International Journal of Technology, Management and Social Sciences (IJTMSS)
[ISSN: 2583-8482]
Volume 3_Issue 4 [Oct-Dec 2025]
Website: www.ijtmss.org

Developing Entrepreneurial Skills among College Students: Challenges and Opportunities in Indian Context

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Submitted: August 25, 2025 Revised: September 22, 2025 Accepted: October 13, 2025 Published: October 27, 2025

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17465653

Abstract:

India is a developing economy witnessing major reforms and movements in the competitive marketplace. In today's fast-changing economy, teaching college students how to be entrepreneurs is an important part of higher education, especially in a country like India that is changing quickly. The government's programs like Startup India and *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, as well as the urgent need to lower graduate unemployment, have made entrepreneurship seem like a powerful way to boost the economy and come up with new ideas. But there are many problems with developing entrepreneurial skills, such as outdated curricula, a lack of collaboration between industry and academia, limited access to funding, and not enough opportunities for hands-on learning. In rural and semi-urban areas, things are even more complicated because of social and cultural biases, lack of resources, and poor mentorship networks. There are still a lot of good chances, even with these problems. The rise of digital technologies, government-backed incubation centers, and more access to global entrepreneurial ecosystems through digital platforms all point to a bright future for student entrepreneurship. Bridging the skills gap can be done by adding entrepreneurial education to regular school subjects, encouraging learning across disciplines, and offering hands-on training through internships, innovation labs, and mentorship programs. This paper looks at these problems and chances in India and tries to suggest strategic actions that schools, policymakers, and businesses can take to help college students develop an entrepreneurial mindset and help the economy grow in a way that lasts.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Skills, College Students, Start-up Ecosystem, Higher Education, Indian Context, Challenges and Opportunities, Skill Development*

1. Introduction:

Entrepreneurship is one of the top most priorities for the governments and nations to make the future sustainable and bright. In the 21st century, entrepreneurship has become a major driver of economic growth and new ideas. More and more, schools are seen as important places to encourage young people to be entrepreneurs. In India, where almost 65% of the population is under 35, teaching college students how to be entrepreneurs is seen as important for the country's growth (Gupta & Sharma, 2022). The move from a traditional economy to a knowledge-based one has made it even more important for schools to promote a culture of innovation and self-employment instead of just getting jobs. The most Indian colleges and universities still use a traditional way of teaching that focuses on learning theory with few chances to put it into practice. Mainstream curricula don't do a good job of teaching entrepreneurial skills like creativity, leadership, risk management, and financial planning (Chatterjee et al., 2021). Also, institutional barriers like old syllabi, a lack of entrepreneurial mentors, and not enough funding sources often stop

students from starting their own businesses (Mitra & Choudhury, 2022). These problems are especially bad in rural and semi-urban areas, where students have to deal with even more social, economic, and cultural issues.

The changing world of technology and proactive government policies has created a good environment for encouraging student entrepreneurship. Programs like Startup India, *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* and the National Innovation and Start-up Policy (NISP) have made it easier for entrepreneurs to grow. Also, the rise of digital platforms and social media has made it much easier for student entrepreneurs to get into the market. They can now reach customers, investors, and mentors all over the world with very little money (Sen & Dutta, 2022). These trends show that there are real problems in the Indian education system, but there are also real chances for entrepreneurs to grow. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 makes it even clearer how important it is to learn through experience and skills in order to make education more well-rounded, adaptable, and multi-disciplinary (Gaikwad, 2024). It encourages schools to help students develop creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are all important parts of entrepreneurial thinking (Narayanan & Joseph, 2021). Adding entrepreneurship to vocational training and curriculum frameworks helps students learn about real-world problems, which helps solve economic and social problems at the grassroots level. This method is especially useful in India, where there are many different social and economic situations and grassroots innovation can make a big difference. This paper looks at the current state of entrepreneurship education in India and finds important barriers and growth opportunities from the points of view of policy, institutions, and students. It wants to look at current academic interventions and point out the best ones to make a supportive environment for new entrepreneurs. This study gives academic institutions, government agencies, and private stakeholders' practical suggestions for encouraging inclusive and long-lasting entrepreneurial growth among college students in India using case studies, recent data, and expert analysis.

