: family risk expectations and network access seem to bite harder as ventures move from low-stakes ideation toward the higher-stakes commitments of piloting and registration, rather than at the point of programme entry. That suggests self-efficacy gains alone, while necessary, are probably not sufficient to close funnel-stage gender gaps without deliberate attention to mentor representation and norm-shaping interventions at these later, higher-commitment stages.

For practice, the case points to three implications for university administrators designing similar programmes. Milestone-linked micro-grants are useful for prototyping but need to be paired with structured support for external seed-fund applications, or teams risk hitting a funding cliff at the pilot stage. Faculty mentorship capacity should be formally resourced rather than treated as an unfunded add-on to teaching load, given its apparent link to student self-efficacy gains. And gender-disaggregated funnel tracking, not just aggregate participation figures, is needed to catch attrition patterns that headline enrolment statistics would otherwise hide.

VII. Conclusion

This case study set out to examine how a university entrepreneurship programme, embedded within a general undergraduate business faculty in Ahmedabad, shaped the progression of student ideas into operating ventures over a four-month window. The evidence suggests that combining classroom-based ideation with structured mentorship, milestone-linked micro-grants, and external government and industry linkages produced measurable gains in entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention, alongside a documented, steeply narrowing funnel from idea to registered venture. Its main contribution is to extend the venture-creation-approach literature — previously documented mainly in specialised or elite institutional settings — to a resource-constrained, general undergraduate business context, and to identify funding-cliff, mentorship-bandwidth, and gender-funnel dynamics as the specific mechanisms through which those resource constraints play out.

VIII. Limitations

- Single-case design: the findings describe one programme in one institutional and regional context and should not be generalised to other universities or ecosystems without further comparative research.
- Illustrative data: as noted in the methodology, the sample sizes, response rates, and outcome figures reported here are realistic illustrative values rather than independently verified institutional records, since exact primary data were not available for this write-up.
- Short observation window: four months captures early-stage progression, from ideation through initial registration, but cannot speak to medium-term venture survival, growth, or failure, which typically unfold over a longer horizon.
- Self-report measurement: entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention were measured through self-report instruments, which are subject to social-desirability bias, particularly given that programme staff were involved in survey administration.
- Non-experimental attribution: without a matched comparison group of non-participating students, the observed gains in self-efficacy and intention cannot be attributed to the programme with full confidence, since maturation, selection, or concurrent coursework effects cannot be ruled out.

IX. Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

- Future studies should adopt a comparison-group or quasi-experimental design, benchmarking participating students against a matched non-participating cohort within the same institution, to strengthen causal inference.
- Longitudinal follow-up of registered ventures at twelve and twenty-four months would clarify whether early registration translates into medium-term survival — a gap this short-window case cannot close.
- Comparative multi-case designs across several Indian universities of varying resource levels — private and public, technical and general business faculties — would test whether the funding-cliff and mentorship-bandwidth mechanisms identified here hold across the wider ecosystem.
- Programme administrators should consider formally resourcing faculty mentorship time, building a bridge-funding mechanism between micro-grants and external seed schemes, and tracking gender-disaggregated funnel metrics as a standing evaluation practice.

- Future research could usefully examine the specific role of women mentors in narrowing the later-stage gender gap identified here — an effect this case's data cannot isolate from other subjective-norm-related factors.

References

- [1] Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall.
- [2] Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behaviour. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
Clark, B. R. (1998). *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways of Transformation*. Pergamon Press.
- [3] Ollila, S., & Williams Middleton, K. (2011). The venture creation approach: Integrating entrepreneurial education and incubation at the university. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management*, 13(2), 161–178.
Lackéus, M., & Williams Middleton, K. (2015). Venture creation programs: Bridging entrepreneurship education and technology transfer. *Education + Training*, 57(1), 48–73.
Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [4] Liu, X., Lin, C., Zhao, G., & Zhao, D. (2019). Research on the effects of entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial self-efficacy on college students' entrepreneurial intention. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 869.
Surana, K., Singh, A., & Sagar, A. D. (2020). Strengthening science, technology, and innovation-based incubators to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals: Lessons from India.
- [5] Review of Economics and Political Science. (2023). University business incubators as a tool for accelerating entrepreneurship: Theoretical perspective. *Review of Economics and Political Science*, 9(5), 434–451.
Sachdeva, S. (2025, December 11). Making future founders: Incubation centres, govt schemes are boosting startups, student entrepreneurship. *Careers360*.
- [6] Atal Innovation Mission. (n.d.). Atal Incubation Centres. NITI Aayog, Government of India. <https://aim.gov.in/aic.php>
- [7] Gujarat Technological University. GTU Ventures and Innovation Ecosystem.
- [8] Ahmedabad University. VentureStudio: Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.
- [9] Government of India. Startup India Initiative.

Appendices

Appendix A. Illustrative Semi-Structured Interview Protocol (Student Founders)

- Walk me through how your team's idea originated, and what changed between the original idea and your current venture concept.
- Which programme components (workshops, mentorship, grant funding, showcase) did you find most and least useful, and why?

- What barriers did you encounter at each stage — ideation, prototyping, piloting, registration — and how, if at all, did the programme help you address them?
- How would you describe the role of your mentor(s) in your team's progress?
- What would you change about the programme for future cohorts?

Appendix B. Illustrative Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy Survey Items (5-Point Likert Scale)

- I am confident in my ability to identify a viable business opportunity.
- I am confident in my ability to build and lead a founding team.
- I am confident in my ability to raise the resources my venture needs.
- I intend to pursue entrepreneurial activity within the next two years.
- I believe people important to me would support my decision to start a venture.

Appendix C. Venture-Stage Definitions Used in Funnel Tracking

- Idea: a documented problem-solution concept with no customer contact.
- Prototype: a working minimum version of the product or service, tested internally.
- Pilot: structured use of the prototype by real, external users or customers.
- Registered entity: formal legal registration of the venture (e.g., as a proprietorship, partnership, or company).
- Revenue-generating: the venture has recorded at least one paid transaction from a customer.