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Navigating the Academic Ecosystem:

University Education and Women's Entrepreneurial Ambitions

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ABSTRACT :

This thesis examines the role of university education on the entrepreneurial aspirations of women in Finland, with a particular emphasis on the experiences and perspectives of female students. The research underscores the substantial influence of university environments on the development or suppression of entrepreneurial ambitions among women. Despite Finland's progressive educational policies, a significant gender disparity persists in the field of entrepreneurship. The objective of this research is to determine the barriers and facilitators within academic institutions that influence the entrepreneurial engagement of female students.

The study employs the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to investigate the interaction of environmental factors, social influences, and individual intentions that influence the entrepreneurial behaviors of women. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight female students from the University of Vaasa who had completed at least one entrepreneurship-related course. The students were purposively selected. Thematic analysis was implemented to evaluate their experiences, with an emphasis on the relevance of the curriculum, the support provided by institutions, and the challenges that were gender-specific.

Results indicate that entrepreneurial education offers indispensable knowledge and abilities; however, women frequently encounter distinctive obstacles, such as inadequate mentorship, networking opportunities, and gender-specific resources. Participants emphasized the importance of mentorship and practical, hands-on experiences, but they also identified deficiencies in curricula and support systems that are specifically designed to meet the requirements of women. Women's entrepreneurial endeavors and confidence are additionally restricted by structural barriers, including societal norms and implicit biases within academic environments.

The study concludes that universities are instrumental in influencing the entrepreneurial aspirations of women by promoting inclusive environments and addressing gender-specific requirements. Suggestions include the promotion of female representation in entrepreneurial networks, the provision of targeted mentorship and resources, and the updating of curricula to reflect diverse experiences. It is the objective of these insights to inform educational strategies that will enable women to confidently pursue entrepreneurship.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship, University Education, Gender-Specific Barriers, Mentorship, Entrepreneurial Aspirations, Finland

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1 Introduction

Over the course of the past few years, entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical factor in driving both innovation and economic growth. Nevertheless, in spite of the growing attention paid to gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in entrepreneurial activities in comparison to males (Bradley & Fry, 2024; Bullough et al., 2022). Even in cultures that have seen to be progressive and where educational options have supposed to be inclusive, this discrepancy continues to exist (Bullough et al., 2022). Students' perceptions of and interest in pursuing jobs in entrepreneurship have significantly impacted by their university education (Donaldson et al., 2023), which plays a significant influence in the formation of entrepreneurial aspirations (Ganna et al., 2020). This effect has the potential to either encourage or hinder women's desires to become entrepreneurs, depending on the culture of the institution, the resources available, and the support networks that have also accessible (Bradley & Fry, 2024; Bullough et al., 2022; Donaldson et al., 2023; Gera et al., 2024; Jenkins, 2024; Krieger et al., 2022).

In spite of the fact that numerous studies have emphasized the importance of entrepreneurial education (EE) in equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset that are essential for the success of entrepreneurs (Ganna et al., 2020; Stoker et al., 2024). The experiences of women who partake in such programs frequently demonstrate significant gender-specific obstacles (Bullough et al., 2022). Research reveals that women may be less likely to pursue entrepreneurship than males (Bradley & Fry, 2024; Krieger et al., 2022). This may not be attributable to a deficiency of qualifications or skills, rather to the psychological, cultural, and structural barriers that have developed within the academic environment (Grandy & Culham, 2022; Krieger et al., 2022).

Moreover, major challenge for women was the limited access to resources and networks inside educational settings (Liñán et al., 2022). Mentorship, financial opportunities, and professional networks have crucial for transforming entrepreneurial ambitions into viable

enterprises, and male students generally possess superior access to these resources compared to their female peers (Donaldson et al., 2023; Jenkins, 2024; Krieger et al., 2022). On the other hand, women typically face structural impediments, such as prejudices and cultural norms, which hinder female participation in entrepreneurship, particularly in areas that have mostly dominated by males (Donaldson et al., 2023; Jenkins, 2024). Subsequently, they may experience a decrease in their confidence as a result of these structural and societal barriers, which may prevent them from fully engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors.

Furthermore, it was possible that the content and organization of education about entrepreneurship may not adequately address the particular requirements and goals that women should have (Bradley & Fry, 2024; Yang & Aldrich, 2014). Due to the prevalence of male-dominated corporate environments in traditional entrepreneurship curricula (Gera et al., 2024), female students must navigate an educational system that may not align with their unique experiences. The absence of diversity may substantially affect women's self-efficacy and dramatically reduce their inclination to seek entrepreneurial careers (Donaldson et al., 2023; Ganna et al., 2020).

In spite of Finland's progressive educational programs and commitment to gender equality, the gender disparity in entrepreneurship remains quite substantial (Elomäki et al., 2020). Despite the fact that Finnish universities have implemented numerous initiatives to foster entrepreneurial pursuits (Elomäki et al., 2020), the effectiveness of these programs in assisting female students remains uncertain (Opie et al., 2019; Stoker et al., 2024). Thereafter, a deeper understanding of how university education either positively or negatively impacts women's plans to become entrepreneurs needs to be gained by looking into the experiences of women who have been in these academic settings.