2. Background of Study:

India's economy is growing quickly, and the country has a young and dynamic population that is contributing to the demographic dividend. Data from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) shows that more than 40 million students are currently enrolled in higher education institutions. This is a large group of people who could become innovators and business owners. If this group of people gets the right kind of entrepreneurial education and training, they could become a driving force behind job creation and self-employment. Unemployment among young people is still a big problem, even though the government is trying to fix it with policies and programs. Traditional education systems, especially in non-technical fields, still put a lot of emphasis on academic success and theoretical knowledge. They don't put as much emphasis on practical problem-solving, creativity, or taking risks, which are all important parts of being an entrepreneur (Bhat & Mehta, 2022). Students have a hard time moving from school to the unpredictable and ever-changing world of startups if they don't learn how to think like an entrepreneur early on. The Indian government has started a number of strategic projects to create an economy based on innovation. These include the National Innovation and Startup Policy (NISP), Startup India, and Skill India Mission. The goal of these efforts is to give higher education institutions institutional support, access to funding, mentorship, and incubator space. But the actual use and integration of these policies at the college level are still not consistent. In colleges in rural and semi-urban areas, the lack of infrastructure, untrained faculty, and limited awareness are still major problems. Students from low-income or marginalized backgrounds also face cultural and financial problems that make it harder for them to start their own businesses. In larger cities, there are often startup ecosystems, hackathons, and accelerators

available, but these are not as common in smaller towns and tier-II institutions (Sharma & Vohra, 2022). To fully tap into India's youth potential, we need to close this gap between cities and rural areas when it comes to starting a business.

The educational institutions are very important places for young people to learn the skills, confidence, and connections they need to start their own businesses. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 says that multidisciplinary education, creativity, and learning by doing are all important for developing entrepreneurial mindsets. It encourages combining academic instruction with internships, vocational education, and learning in the workplace (Choudhury et al., 2024). However, the pace of curriculum reform is still slow, and many teachers don't have the training or experience in business that they need to help student entrepreneurs. Students are also often put off from looking into entrepreneurship as a career because they are afraid of failing, don't have enough seed capital, or don't have easy access to digital tools (Gaikwad & Bhattacharya, 2024). To encourage a proactive entrepreneurial culture on campuses, it is important to create a supportive ecosystem with entrepreneurship cells (E-cells), start-up clubs, and innovation labs. When industry and alumni get involved, these environments can help create a strong base for long-term and inclusive entrepreneurial growth across India.

3. Scope and Significance of Study:

The study looks at how to create, promote, and evaluate ways for college students in different parts of India to improve their entrepreneurial skills. It looks at how academic institutions, government policies, social and cultural factors, and institutional infrastructure all work together to shape students' entrepreneurial orientation. The study looks at differences in entrepreneurship education between urban and rural areas and between public and private schools. It also looks at how gender, socio-economic status, and regional limitations affect students' ability to start their own businesses. The study is interdisciplinary, using ideas from education, business management, sociology, and public policy to get a full picture of the ecosystem. It wants to find ways to build capacity, reform institutions, and make policies that include everyone so that entrepreneurial potential can grow at the grassroots level. This study is important because it is relevant to India's long-term social and economic development goals, especially since youth unemployment is rising and the job market is changing. People now see entrepreneurship as a way to start their own business and as a way to bring about social change and long-term growth. The study stresses how important it is for higher education reforms to fit in with the national agenda set by NEP 2020 and global frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). It also stresses the importance of incorporating entrepreneurial thinking into the early stages of education through project-based learning, mentorship, and partnerships with businesses. By focusing on college-level interventions, the research helps to create a strong base for youth-led innovation, which will lead to a new generation of job creators (Ramesh & Tiwari, 2022).

The study has important effects on policymakers, teachers, and people in the business world. It gives policymakers evidence-based information about how well current programs like Startup India and NISP are working and suggests areas where they could be made more decentralized and tailored to individual needs. The results can help schools redesign their curricula, train their teachers, and set up incubation centers that meet the needs of the community (Sen & Mehra, 2022). The study gives businesses and industry leaders a way to work with schools to help young entrepreneurs by mentoring, funding, and supporting them. The results can be used as a strategic tool to close the gap between talent and skill and promote businesses that are based on innovation among students. In the end, the research helps make the

entrepreneurial ecosystem fairer and easier to get into, giving students from all backgrounds the chance to make a real difference in India's development journey.

