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CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE COLLEGE STUDENTS' INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CHINA

Peng Jing[1], Rabiaal Adawiyah Binti Shazali[2], Peng Yuling[3]
[1, 2, 3]*Graduate School of Business, SEGi University & Colleges, Malaysia*

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, driven by the wave of innovation and entrepreneurship, universities have increasingly focused on fostering college students' innovative undertakings. However, the development of innovation and entrepreneurship education in China began relatively late and still exhibits numerous shortcomings. College students' awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship remains weak, their innovative and entrepreneurial capabilities are underdeveloped, and the scarcity of qualified teaching resources continues to be a significant barrier to progress in this field. These factors collectively hinder the advancement of innovation and entrepreneurship among college students.

This paper employs the interview method, selecting three representative college students from local universities to explore the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship from multiple perspectives, including the students themselves, society, family, and government. Using ATLAS.ti software, the study analyzes internal and external factors and proposes targeted strategies to effectively enhance college students' innovation and entrepreneurial capabilities.

KEYWORDS: *Current Situation of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, College Students, Influencing Factors, Countermeasures*

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of innovation and entrepreneurship education in China's higher education system reflects broader global trends in preparing students for an increasingly dynamic and competitive workforce. As universities worldwide adapt their curricula and teaching methodologies to meet these emerging challenges, understanding the current landscape and identifying areas for improvement becomes crucial. This study examines these aspects within the Chinese context, beginning with an exploration of the foundational elements that shape this educational initiative.

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, colleges and universities worldwide have increasingly emphasized the practical application skills of college students. They have organized various activities related to innovation and entrepreneurship and intensified efforts to nurture students into well-rounded talents. Under the new strategic framework, traditional approaches to entrepreneurship education can no longer fully meet the demands of modern society. As key institutions for cultivating social talent, universities must play a leading role in guiding students, inspiring creative consciousness, enhancing their innovation and entrepreneurship abilities, and contributing to a broader pool of innovative entrepreneurial talent.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Methodology

Many college students face a challenging external environment and high employment difficulties post-graduation, often adopting a "cross the bridge when you come to it" mindset. Common issues include weak awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship, lack of self-confidence, insufficient knowledge, inadequate innovation skills, fear of taking risks, and lack of start-up capital. Addressing how to accurately assess the current state of college students' innovation and entrepreneurship and effectively improve their capabilities in these areas remains an urgent problem.
This study involved an extensive review of existing literature on the status quo of innovation and entrepreneurship, its challenges, and associated problems. Additionally, first-hand data were gathered through on-site interviews with three

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selected students. The data were analyzed using grounded theory and the ATLAS.ti software to identify the primary bottlenecks impeding innovation and entrepreneurship among college students. Based on the findings, this paper proposes practical recommendations for the government, universities, and college students to enhance innovation capabilities and improve entrepreneurial success rates, culminating in a comprehensive summary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research Paradigm

This research primarily adopts a positivist research paradigm alongside natural science research methods, including interviews and observation.

Qualitative Research Method: Data for this study are collected through interviews, observations, and other qualitative approaches. The data are then systematically analyzed and summarized to derive meaningful conclusions.
Literature Review: A comprehensive review of existing studies on innovation and entrepreneurship is conducted to summarize and organize the current state of knowledge in this field.

2.2 Relevant Past to Current Studies

Definitions: Peng Zhang (2005) defined innovation ability as the capacity to consistently generate new ideas, theories, methods, and inventions that hold economic, social, and ecological value in technology and other practical activities. Similarly, entrepreneurship ability refers to the aptitude to discover or create a new domain and commit to understanding and creating novel ideas or entities. Zhu Guilong (2017) defined innovation and entrepreneurship as the process of leveraging knowledge, skills, and innovative thinking to build a career.