In line with this perspective, the purpose of this research is to investigate and understand how women's engagement in entrepreneurship is influenced by their university education

in Finland. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the experiences, viewpoints, and challenges faced by female students in academic institutions regarding their education in entrepreneurship. To achieve this, the research aims to identify the facilitating factors and obstacles within university environments that shape women's entrepreneurial aspirations. The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question: *How do female students experience and perceive the influence of university education on their entrepreneurial aspirations, particularly regarding curriculum relevance, practical exposure, mentorship, support systems, and societal barriers?* By conducting an in-depth investigation of these experiences, the study seeks to provide insights that can inform the development of more inclusive educational strategies and support systems, effectively fostering entrepreneurial aspirations among female students.

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Literature review: an introduction to themes

The researcher examines topics that directly address the factors that influence the participation of female students in entrepreneurial endeavors conducted within Finnish educational institutions within the context of this literature study. The following themes were selected: the impact of university education on entrepreneurial engagement, personal reflections and recommendations for improvement, university support systems and resources, barriers and challenges for female students in entrepreneurship, and experiences and perspectives on entrepreneurship education. These themes have in close alignment with the research objective, which was to comprehend the ways in which women's entrepreneurial aspirations have influenced by their academic experiences, perceived challenges, and the institutional support that was accessible.

Each theme was selected to capture a distinct and essential dimension of the factors that influence female students' entrepreneurial engagement, focusing on both external structures—such as curriculum design and institutional support—and internal influences, including personal motivation and cultural context. This thematic approach was informed by previous studies that emphasize the layered complexity of institutional, societal, and individual factors affecting women in entrepreneurship (Bullough et al., 2022; Chan, 2022).

By dissecting these aspects, this review aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the unique needs, challenges, and aspirations of female students within Finnish universities. Such insights have critical for informing targeted strategies and creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Finland's higher education sector that was inclusive and responsive to the diversity of women's experiences (Aman et al., 2024; Bergmann et al., 2024). This approach not only facilitates a deeper examination of structural and social barriers but also provides a clearer basis for actionable improvements in educational practices and support systems that can foster women's entrepreneurial ambitions.

2.1.1 Influence of University Education on Entrepreneurial Engagement

A growing amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the impact that a university education has on the participation of women in entrepreneurial endeavors. This was especially true in Nordic nations like Finland, where educational equality was a paramount concern. A number of cultural, institutional, and curriculum-based factors contribute to the fact that women have still underrepresented in the field of entrepreneurship in Finland (Ito et al., 2024; Nummela et al., 2021). This was despite the fact that Finland has implemented progressive educational and social policies. The academic foundation and experiential possibilities that impact students' career trajectories have provided by universities, which have the subject of a considerable body of scholarship that suggests universities have a significant role in molding the entrepreneurial goals, aspirations, and capabilities of women.

It was one of the key aspects that was noted in the literature that the relevance of curriculum content to women's entrepreneurial participation was one of the essential factors. Research conducted by Bui et al. (2018) demonstrates that, women's interest in entrepreneurship was more effectively encouraged when the content of the course acknowledges special issues experienced by female entrepreneurs and reflects a variety of perspectives. Courses in entrepreneurship that address the realities of gender dynamics in business and introduce students to concepts such as work-life balance, which have frequently more important for women, have been found to have a greater influence on students.

Adetunji (2024) and Salo (2024) conducted research in Finland and discovered that in order to assist bridge the gap in entrepreneurial ambitions between male and female students, entrepreneurship curriculum that incorporate instances and examples that have relevant to women's experiences might be considered effective. In addition to highlighting the relevance of the curriculum, case studies that feature successful female entrepreneurs can further improve women's participation. These case studies not only serve as significant

motivators for women who have exploring entrepreneurship, but they also emphasize the relevance of the curriculum. However, a number of studies suggest that university curricula still frequently fail to devote sufficient attention to gendered experiences in the realm of entrepreneurship (Paray & Kumar, 2020). This may be a factor that hinders the process of encouraging a greater number of women to take this path.

Another essential component influencing women's entrepreneurial engagement was the opportunity for practical application of skills within the university setting. Experiential learning theory suggests that hands-on experiences significantly increase entrepreneurial readiness by allowing students to test theories in real-life settings (Singh et al., 2022). For female students, however, access to experiential learning, such as internships and incubator programs, can be impacted by gender dynamics in traditionally male-dominated entrepreneurial environments (Manishimwe et al., 2023). Studies show that in Finland, while universities provide robust experiential learning platforms, female students often feel less confident in these spaces due to a lack of female representation or mentorship (Adetunji, 2024; Ekblad, 2024).

The creation of a friendly and relevant environment can be accomplished through the implementation of women-centric experience opportunities. These opportunities include female-led entrepreneurship boot camps, mentoring from successful female entrepreneurs, and networking activities that have specifically tailored for women. According to the findings of research conducted by Aman et al. (2024), such spaces have particularly beneficial because they inspire women to actively participate in entrepreneurial activities and develop a sense of belonging, both of which have essential building blocks for the confidence to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors.

Motivation and aspiration have other important characteristics that play a significant role in determining whether or not women engage in entrepreneurial endeavors. According to Ajzen (1991), the Theory of Planned Behavior proposes that intention was a significant

predictor of behavior. This theory suggests that an increase in the chance of women pursuing entrepreneurial jobs can be achieved by encouraging them to have a favorable attitude toward entrepreneurship (Boubker, 2024). However, even in progressive situations like Finland, women's incentives might be negatively impacted by public conceptions of entrepreneurship as a subject that was largely dominated by men.