4. Objectives of Study:

- To examine the current status of entrepreneurial skill development initiatives across Indian colleges
- To identify the major challenges faced by college students in acquiring entrepreneurial skills, including institutional, socio-cultural, financial, and psychological barriers that hinder entrepreneurial intent and action
- To evaluate the role of government policies and higher education frameworks
- To explore the opportunities created by digital platforms, incubation ecosystems, and industry
- To propose a set of strategic recommendations for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education

5. Review of Literature:

Entrepreneurship education has gotten a lot of attention from academics as a way to empower young people and help the country grow. Fayolle and Gailly (2015) stressed that learning about entrepreneurship should not only be about theory, but also include hands-on and behavioral parts. Kuratko (2016) agreed with this point of view by saying that cognitive development in entrepreneurial thinking needs to be encouraged through real-world experiences and critical self-reflection. Both scholars support changes in teaching that make innovation, creativity, and problem-solving skills a part of the classroom. India is working to close the gap in employability through educational reforms, and the focus on skill-building fits with that goal. Indian colleges have big problems with teaching good entrepreneurship because their curricula are out of date and they don't have much freedom to make decisions.

Jain and Ali (2020) say that many universities don't have enough faculty members who are trained in business-related fields, which makes it hard for them to make interesting and useful courses. Prabhu and Thomas (2021) also said that schools in tier-II cities have trouble with infrastructure and getting to know startup ecosystems, which makes it harder for students to get involved. Even though the national policies are good, these problems make it harder for students to want to start their own businesses. The lack of case-based learning, workshops, and mentoring programs makes it even harder for institutions to encourage entrepreneurial thinking.

Policy plays a big part in how entrepreneurial ecosystems develop in schools. Saxena and Sharma (2022) looked at the National Innovation and Startup Policy (NISP) and found that it was not being used the same way in all states and universities. At the same time, Reddy and Bansal (2021) found that Startup India offers mentorship and financial help, but not many colleges are able to provide these benefits in a useful way. To be more effective, government efforts need to work with more institutions, be carried out in specific areas, and be checked on regularly. The gap between making policies and putting them into action on the ground continues to get in the way of higher education's full development of entrepreneurship. Digital platforms have become very useful for student entrepreneurship, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mishra and Singh (2022) found that social media, e-commerce sites, and crowdfunding apps are some of the new ways that college students can come up with ideas and start businesses with little money. These

platforms also help make entrepreneurial networks more accessible to everyone, especially students who live outside of cities, by making them less reliant on institutional support. The urban-rural divide in access to entrepreneurship education is a problem that keeps coming up in India. Sharma and Bose's (2020) study showed that colleges in cities are more likely to have E-cells, incubation centers, and entrepreneurship clubs.

Bhagat and Naik (2021), on the other hand, found that students at rural schools often don't have access to mentors, funding, or real business environments. These differences make it hard for some students to learn and practice business skills. To close this gap, policymakers need to make sure that everyone is included and that institutions invest in areas that don't have enough resources. In Indian colleges, there is still a big problem with gender inequality in entrepreneurship education. Kumari and Meena (2022) said that cultural and family barriers often keep female students from pursuing their entrepreneurial goals. Batra and Das (2021) found that even when there are resources available, women still don't participate in startup incubators and competitions as much as men do. This gap between men and women is caused by social norms, a lack of role models, and institutions that don't care about diversity. To encourage women to start their own businesses, we need to make changes to the way things are done, such as making the curriculum more gender-sensitive, starting women-led startup cells, and making mentorship programs easier to get to.