Past Studies and Overview: Li Aixiang (2020), a renowned scholar, highlights that current college innovation and entrepreneurship courses are largely offered as public electives or lectures. However, when students require more advanced knowledge, suitable courses are often unavailable. Xiao Hong (2020) notes that career planning, employment guidance, and entrepreneurship courses at universities encompass relevant knowledge, yet 80% of respondents misunderstand innovation and entrepreneurship, equating it solely to starting a company. Graduates, on the other hand, demonstrate the most accurate understanding of the concept. This underscores that effective innovation and entrepreneurship education requires practical application, not just theoretical instruction.

This paper, therefore, examines the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship education, proposing constructive strategies for the government, local universities, and college students. The goal is to enhance students' awareness, strengthen their innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities, and improve the success rate of entrepreneurial ventures driven by innovation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach to gather rich, detailed insights into the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship among college students. Through carefully structured interviews and systematic analysis, the study aims to uncover both obvious and subtle factors influencing students' entrepreneurial journey. The following sections detail the specific methodological framework and processes implemented to ensure robust and reliable findings.

3.1 Research Design

The interviewees were selected from the School of Economics and Management at the university. Three students were chosen from four majors: accounting, marketing, and logistics management. Table 3-1 provides the basic demographic and interview information for the participants.

3.2 Participants and Setting

The interviewees were selected from the School of Economics and Management at the university. Three students were chosen from four majors: accounting, marketing, and logistics management. Table 3-1 provides the basic demographic and interview information for the participants.

Table 3-1. Basic Information of Participants

Participants	Age	Sex	Educational Background	Professional	Interview Time
1	19	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Accounting	55 mins
2	18	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Logistics MGT	45 mins
3	18	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Marketing	50 mins

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3.3 Data Collection Technique

Before initiating the formal interviews, a procedural investigation was conducted to gather basic demographic information and family economic backgrounds of the participants, ensuring that no sensitive issues were included. Data collection began by gradually introducing relevant topics related to innovation and entrepreneurship, tailored to the participants' responses.

Each participant was interviewed twice. Verbal communication during the interviews was recorded in its entirety, while non-verbal communication, emotional cues, and participants' feelings were documented manually. To meet the research objectives, a total of 13 semi-structured questions were designed for the interviews.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis phase of this research followed a systematic approach to transform raw interview data into meaningful insights. Using both manual coding techniques and computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), the researchers developed a comprehensive understanding of the patterns and themes emerging from the interviews. The following sections detail the specific analytical procedures employed in this study.

3.4.1 Data Coding and Categorization

Immediately following the interviews, the data were encoded and organized into distinct categories and attributes. Table 3-2 outlines the development of categories and their corresponding properties derived from the codes.

Table 3-2 Developing the Categories, Properties From the Codes

Category	Code	Properties
Students' intention and cognition of innovation and entrepreneurship	knowledge deviation	internal influence
	consciousness is weak	
	running out of steam	
	Lack of innovation ability	
Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges	theory and practice are not closely linked	
	the instructor is not rich in entrepreneurial experience	
	incentives are not attractive enough	
	policy propaganda is not strong	
Social environment and atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship	the atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship is lacking	external influence
	constraints of family conditions	
	cooperative enterprises become mere formalities	
National policies on innovation and entrepreneurship	insufficient support	

The current state of college students' innovation and entrepreneurship was categorized into four main areas:

1). **Students' Intention and Cognition of Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

This category primarily concerns students. Their understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship directly influences their behaviors, such as participation in training programs, competitions, and critical thinking about the nature and purpose of innovation, as well as the impact they aim to create.

2). **Status Quo of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Colleges and Universities**

Universities play a pivotal role in guiding, supporting, and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. They bear significant responsibility for cultivating talent and creating a conducive environment for student development in this field.

3). **Social Environment and Atmosphere for Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

This category addresses the societal aspects, such as the tolerance and support of families, financial institutions, and enterprises toward students' innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives. These factors heavily influence students' motivation and confidence in pursuing entrepreneurial activities.