In accordance with this, research indicates that the visibility of role models and mentors has a significant impact on the motivations of Finnish female students. These individuals have instrumental in dismantling gender stereotypes and empowering women to pursue entrepreneurship. Nyakudya et al. (2024) underscore the influence of female role models on the motivation of women to pursue entrepreneurship, thereby corroborating Bandura's social learning theory.

This theory posits that individuals have more inclined to emulate the behaviors of individuals with whom they identify. Expanding alumni networks to include successful female entrepreneurs and incorporating mentoring from female professionals can be effective strategies for increasing the entrepreneurial motivation of women in Finnish universities. This visibility helps normalize female entrepreneurship and encourages women to view it as a viable career path.

Facilitating factors and obstacles within university environments also play a significant role in shaping women's engagement in entrepreneurship (Nevi et al., 2024). Finnish universities have implemented various initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive educational environments, yet research shows there have still areas for improvement, particularly in addressing the gender-specific challenges women face in entrepreneurship programs.

Studies by Haltia et al. (2021) indicate that while Finnish universities have committed to gender inclusivity, gender biases in classroom discussions and a lack of support structures specifically tailored for women can act as barriers to female students' entrepreneurial aspirations. For instance, women in Finland report challenges related to balancing career

and family responsibilities, a consideration that influences their entrepreneurial ambitions. University policies that address these challenges, such as promoting work-life balance in entrepreneurship courses or offering flexible learning opportunities, could support female students in reconciling personal and professional goals.

Another aspect of the literature that was emphasized was the institutional support for gender inclusivity in entrepreneurship education. Although Finland's higher education system fosters gender equality, it was imperative to implement more focused initiatives to combat the subliminal forms of gender bias that persist in entrepreneurial areas. Sampene et al. (2023) observes that the provision of female-specific resources, such as gender-sensitive entrepreneurial training and platforms that commend female-led innovations, can substantially increase the confidence and interest of female students in pursuing entrepreneurship. By cultivating an environment in which female students experience equal support and representation, Finnish universities can promote a more inclusive entrepreneurial culture and surmount these institutional obstacles.

Through the implementation of inclusive educational methodologies and support systems, research indicates that universities in Finland have the potential to play a significant role in fostering the entrepreneurial participation of women. A curriculum that emphasizes a variety of experiences, experiential opportunities that have adapted to the needs of women, motivational programs that feature female role models, and supportive institutional frameworks have all beneficial to the participation of women in entrepreneurial endeavors.

When these components have present, women report feeling more confident, supported, and inspired to pursue entrepreneurial pathways, according to research that has been conducted in the greater Nordic region as well as in the context of Finland (Donaldson et al., 2023; Ito et al., 2024). It will not only be beneficial to female students if these disparities

have addressed and a gender-inclusive educational environment was promoted, but it will also contribute to a more balanced and inventive landscape of Finnish entrepreneurship.

2.1.2 Experiences and Viewpoints on Entrepreneurship Education

A combination of strengths and limitations was revealed by research that analyzes students' perspectives and experiences regarding entrepreneurship education. These experiences have influenced by distinctive perspectives and challenges, particularly for women in Finland. Entrepreneurship education has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the entrepreneurial intentions of students; however, its efficacy was frequently contingent upon critical factors, including networking opportunities, course structure and duration, and real-world exposure. Each of these factors contributes to the development of female students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a viable career path and influences their participation in entrepreneurial activities.

Networking opportunities within entrepreneurship education have widely recognized as valuable by students, and this was especially relevant for female students who may face additional challenges in accessing professional networks (Bui et al., 2018; Kovaleva et al., 2023). Studies indicate that for female students in Finland, networking opportunities provided by universities play an essential role in bridging the gap to entrepreneurial ecosystems, which can often be male dominated. Research by Manishimwe et al. (2023) shows that, female students feel more empowered and supported in their entrepreneurial pursuits when they have access to formal and informal networking events.

These events include opportunities to connect with successful entrepreneurs, both male and female, who can offer insights and mentorship. Furthermore, a supportive networking environment can mitigate some of the barriers women encounter when entering entrepreneurial spaces, such as limited access to funding and a lack of visibility in male-dominated networks. When universities actively facilitate networking through mentorship programs and alumni associations, they enable female students to build confidence and

gain practical insights, which significantly impacts their entrepreneurial aspirations (Galvão et al., 2024; Kakeesh, 2024).

Course structure and duration have also critical aspects influencing students' experiences with entrepreneurship education. Research indicates that the structure of entrepreneurship courses—whether they have short-term workshops, semester-long classes, or multi-year programs—can impact how well students retain entrepreneurial knowledge and skills (Gansser & Reich, 2023; Singh et al., 2022). Female students, in particular, benefit from flexible and well-structured courses that acknowledge potential constraints such as balancing academic responsibilities with personal commitments.

In the Finnish context, studies show that female students favor courses that offer flexibility in timing and workload, as well as courses with modular content that allows for gradual skill-building (Ekblad, 2024; Salo, 2024). Additionally, shorter, intensive workshops focusing on specific entrepreneurial skills, such as negotiation or business pitching, have been found to resonate well with female students who prefer targeted, skill-based training over extended theoretical courses. The structure and duration of these courses can also influence students' perceptions of entrepreneurship's accessibility and practicality. Well-designed, inclusive courses that have mindful of women's time constraints and learning preferences can thus make entrepreneurship education more appealing and applicable for female students.