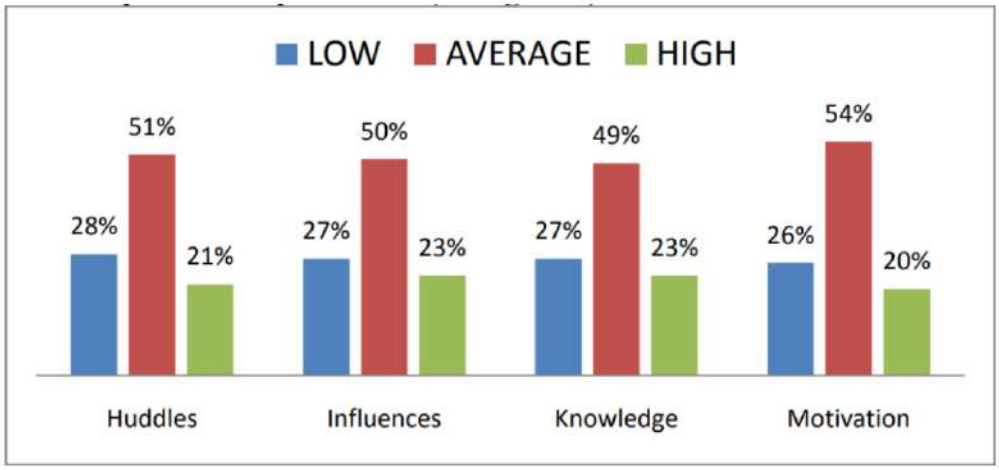
The experiential learning has been shown to be a good way to teach people how to be entrepreneurs. Narayan and Agarwal (2020) used Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory to show that students learn better when they do things, think about them, and use what they know. Joshi and Pillai (2021) also wrote about how entrepreneurship bootcamps and real-world projects helped students become more interested and willing to take risks. These models fill the gap between what students learn in school and what happens in the real world. They give students a place to test their ideas and gain confidence. Putting these kinds of programs in all campuses can improve the results of entrepreneurship education. The culture and leadership of an institution have a big impact on how well entrepreneurship education works. Colleges with visionary leadership and dedicated entrepreneurship cells have higher rates of student startups, according to Varma and Natarajan (2022). A culture of innovation, accepting risk, and working together across disciplines needs good leadership. Giving academic leaders the power to support entrepreneurial goals is important for keeping up the momentum and making changes in institutions.

Alumni networks and partnerships with businesses are very important for teaching entrepreneurship. Ranganathan and Verma (2022) talked about how successful alumni entrepreneurs can help student startups by mentoring, funding, and giving advice. Mehta and Rao (2023) also stressed how important it is for businesses and schools to work together to give new entrepreneurs internships, live projects, and domain knowledge. These links make a dynamic ecosystem where students get ongoing feedback, exposure, and credibility in the business world. Improving ways to get alumni involved can have a big impact on how well college students do in business. It's important to start developing an entrepreneurial mindset early in school. Bose and Iyer (2022) also observed that playing business games, doing simulations, and going to ideation workshops at a young age can spark interest and help kids learn basic skills. Learning how to be an entrepreneur for the rest of your life will make you more prepared, adaptable, and resilient. To prepare a generation for both work and business, Indian schools need to focus on early intervention.

6. Discussion and Analysis:

It is observed that there is a big difference between what colleges say they want to do with entrepreneurship programs and what they actually do. National-level policies like Startup India and NEP 2020 set a strong policy framework, but many colleges, especially those in tier-II and III regions, don't have the infrastructure, trained faculty, or funding to help students develop their entrepreneurial skills (Sarkar & Majumdar, 2022). This lack of connection leads to efforts that are broken up and can't be scaled up or kept going. One big problem is that students rely too much on theory and don't get enough real-world experience with business problems, which makes them less confident in taking the lead (Dhar & Tiwari, 2023). Digital transformation is thought to be a powerful way to close some of these gaps between institutions and regions. Students, especially those in remote areas, now have easier access to entrepreneurial ecosystems thanks to online platforms, virtual incubation programs, and startup mentorship apps. In the same way, Desai and Kannan (2022) found that students who took part in online hackathons and pitch competitions felt more confident in their ability to be entrepreneurs. But you still need to know how to use technology and have the right infrastructure to get to these platforms, which is still not always the case in rural colleges. Another important finding is that the culture and leadership of an institution can either encourage or discourage students from becoming entrepreneurs. Institutions that make entrepreneurship education a top priority tend to build dynamic ecosystems with active E-cells, alumni mentorship, and innovation hubs (Ghadge & Gaikwad, 2024). These colleges say that more of their students are starting their own businesses and taking part in national innovation competitions. On the other hand, schools with passive or bureaucratic management often don't encourage taking risks and don't have connections to the industry (Gulati & Rao, 2022). So, it is important to give faculty and administrators leadership training to create academic environments that encourage new ideas.