4). **National Policy**

Macro-level policies significantly impact students' enthusiasm for innovation and entrepreneurship. Favorable government incentives, such as funding and tax benefits, encourage participation, while the absence of such policies can dampen enthusiasm.

3.4.2 Data Validity, Reliability and Consistency

The research findings were subjected to validation through peer consultation and feedback from colleagues. The survey results were shared with the three participants to verify the accuracy and reliability of the data. Furthermore, the findings were compared with existing studies on innovation and entrepreneurship. In cases where discrepancies were significant, the researchers refined their results based on the primary data (Merrian & Tisdell, 2015).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The interviews were conducted voluntarily, with all participants fully aware of their roles in the study. Participants consented to the entire process being recorded and acknowledged that the content of the interviews would be utilized for this research. They signed an interview agreement prior to participation. During the formal interviews, researchers were mindful of participants' emotional states, ensuring no privacy issues were addressed. Additionally, the interview questions were designed to be neutral and unbiased.

In this chapter, the data gathered from interviews with three student participants from a local university will be presented. The analysis was guided by 13 semi-structured questions designed to uncover insights into the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship. To ensure thorough and accurate analysis, the researchers utilized qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS.ti, to process and interpret the collected data effectively.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interview data revealed several significant patterns and themes regarding college students' innovation and entrepreneurship experiences. Through careful examination of participants' responses, both explicit statements and implicit meanings were considered to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current situation. The findings are presented in a structured format, beginning with detailed participant information and progressing through the emerged themes and codes.

4.1 Findings – Participants' Details, Emerging Themes and Codes

The analysis of the collected data yielded rich insights into the various aspects of college students' innovation and entrepreneurship experiences. Through systematic coding and categorization, several distinct themes emerged from the interviews. These themes were further analyzed to understand their relationships and significance within the broader context of innovation and entrepreneurship education. The following sections present detailed findings from the reference text analysis.

4.1.1 Reference Text Analysis

(1) Social Environment and Atmosphere for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The social environment and atmosphere were referenced 11 times across the participants:

Participant 1 (P1) noted the importance of high technology and substantial capital for successful innovation and entrepreneurship (1:1 ¶5). He mentioned that entrepreneurship subsidies and dedicated parks for entrepreneurship students were available but highlighted the complex procedures for accessing start-up loans (1:17 ¶31; 1:19 ¶39). P1 also indicated a lack of understanding of certain policies (1:20 ¶42).

Participant 2 (P2) referenced product promotion and sales (2:1 ¶5) and considered starting her own business only if she lost her job (2:2 ¶7). She acknowledged state venture capital and family support as sources of funding but lacked awareness of joint ventures (2:9 ¶29; 2:11 ¶32–33). She further noted the challenge of piecing together initial investments from family resources (2:14 ¶31).

Participant 3 (P3) stated that most startups are limited to merely starting a company (3:1 ¶5) and expressed skepticism about whether the current environment could significantly help in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship (3:15 ¶46).

(2) Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Awareness and Cognition

This theme was referenced 15 times, indicating varied levels of awareness and understanding:

P1 preferred finding a job first and emphasized the necessity of strong professional knowledge and high-quality innovation projects, which are often lacking (1:2 ¶8; 1:7 ¶12; 1:8 ¶12). He highlighted issues such as a lack of entrepreneurial psychology (1:9 ¶14), unclear goals (1:10 ¶14), and challenges related to capital and experience (1:22 ¶8). He expressed a desire for independence in entrepreneurship (1:23 ¶10).

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P2 associated entrepreneurship with a sense of accomplishment and flexible working hours but pointed out the need for money and a clear vision for success (2:3 ¶9; 2:4 ¶14).

P3 preferred employment over entrepreneurship due to its relative ease (3:2 ¶8; 3:3 ¶8). He viewed school entrepreneurship competitions as low-cost but limited in value (3:4 ¶13) and highlighted the difficulty of identifying innovative, high-quality projects (3:5 ¶16). P3 also mentioned financial and parental constraints as significant concerns, especially the fear of failure and its financial consequences (3:13 ¶40; 3:14 ¶41–42).