In order to enhance students' comprehension and enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, it was essential to provide them with real-world exposure, which denotes practical entrepreneurial experience. Kolb's experiential learning theory provides evidence for this, asserting that students acquire knowledge more efficiently when they have able to actively interact with concepts in real-world contexts (Morris, 2020). The advantages of real-world exposure for female students in Finland include the opportunity to cultivate practical skills, confidence, and resilience, all of which have essential for traversing the landscape of

entrepreneurship. Singh et al. (2022) have conducted research that indicates that female students place a high value on experiential learning components, including internships, case studies, business simulations, and collaborations with industry partners, which enable them to implement classroom knowledge in real-world scenarios.

In particular, business plan competitions and startup incubators have been seen as beneficial by female students, as they provide a realistic view of entrepreneurial challenges and rewards. However, studies also reveal that Finnish female students may face additional barriers in real-world exposure activities, such as a lack of female representation in these environments, which can make these spaces feel less accessible. As a result, universities that provide women-specific opportunities for real-world exposure, such as female-only pitch events or mentoring sessions with female entrepreneurs, have more success in engaging female students and encouraging their entrepreneurial ambitions.

In addition to the advantages that have been linked to these components of entrepreneurship education, there are also constraints that affect the experiences of female students. Although networking opportunities are advantageous, certain investigations indicate that male students frequently obtain additional encouragement and visibility within these networks, which may result in discriminatory access to resources and assistance (Kakeesh, 2024). Similarly, female students may be discouraged by course structures that are excessively theoretical or rigid, as they may believe that these courses do not adequately prepare them for the realities of entrepreneurship (Nevi et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2022).

Another factor that can be a barrier is the length of time that entrepreneurship programs have offered. According to Kovaleva et al. (2023), women who have other responsibilities in addition to their studies may find it more difficult to participate in programs that are too long or too demanding. In conclusion, although exposure to the real world is an essential component, research indicates that these opportunities have frequently not

targeted to meet gender-specific difficulties. As a result, female students may experience feelings of being underrepresented and unsupported (Danho, 2023).

In summary, the literature indicates that entrepreneurship education holds significant potential for encouraging female students in Finland to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Networking opportunities, flexible course structures, and real-world exposure have particularly valued by female students, as these elements provide practical insights and build confidence. However, there have still limitations within these areas that universities need to address to create more inclusive environments. By focusing on these factors and tailoring them to the unique needs of female students, Finnish universities can enhance the effectiveness of their entrepreneurship programs and support more women in pursuing entrepreneurial careers.

2.1.3 University Support Systems and Resources

The research on university support systems indicates that effective resources, mentorship, and access to networks have essential for the development of entrepreneurial aspirations among students, particularly women who encounter distinctive obstacles in entering entrepreneurial environments. The specific impact of these support mechanisms on the entrepreneurial intentions of female students in Finland, where universities have committed to promoting equality in educational access and career outcomes, offers valuable insights for the development of more inclusive entrepreneurial environments.

One of the most beneficial university support resources available to female entrepreneurs who aspire to be entrepreneurs was mentorship and guidance (Kakeesh, 2024) . Mentorship can have a beneficial impact on the confidence, resilience, and ability of students to overcome entrepreneurial obstacles, as demonstrated by the literature. Mentorship from female entrepreneurs or role models can be particularly beneficial for women, as it offers relatable guidance and assists in the dismantling of gendered barriers to entrepreneurship (Lee et al., 2023; Maziriri et al., 2024).

In the Finnish context, Ekblad (2024) discovered that female students exhibit increased entrepreneurial self-efficacy and motivation when they have access to mentors who have encountered and navigated comparable obstacles. Mentorship offers technical assistance and also allows female students to address the distinctive obstacles they may encounter, such as reconciling personal and professional objectives or surmounting confidence disparities in industries that have predominantly male. Universities in Finland that provide structured mentorship programs that have specifically designed for women have therefore better equipped to encourage the entrepreneurial aspirations of female students, as they establish a more supportive and relatable environment for women to participate in entrepreneurship.

Additionally, it was imperative to implement gender-specific support mechanisms within university entrepreneurship programs to cultivate an inclusive environment that motivates women to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Despite the fact that Finnish institutions generally prioritize gender equality, research suggests that female students continue to encounter challenges associated with gender bias and a lack of representation in entrepreneurial environments (Nummela et al., 2021). Resources such as women-only seminars, leadership training, and female-centered networking events have examples of gender-specific support that can be used to address the underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship and provide a more personalized support system (Kakeesh, 2024; Sampene et al., 2023).

Similarly, studies also show that such targeted programs increase female students' confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities by creating a space where they can discuss and navigate gender-related challenges without fear of bias or marginalization. For example, Haltia et al. (2021) highlight that, Finnish universities that offer women-specific resources, such as funding advice and training in leadership, help reduce perceived barriers and foster a sense of belonging in entrepreneurial spaces. These gender-specific initiatives also align

with Finland's national policies on gender equality, reinforcing the commitment to equitable opportunities within higher education and entrepreneurship.

Access to networking and funding opportunities was a critical component of university support for entrepreneurship, providing students with the essential resources and connections to launch their business ideas. However, research indicates that women often experience challenges in accessing these resources compared to their male counterparts, a discrepancy that can hinder female students' entrepreneurial aspirations (Bui et al., 2018; Manishimwe et al., 2023).