Figure 1: Entrepreneurship Attitude among College Students

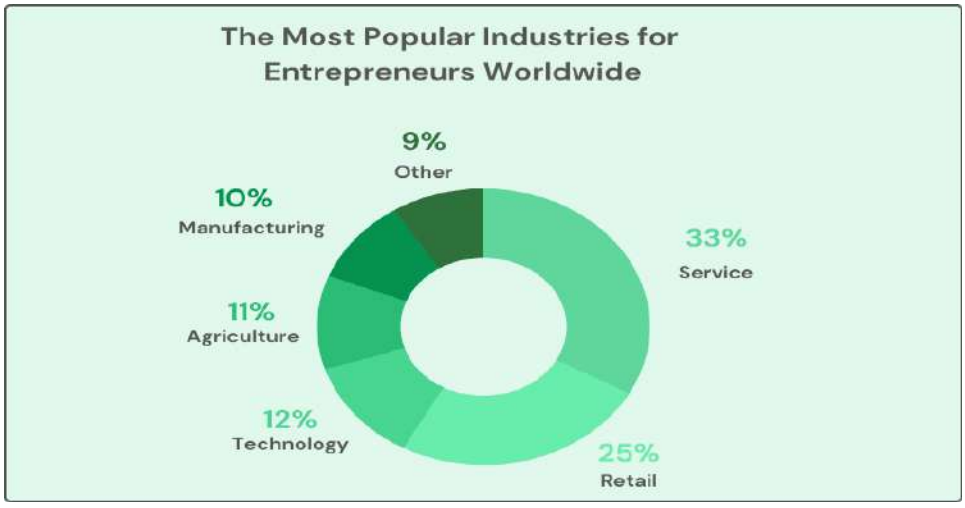


(Source: Swadeshi Shodh Sansthan)

Figure 1 shows the attitude of college students towards entrepreneurship on four dimensions—huddles, influences, knowledge, and motivation—broken down into low, average, and high levels. The findings show that most students are in the average category on all dimensions, with motivation (54%) and huddles (51%) having the highest averages. Fewer students have a high degree of entrepreneurial characteristics, with motivation (20%) and huddles (21%) having the lowest. At the same time, approximately a quarter of students systematically report low attitudes on all levels at 26–28%. These data indicate that most students demonstrate intermediate entrepreneurial attitudes, whereas relatively few students exhibit high

levels of motivation, knowledge, or influence required for entrepreneurial success, and therefore, targeted interventions should be implemented to reinforce high-level entrepreneurial competencies.

Figure 2: Favourable Industries for Entrepreneurship



(Source: MarkingBlog.com)

The above figure indicates that service industry has the highest potential to set up new ventures since service economy is growing drastically worldwide. This is the market insight for the college students. The retail sector ranks second with 25% followed by technology (12%), agriculture (11%) and manufacturing (10%) respectively. The demographics and talent pool for the developing economy like India can tap hidden and unlimited opportunities. It is important to develop the attitude of job giving rather than job seeking. Gender, socio-economic status, and where you live are all strong indicators of how likely you are to have access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Female students, especially those from conservative or low-income areas, often don't get the family support or cultural encouragement they need to start their own businesses. Students from lower-income backgrounds also have a harder time getting seed money, incubators, or networking opportunities than students from urban or upper-middle-class backgrounds (Verma & Chauhan, 2022). To fix these problems, we need more than just policies that include everyone. We also need to make support systems like financial aid, targeted mentorship, and awareness programs a part of the system so that everyone can participate fairly in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