(3) Current Situation of Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Universities

The status of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities was referenced 12 times, shedding light on institutional limitations:

P1 participated in competitions like "Internet Plus" and highlighted the importance of courses and training. However, he noted that practical courses were relatively limited, requiring students to integrate theory and practice independently (1:11 ¶17; 1:12 ¶22). He pointed out that student interest, training facilities, and dedicated spaces are vital but underdeveloped (1:14 ¶28).

P2 observed that theoretical and practical courses operate as separate systems, with limited connection between the two. She identified deficiencies in her program, particularly the lack of logistics-specific entrepreneurship courses (2:6 ¶18; 2:7 ¶21–23).

P3 mentioned that theoretical courses often dominate, leaving little room for practical applications. These courses are typically lecture-based, and evaluations rely on final exams rather than practical assessments. He also noted a lack of entrepreneurial experience among teachers and limited peer evaluations (3:8 ¶25; 3:9 ¶25; 3:10 ¶25; 3:11 ¶30; 3:12 ¶37).

(4) Current Situation of Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Universities

This theme is supported by one quotation:

Participant 1 (P1) highlighted the role of tax breaks, small loans, and entrepreneurship subsidies in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. He also referenced the implementation of successful entrepreneurship rewards as a potential incentive for students (1:21 ¶44).

4.1.2 Code Analysis

After analyzing the interview outlines of the three participants, a total of 17 codes were identified, as detailed in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1 Coding Details

	code	Number of code	density	Coding group
•	capital source	3	2	Social environment and atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship
•	Loan and other policies	1	4	Social environment and atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship
•	Knowledge deviation	4	3	Students' innovation and entrepreneurship awareness and cognition
•	Single assessment method	2	2	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities
•	Incentive policy means	1	2	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities
•	Favourable activity	2	2	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities
•	Tradition of educational form	1	3	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities
•	Single teaching model	1	2	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities
•	Instructors are not experienced enough in entrepreneurship	3	2	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities
•	Family constraints	1	3	Social environment and atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship
•	National policy	1	3	National policy
•	Cooperative enterprises become mere formalities	3	1	Social environment and atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship
•	Running out of steam	3	3	Students' innovation and entrepreneurship awareness and cognition
•	Lack of innovation ability	2	2	Students' innovation and entrepreneurship awareness and cognition
•	Entrepreneurship block	5	3	Students' innovation and entrepreneurship awareness and cognition
•	Weak entrepreneurial consciousness	3	2	Students' innovation and entrepreneurship awareness and cognition
•	The innovation and entrepreneurship courses of professional courses are not connected effectively	3	3	Current situation of innovation and entrepreneurship in universities

4.2 Key Findings

The interview recordings were classified using citations and encoded into four categories. The researchers identified relationships between the codes, references, and categories, as outlined in Table 4-2.