In Finland, networking and funding opportunities provided by universities, such as business incubators, pitch events, and venture capital connections, have valued by female students, who often report that these opportunities have instrumental in building the necessary networks and securing the resources required to launch entrepreneurial ventures (Adetunji, 2024; Ito et al., 2024). Studies suggest that universities can enhance the inclusivity of these resources by actively promoting women's participation in networking events and by providing tailored guidance on navigating funding processes that can be challenging due to biases or traditional expectations around women's roles in business.

The challenges female students face in accessing these opportunities have well-documented. For instance, research indicates that women have often underrepresented in networking spaces and may lack the confidence to seek out funding, especially in male-dominated networks. A study by Haltia et al. (2021) found that female students in Finland benefit from programs that create safe, inclusive networking spaces, where they can connect with both peers and potential investors in a supportive environment. In addition to gender-specific networking events, some Finnish universities have begun to offer access to women-focused venture funds and angel investment groups, which help bridge the funding gap that women frequently encounter. By creating pathways that facilitate access to capital

and professional networks, universities play a crucial role in reducing the barriers to entrepreneurial engagement for female students.

In summary, mentorship, gender-specific support, and access to networking and funding have essential elements of university support systems that significantly impact female students' entrepreneurial engagement in Finland. Mentorship from relatable role models, targeted programs that address gender-specific challenges, and inclusive access to vital resources like networking and funding create a conducive environment for female students to pursue entrepreneurship confidently. Finnish universities that prioritize these support systems contribute to a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, providing female students with the resources and encouragement necessary to overcome traditional barriers and view entrepreneurship as a viable career path. By focusing on these areas, universities can better align with Finland's commitment to gender equality and foster a diverse and innovative entrepreneurial landscape.

2.1.4 Barriers and Challenges for Female Students in Entrepreneurship

Female students pursuing entrepreneurship in academic settings often encounter unique barriers that influence their engagement, ambitions, and outcomes. Gender bias, challenges with self-confidence, and financial and institutional barriers have among the primary hurdles. These obstacles, though sometimes subtle, create an uneven playing field in entrepreneurship education. While Finland's higher education institutions have made significant strides toward gender equality, these issues still affect how female students experience and engage with entrepreneurship programs.

One of the most complex and pervasive issues was gender bias, which can manifest in various forms, ranging from implicit stereotypes to structural inequalities. Entrepreneurship was often framed within masculine norms, with success frequently associated with assertiveness, risk-taking, and resilience—traits traditionally coded as male (Chan, 2022; Li et al., 2024). This framing can subtly discourage female students from participating fully in

entrepreneurial activities, as they may feel out of place or face implicit questioning of their competencies.

In Finland, Nummela et al. (2021) highlight that gender bias can exist even in progressive university environments, where women may receive less encouragement or visibility in entrepreneurial initiatives. Moreover, female students report feeling less included in entrepreneurial communities on campus, perceiving an informal “old boys’ club” atmosphere that can deter engagement. Efforts to counteract this need to go beyond policy statements; universities should actively foster an inclusive environment by integrating female voices and perspectives in entrepreneurship programs and challenging stereotypical views of what it means to be a successful entrepreneur.

Self-confidence and self-esteem have additional areas where female students may face challenges. Research consistently shows that confidence plays a crucial role in entrepreneurial success; individuals with higher self-belief have more likely to act on business ideas, take calculated risks, and persist through setbacks (Chan, 2022). However, societal expectations and internalized gender norms often contribute to women doubting their entrepreneurial potential. Studies on Finnish students indicate that female students have more prone to self-doubt when compared to their male peers, often resulting in lower participation in activities like pitching or leading projects (Naukkarinen & Bairoh, 2022).

Unlike their male counterparts, many female students report hesitating to assert their ideas or step into leadership roles within entrepreneurial spaces. This was often linked to a lack of relatable role models within their programs. In Finland, studies suggest that targeted mentorship—especially when provided by successful female entrepreneurs—can be instrumental in boosting self-esteem among female students (Aman et al., 2024; Naukkarinen & Bairoh, 2022). Universities could therefore enhance confidence-building by not only providing role models but also fostering supportive environments that actively encourage female participation and leadership.

Financial and institutional barriers also play a substantial role in shaping female students' entrepreneurial experiences. Access to funding remains a significant issue, as female entrepreneurs worldwide tend to receive less funding than their male counterparts, often due to perceptions that women-led ventures have higher-risk or less scalable (Nevi et al., 2024). In Finland, female students frequently report finding it challenging to access university-backed funding or networking resources, which can be instrumental in early-stage entrepreneurial development (Siivonen et al., 2022).

While universities often provide resources such as grants or incubator programs, these have not always been designed with female students' needs in mind. Female students may feel overlooked or underrepresented in these spaces, making it difficult to access capital or mentorship within institutional structures. Additionally, because women tend to approach financial risk more conservatively, they may also feel hesitant to pursue funding that requires high upfront costs or substantial debt. Studies suggest that creating more gender-specific funding opportunities and providing financial education tailored to female students could significantly address this gap (Donaldson et al., 2023; Nevi et al., 2024). By designing entrepreneurship resources with women's needs in mind, universities can better support female students' journeys in launching and sustaining their entrepreneurial projects.