7. Findings of Study:

- The study shows that there is a big difference between entrepreneurship policy initiatives and how they are carried out at the institutional level. Even though there are central policies like Startup India and NISP, many colleges, especially those in tier-II and III cities, have trouble getting their infrastructure and operations ready to run effective entrepreneurial programs. Tripathi and Kulshreshtha (2022) say that only a few schools offer structured entrepreneurship courses with hands-on learning activities. Also, many faculty members don't know how to mentor startups, which makes students less interested in and motivated to do entrepreneurial activities. So, a mismatch between policy and practice makes it harder for the country to work together.
- The data also shows that digital platforms have opened up new ways for students to start their own businesses, especially those from schools that don't have a lot of money. Tech-savvy students who

use digital tools to come up with ideas and grow their businesses are finding it easier to access online courses, pitch competitions, and startup incubators. Singh and Rao (2022) say that students who took part in virtual entrepreneurship programs were better prepared for business and better at validating their ideas. But digital access is still not equal. For example, rural students have problems like bad internet connections, not having enough devices, and not being very good at using technology. So, technology alone can't fully close the gap in access to entrepreneurship without help from infrastructure.

- Gender and socio-economic differences also turned out to be long-lasting obstacles to the growth of inclusive entrepreneurship. Families are hesitant to let female students, especially those from rural and conservative backgrounds, go to entrepreneurship events because they don't know any role models and are worried about their safety. Students from lower-income families also often don't think entrepreneurship is a good idea because they don't have enough money and are afraid of taking risks (Pandey & Sethi, 2022). The results show how important it is to reach out to underrepresented groups, offer gender-neutral mentoring, and give them seed money.
- The success of entrepreneurship depends a lot on the leadership of institutions and the networks of alumni. Colleges that have active entrepreneurship cells, partnerships with businesses, and alumni who help out have students who start businesses at higher rates. Joshi and Mehra (2022) found that students are more likely to take initiative when there is a supportive culture, committed leadership, and success stories that are easy to see. On the other hand, institutions that don't have leaders who are interested in innovation or business incubation don't do well. This supports the idea that a top-down vision and bottom-up student enthusiasm are both important for creating a good entrepreneurship ecosystem in higher education.

8. Conclusion:

This study shows how important it is to teach entrepreneurship in order to shape India's future workers and economy. Because the country has a lot of young people, schools need to change to encourage people to create jobs instead of just look for them. National policies like NEP 2020 and Startup India have set a strong base, but things are still not going smoothly at the local level. The results show that more people are aware of and want to promote entrepreneurship, but there isn't much real institutional support (Mishra & Pillai, 2022). To get the most out of student entrepreneurs, the national vision and institutional readiness need to be in sync. The study also shows that a lack of infrastructure and teaching methods continues to hold back the growth of entrepreneurship in many colleges, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Most schools don't have trained teachers, places for startups to grow, or connections to the business world that are important for experiential learning. This means that people learn about entrepreneurship in theory but not in practice. Also, an overly centralized curriculum makes it harder for teachers to use real-world case studies or local business models. Colleges could better meet the needs of their students and local economies if they took a more flexible, context-specific approach to curriculum and teaching.

Digital technology could help solve some of these problems in a promising way. Virtual incubation platforms, online training modules, and startup competitions are all becoming more popular, making it easier than ever to find resources for entrepreneurs. These tools are especially helpful for students at schools that don't have the resources to support entrepreneurship (Deshmukh & Roy, 2022). But technology shouldn't be thought of as a replacement for human mentorship and the culture of an organization. Instead, it should be part of a larger entrepreneurship ecosystem that combines the ease of digital tools with personal help and community involvement. Another important point is that entrepreneurship education should be fair and open to everyone. Students from poor backgrounds are more

likely to be affected by gender gaps, money problems, and cultural barriers. Women, students from rural areas, and people with less money often don't have access to the mentorship, capital, and networks they need to do well in entrepreneurial ecosystems. To fix this, we need to do things like create female-led mentorship programs, teach people about money, and set up regional incubation hubs. To make sure that entrepreneurship is not just an elite opportunity but also a way for people to move up in society and the economy, policies, teaching methods, and institutional design must all include it. To help Indian college students become more entrepreneurial, schools, policymakers, businesses, and civil society all need to work together. India's higher education system can only become a center for innovation and entrepreneurship if it can offer relevant education, fair chances, and enough support from institutions. Future plans should focus on bringing entrepreneurship into the mainstream of education, making sure everyone has access to technology, and putting underrepresented groups first. Indian colleges can only really prepare students to be resilient entrepreneurs and responsible change makers in the 21st-century economy if they take this kind of all-encompassing and welcoming approach.

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