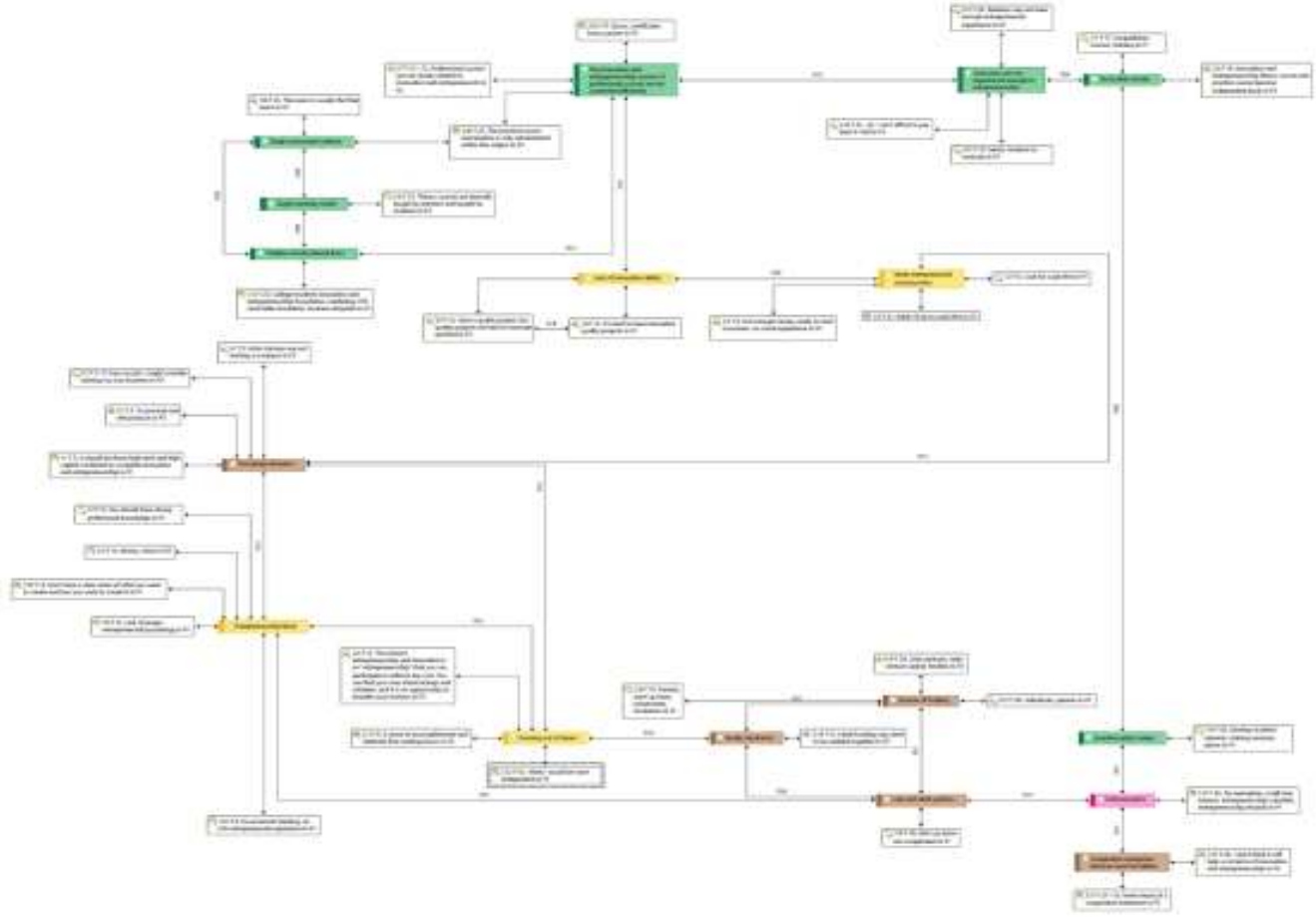
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Table 4-2 Encoding Document Form

Codes	P1	P2	P3	Totals
Lack of innovation ability	1	-	1	2
Business conditions	4	1	-	5
Weak entrepreneurial consciousness	1	-	2	3
Loan and other policies	1	-	-	1
Running out of steam	1	1	1	3
National policy	1	-	-	1
Cooperative enterprises become mere formalities	1	1	1	3
Incentive policy means	1	-	-	1
Family constraints	-	1	-	1
Single teaching model	-	-	1	1
Single form of education	1	-	-	1
Single assessment method	-	-	2	2
Knowledge deviation	1	2	1	4
Favourable activity	1	1	-	2
Instructors are not experienced enough in entrepreneurship	-	-	3	3
The innovation and entrepreneurship courses of professional courses are not connected effectively	-	2	1	3
Sources of funding	1	1	1	3
Totals	15	10	14	39

Based on Table 4-2, the most influential factor was "business conditions", which was mentioned by both P1 and P2. P1 alone referenced it four times. Another notable theme was "knowledge deviation", which was discussed by all participants.