In essence, while Finnish universities have made strides toward gender inclusivity, female students still face a range of barriers—both cultural and structural—when engaging in entrepreneurship. Addressing these barriers requires targeted action that recognizes and respects the different experiences female students may bring to the entrepreneurial landscape. By understanding and actively mitigating the effects of gender bias, fostering confidence-building initiatives, and developing more accessible financial support systems, universities can work toward creating a truly inclusive and empowering entrepreneurial ecosystem.

2.1.5 Personal Reflections

Exploring participants' personal reflections alongside recommended improvements provides valuable context for understanding the broader, often nuanced, experiences of female students in entrepreneurship. The importance of capturing personal reflections lies in their ability to reveal not only the structural barriers but also the internal and cultural dynamics that shape women's entrepreneurial ambitions. Such insights allow universities and policymakers to address both external and internal challenges facing women entrepreneurs and create more inclusive, empowering environments. According to Kakeesh (2024), personal reflections can offer a deeper, often overlooked perspective in research on entrepreneurship, showing how individual motivations, cultural backgrounds, and personal resilience intersect with institutional structures.

Universities must prioritize inclusivity and provide students with resources that have specifically designed to resolve their unique entrepreneurial challenges. This was frequently the case in the recommendations of female students. Research indicates that female students in entrepreneurial programs frequently advocate for the enhancement of access to female mentors, the expansion of women-specific funding opportunities, and the establishment of an inclusive environment in classrooms and networking events (Kakeesh, 2024; Singh et al., 2022).

These recommendations underscore the necessity for universities to transcend a "one-size-fits-all" approach and recognize the distinct experiences of male and female students. Haltia et al. (2021), have proposed that Finnish female students advocate for more collaborative, supportive learning environments that prioritize mutual support and knowledge-sharing over competition. In studies on this subject, personal reflections frequently demonstrate how the absence of inclusive practices in these areas can result in feelings of exclusion or hesitancy among female students, which can impact their propensity to participate in entrepreneurial activities. Capturing these reflections was beneficial in that it contextualizes these recommendations, as they reflect authentic experiences that may be overlooked in comprehensive data analyses.

Female role models have essential in fostering the entrepreneurial aspirations of women, as they offer relatable examples of success and assist in the dismantling of gendered stereotypes in the field of entrepreneurship. Research conducted by Nyakudya et al. (2024), indicates that the inclusion of female role models in entrepreneurial programs has a positive effect on the self-perception and ambition of students. Observing women who have successfully navigated the entrepreneurial landscape can inspire resilience and encourage female students to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions, thereby empowering them.

In Finland, institutions have committed to promoting gender equality. Students' personal reflections indicate that mentorship and the visibility of female entrepreneurs can provide both moral support and guidance. Numerous female students have reported that these role models foster a sense of community and shared experience, which mitigates the "imposter syndrome" that many women experience in male-dominated entrepreneurial environments (Danho, 2023; Manishimwe et al., 2023; Maziriri et al., 2024).

The inclusion of personal reflections was essential in this context, as they frequently capture the unique emotional and psychological effects that role models have on students. These insights have challenging to quantify but have a significant influence on engagement. Reflections of Finnish female students frequently underscore the dual significance of role models who exhibit perseverance, courage, and resilience, as well as those who offer technical expertise. Recent research indicates that universities could prioritize the integration of more visible female role models into their programs and the expansion of networking events that showcase successful female entrepreneurs. This would guarantee that students have consistent opportunities to engage with these individuals (Lee et al., 2023; Nyakudya et al., 2024).

Lastly, personal motivation and resilience have critical components of the entrepreneurial journey, particularly for female pupils who encounter distinctive obstacles in this field. Bandura (1999) emphasizes that resilience was frequently fostered through personal

experiences, reflections, and the surmounting of obstacles, all of which have essential for achieving long-term success in entrepreneurship. Personal ambition, familial influence, and cultural background have important motivators for many female students in their entrepreneurial endeavors. For example, in Finland, women who contemplate their cultural heritage frequently engage in discussions regarding the principles of independence and equality, which influence their entrepreneurial ambitions. Nevertheless, this entrepreneurial landscape was frequently characterized by societal expectations and gender biases that challenge these internal motivations (Aman et al., 2024; Salo, 2024). The inclusion of these personal reflections offers a more comprehensive understanding of the process by which resilience and motivation have developed, demonstrating the significance of both internal drive and external support from institutions.

Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated that female students cultivate a more robust sense of self-efficacy and purpose when they have motivated to contemplate their personal motivations and obstacles (Duong & Vu, 2024; Maziriri et al., 2024). Women have more likely to persist through obstacles when they engage in self-reflection, which enables them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their own objectives and priorities. This proposes a recommendation for universities to incorporate reflective practices into entrepreneurship education, enabling students to regularly evaluate their personal growth, values, and motivations. Through mentorship sessions, journaling assignments, or group discussions, Finnish universities could promote reflective practices, thereby assisting students in identifying their resilience and fortifying their personal resolve.

In summary, it was imperative to integrate personal reflections and recommendations into research on female entrepreneurship to achieve a thorough comprehension of the subject matter. Personal reflections unveil the profoundly personal factors—motivation, resilience, and cultural identity—that drive and sustain entrepreneurial ambitions, while recommendations enlighten structural and programmatic improvements. The necessity for targeted improvements, increased visibility of female role models, and a strong emphasis

on personal development and reflection to cultivate a genuinely inclusive entrepreneurial environment was underscored by these insights for Finnish universities.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study applies the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to investigate how Finnish university environments impact female students' engagement in entrepreneurship. These frameworks provide a dual perspective that examines both the personal intentions and the social influences shaping entrepreneurial behaviors. Each theory offers a lens through which to understand the unique experiences of female students in Finnish universities as they encounter both the opportunities and the barriers associated with entrepreneurial pursuits.