Table 4-3: A Network of Codes Around the Code Groups and Quotations



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Through the interviews, the participants frequently mentioned terms such as "money", "personal experience", and "innovation ability". These factors were identified as key internal barriers to college students' innovative undertakings. Observations of participants' body language and tone further revealed a pervasive perception that innovation and entrepreneurship are difficult to achieve. Many participants expressed concerns about the high likelihood of failure, which often led to hesitation or abandonment of entrepreneurial ambitions.

4.2.1 Internal Constraints

(1) Students' Intention and Cognition of Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Participant 1 (P1): P1 emphasized that innovation and entrepreneurship require the combined forces of high technology and significant capital. He observed that such resources are often inaccessible to college students, stating, "High capital is generally supported by family conditions". Consequently, he plans to seek employment after graduation rather than starting a business immediately. The lack of financial backing and entrepreneurial experience are key barriers. However, he expressed a desire for independence, noting, "I don't want to work for others. It's better to work for myself than for others". P1 highlighted the need for excellent professional knowledge and innovative, high-quality projects, but acknowledged the difficulty in developing such innovation.

Participant 2 (P2): P2 described innovation and entrepreneurship as activities centered around promoting and selling products that are new to the market. She preferred to work after graduation to gain market experience, which she believed would support self-entrepreneurship. She remarked, "If I lose my job, I may consider starting my own business. If I start my own business, I think it will give me a sense of achievement. Besides, I can have relatively free working hours and take into account other things".

Participant 3 (P3): P3 suggested that entrepreneurship often involves improving existing ideas rather than creating something entirely new. He noted that most startups are focused on establishing companies, but he plans to pursue employment first. He explained, "I don't have enough money to cover my living expenses. Starting a business is hard. I don't have social experience and enough capital to test the waters. Employment is much easier than starting a business, and there is basically no hope of success for me now". P3 felt that entrepreneurship should be approached rationally, requiring high-quality projects, which he deemed difficult to innovate or find.

(2) Current Situation of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Colleges and Universities

Participant 1 (P1): P1 mentioned participating in competitions such as "Internet Plus + National College Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship" and "Ke Chuang Cup", as well as attending college innovation and entrepreneurship courses like GYB+SYB training. He emphasized the importance of foundational theoretical courses, such as Fundamentals of Economics, Economic Law, Basic Accounting, Data Statistics, and Management, alongside practical courses like Business Operations Management and Psychology of Entrepreneurs. However, he noted that practical courses are limited and require self-integration with theoretical knowledge. Regarding university incentives, P1 said, "There is also the possibility of exchange of credits between competitions and courses".

Participant 2 (P2): P2 highlighted the benefits of lectures and courses on innovation and entrepreneurship. However, she observed that theoretical and practical courses often operate independently without meaningful integration. She mentioned theoretical courses covering topics such as industry qualitative analysis, product positioning, market research, and promotion methods as helpful. Nonetheless, she noted the lack of innovation-specific logistics management courses. P2 also admitted that her involvement in innovative and entrepreneurial activities beyond coursework was minimal.

Participant 3 (P3): P3 observed that theoretical courses on innovation and entrepreneurship dominate, while practical courses are less prevalent. Theoretical instruction is mostly lecture-based, with evaluations relying on final exams rather than practical applications. He remarked, "The Basis of College Students' Innovative Undertaking helps understand the basic idea of entrepreneurship, Economics Foundation covers relevant economic concepts, Economic Law Basic addresses economic law, Data Statistics provides data analysis, and Management helps with managing staff and social relations". However, he noted that practical course teachers often lack entrepreneurial experience and that he was unfamiliar with various forms of innovation and entrepreneurship education.