2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which was developed by Ajzen (1991), was a notable model that was used to understand how intentions lead to behavior. This model was particularly useful in fields such as entrepreneurship, where the decision to act typically follows careful preparation. There have three key components that have responsible for determining behavioral intentions, according to the TPB hypothesis. These factors have subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and attitudes toward the activity (Gansser & Reich, 2023; Rhodes & Courneya, 2005). The entrepreneurial involvement can be viewed from a variety of different angles that have provided by the following elements.

TPB emphasizes that attitudes—whether one views entrepreneurship positively or negatively—are a core driver of entrepreneurial intention (Boubker, 2024; Li et al., 2024). When students perceive entrepreneurship as a desirable and rewarding career, they have more likely to consider it a viable option. Entrepreneurship education (Kakeesh) can play a critical role here, as it exposes students to the potential rewards, societal contributions, and creative aspects of entrepreneurship, often strengthening positive attitudes. However,

studies indicate that female students may develop different attitudes toward entrepreneurship compared to male students due to societal expectations, limited representation of female entrepreneurs, and perceived risk factors (Kovaleva et al., 2023) (Donaldson et al., 2023; Lopes et al., 2024).

Subjective norms have the social pressures that an individual perceives as motivating or discouraging in their entrepreneurial pursuits. Subjective norms have influenced by societal views of gender roles, cultural norms, peer influences, and family expectations for female students (Tang et al., 2024; Villanueva-Flores et al., 2023). These norms may be positively influenced by cultural values regarding gender equality and economic independence in Finland. However, female students may still experience societal constraints due to implicit beliefs regarding the male-dominated nature of entrepreneurship (Chin et al., 2024; Donaldson et al., 2023). This study can evaluate the extent to which these norms within the university and the broader Finnish society influence the entrepreneurial intentions of female students using TPB.

The degree of confidence students has in their capacity to successfully engage in entrepreneurial activities was indicative of their perceived behavioral control. Stronger intentions to pursue entrepreneurship have associated with higher perceived control, as students who have confident in their abilities have more likely to pursue their aspirations (Sampene et al., 2023). EE improves perceived control by providing students with pertinent skills, business knowledge, and confidence; however, research suggests that gender disparities have also present. Nevi et al. (2024), Kakeesh (2024), and Manishimwe et al. (2023) have observed that female students frequently report lower self-efficacy in entrepreneurship as a result of challenges such as limited access to networks and male-dominated entrepreneurial spaces, which may reduce their perceived control.

For the purpose of this study, TPB offers a methodical approach to evaluate whether or not universities in Finland have promoting positive attitudes, helpful subjective norms, and a

sense of control for female students. With the use of this framework, a comprehensive examination of the ways in which entrepreneurial education and university environments influence intentions can be conducted. This framework also provides insight into the ways in which universities can better assist women's entrepreneurial goals by utilizing individualized educational techniques.

2.2.2 Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which was developed in 1986, offers a complementary viewpoint by putting an emphasis on the role that social influences, observational learning, and reinforcement play in the process of molding actions. Within the context of this study, SCT was particularly pertinent since it investigates the ways in which personal, social, and environmental factors interact to influence entrepreneurial behavior among women. The fact that SCT places such strong emphasis on observational learning, social support, and self-efficacy makes it possible to examine three crucial aspects of female students' intents to start their own businesses (Maziriri et al., 2024; Shetty et al., 2023).

According to the Social Cognitive Theory, individuals learn behaviors through observation. This means that female students have more inclined to pursue entrepreneurship if they witness successful female role models in their lives like them. Especially for students who come from marginalized groups, the concept that entrepreneurship was attainable was reinforced when they see role models who they can relate to (Morris et al., 2024; Silverman et al., 2023). In the context of Finnish universities, having prominent female entrepreneurs who have achieved success as mentors or professors can have a good impact on female students by giving them with direction, models of success, and an atmosphere in which they feel supported. According to research conducted by Dhiman (2023) and Inkumsah (2024), universities that do not provide these kind of role models may unwittingly discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors.

As a result of the fact that individuals have more inclined to undertake challenging undertakings, such as entrepreneurship, when they have supported by a positive social network, social support was an essential component of SCT. In the realm of entrepreneurship, this support can originate from mentors, peer networks, or institutional organizations that offer encouragement and resources. Female students, on the other hand, frequently report less possibilities for networking and a dearth of activities that have specifically geared toward female entrepreneurs (Danho, 2023; Dhiman, 2023; Nyakudya et al., 2024). This restricts their access to the social reinforcement that was necessary for them to pursue entrepreneurship with self-assurance. This gap might be addressed by improving these networks inside university settings in Finland, where universities have working to promote gender equality. This would encourage female students to consider entrepreneurship as a path that was both feasible and attainable (Campopiano et al., 2023; Ito et al., 2024).

Self-efficacy, often known as the belief in one's own potential to achieve success, was an essential component of self-concept theory (SCT) and was especially pertinent to the concept of entrepreneurship. Students' self-efficacy has an effect on their likelihood to persevere in the face of challenges and their readiness to take chances in their entrepreneurial endeavors (Duong & Vu, 2024). Self-efficacy can be hampered for female students by cultural prejudices that may gently discourage women from considering themselves as capable entrepreneurs (Chan, 2022). This can have a negative impact on the students' levels of self-efficacy. The SCT emphasizes the significance of universities providing supportive environments, mentorship, and encouragement to female students. This can assist in combating these stereotypes and fostering a sense of self-efficacy among female students (Lee et al., 2023).