4.2.2 External Constraints

(1) Social Environment and Atmosphere for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

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Participant 1 (P1): P1 highlighted several potential sources of start-up capital, including parental support, start-up loans, start-up support funds, and angel investors. However, he noted significant barriers, stating, "There are special start-up loans, but the procedures are complicated, and general loans are difficult, requiring mortgage and other conditions". P1 also admitted limited familiarity with cooperative enterprises for innovation and entrepreneurship.
Participant 2 (P2): P2 identified state venture capital and family support as potential funding sources but highlighted challenges. She remarked, "The initial investment may need to be pieced together. If the business fails, the family will be hit hard, so the parents are not very supportive". Furthermore, she was unfamiliar with cooperative models for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Participant 3 (P3): P3 indicated that start-up capital primarily comes from personal and parental resources. When asked about alternative funding methods, he explained, "I'm mainly afraid that I can't pay back the investment capital due to the failure of the start-up". Regarding cooperative enterprises, he observed that logistics-related majors primarily contribute labor, which he believed to be unhelpful for driving innovation and entrepreneurship.
(2) National Policy on Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Participant 1 (P1): P1 demonstrated some understanding of government policies aimed at supporting college entrepreneurs, such as three-year tax breaks, small loans, start-up subsidies, and entrepreneurship rewards. However, he admitted to a lack of knowledge regarding the specific processes involved in utilizing these policies.

Participant 2 (P2): P2 was familiar with policies supporting college entrepreneurship, including opportunities to apply for start-up capital. Nevertheless, she found the operational process to be overly complex, stating, "After applying for the establishment of a company, there are other formalities and materials".

Participant 3 (P3): P3 recognized the existence of policies such as tax reductions, entrepreneurship guidance, and the provision of small loans for college entrepreneurs. However, when asked about specific tax relief measures, such as preferential value-added tax policies for small-scale taxpayers, he admitted limited knowledge about the details.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The current status of college students' innovation and entrepreneurship can be summarized in four key aspects. First, students often lack a solid foundation in professional knowledge and competencies. Second, the integration of innovation and entrepreneurship education with theoretical learning and practical application in universities remains insufficient, with inadequate promotion and encouragement. Third, social support for innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives is relatively limited. Fourth, while national policies provide some degree of bias toward supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, the overall level of attention and training remains low. These factors collectively influence the current state of innovation and entrepreneurship among college students to varying degrees. Overcoming this bottleneck requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders. Specific recommendations are outlined as follows:

5.1 Institutional Level

From the perspective of schools, several measures can be implemented to enhance innovation and entrepreneurship education. First, schools should foster students' knowledge and awareness of innovation and entrepreneurship through a holistic, process-oriented approach that involves the active collaboration of social enterprises, tutors, and students. Second, they should actively cultivate exemplary cases and increase the visibility of successful examples to inspire and guide students. Third, strengthening university-enterprise collaboration is essential, including leveraging industry-academia-research relationships to establish dedicated innovation and entrepreneurship practice and internship bases. Fourth, schools should refine and improve incentive policies to encourage participation and achievement in entrepreneurial initiatives. Fifth, faculty development should be prioritized, with regular training programs conducted both on-campus and off-campus to enhance teaching capabilities in this area. Lastly, courses should be tailored to meet the needs of students at different stages, connecting theoretical instruction with practical application to develop a comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship training system.

5.2 Social and Family Aspects

From the social and family perspectives, several actions can be taken to enhance support for student innovation and entrepreneurship. On the societal level, increased attention and resources should be directed toward student entrepreneurship and innovation projects. Specifically, dedicated angel investment funds should be established to

provide financial backing exclusively for college student initiatives. On the family front, traditional career expectations must be reconsidered to accommodate and encourage students' entrepreneurial pursuits. Families can offer critical support through financial assistance, sharing of relevant experience, and fostering psychological resilience to help students navigate the challenges of innovation and entrepreneurship effectively.

5.3 Policy Level

Regarding national policies, efforts should be made to actively secure government support and foster an environment conducive to college students' innovation and entrepreneurship. This includes advocating for the establishment of policies and initiatives that prioritize the cultivation and development of entrepreneurial skills among students, thereby creating a supportive framework for their projects and aspirations.

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