In this study, SCT was utilized to conduct an analysis of the social environment that exists within Finnish universities. Additionally, the study seeks to evaluate the extent to which social structures, mentorship opportunities, and cultural norms either encourage or

discourage the entrepreneurial aspirations of female students. SCT provides insights into the ways in which Finnish institutions can facilitate the development of support networks, the provision of positive role models, and eventually the enhancement of students' self-efficacy in the area of entrepreneurship. This was accomplished by investigating how these social influences function within the setting of the university.

2.2.3 Integration of TPB and SCT for this Research

The integration of TPB and SCT provides a strong framework for examining the internal motives as well as the external forces that shape the entrepreneurial engagement of female students in Finnish universities. While the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) stresses the ways in which personal beliefs, subjective norms, and perceived control contribute to the creation of entrepreneurial goals, the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) places more of an emphasis on the social reinforcement and environmental elements that can either encourage or discourage these intentions.

The study was able to analyze the degree to which Finnish institutions promote good attitudes toward entrepreneurship, supporting norms, and a sense of control among female students by utilizing TPB. This comprehension was further enhanced by the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which investigates the ways in which social support structures, role models, and mentorship inside institutions influence the attitudes and perceived capabilities of its students. Due to the fact that SCT places a strong emphasis on social and observational learning, the research was able to investigate the ways in which university networks, access to mentorship, and the existence (or lack) of female role models influence the entrepreneurial opportunities that women seek. The integration of this information sheds light on the ways in which students' sense of belonging in entrepreneurial settings was influenced by external reinforcement, so providing insights into how institutions might address support gaps.

Through the integration of the insights gained from TPB and SCT, this framework makes it possible to gain a more nuanced knowledge of both the social surroundings that influence individuals' intentions as well as the intents themselves. It was therefore possible for recommendations to meet both the personal requirements of female students (such as self-efficacy and skill-building) as well as the institutional needs of female students (such as mentorship and role models). In conclusion, this combined framework of TPB and SCT provides as a thorough guide for examining the ways in which educational environments and social elements in Finnish universities influence the entrepreneurial aspirations of women. The purpose of this study was to give a basis for understanding the structural, cultural, and psychological components that collectively define the experiences of female students in higher education in Finland. Additionally, it identifies practical methods to establish an entrepreneurial ecosystem that was more inclusive in Higher Education.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative methodology, which is fundamentally rooted in the phenomenological paradigm, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and experiences of female students with respect to entrepreneurship education at Finnish universities, with a particular emphasis on the University of Vaasa. Phenomenology is well-suited to capturing the sophisticated ways in which university education influences the entrepreneurial aspirations of female students, as it is focused on understanding the lived experiences of individuals (Van Manen, 2016, 2023).

This method is advantageous for exploratory studies such as this one, which aim to pinpoint the obstacles, facilitating mechanisms, and influencing factors that influence the entrepreneurial ambitions and engagement of students. Quantitative methods may not be able to convey the in-depth nature of qualitative methods, particularly when addressing complex social and psychological dimensions (Queirós et al., 2017).

3.2 Sample

The research sample consists of eight female students from the University of Vaasa, all of whom have completed at least one course in entrepreneurship. The students were purposively selected to reduce selection bias, guaranteeing a broad sample of experiences from female students across various academic backgrounds and educational levels. This selection prioritizes people with direct expertise in entrepreneurship education, thereby incorporating ideas pertinent to comprehending the university's entrepreneurial framework within the Finnish academic milieu. This methodology aligns with the objective of attaining analytical profundity in qualitative research, as highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2016), balancing feasibility with the depth of inquiry.

This study defines the unit of analysis as the individual experiences and views of female students participating in entrepreneurship coursework. This course has been crucial in obtaining a detailed comprehension of each participant's perspectives on university

assistance, curriculum relevance, and the distinct problems they have encountered. This emphasis on individual experiences has for a comprehensive examination of the impact of university education on female students' entrepreneurial ambitions, closely coinciding with the research objectives.

Nonetheless, due to data saturation, a sample size of eight individuals was carefully chosen, as it produced a dataset that is both manageable and rich, facilitating thematically assessment. Smaller samples are often preferred in qualitative research as they facilitate in-depth interviews, crucial for capturing complex and subjective experiences (Marshall et al., 2013). Increasing the sample size could have led to oversaturation, complicating the analysis and undermining the study's focus on specificity and intricate features.

Alternative data collection procedures, including focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), were evaluated but ultimately regarded as inappropriate for this study. FGDs although effective for collecting diverse viewpoints concurrently, may restrict participants' ability to independently contemplate sensitive topics, such as gender bias, which necessitate anonymity for candid expression. Key informant interviews, while valuable for gathering expert opinions, would have redirected attention from students' personal experiences to broader ideas, deviating from the study's aim of obtaining direct student perspectives. Consequently, in-depth individual interviews have been identified as the most suitable strategy, allowing participants to articulate their thoughts freely in a private environment devoid of social influence, as advised by Maxwell (2012).

3.3 Data Collection

The data were gathered via unstructured, in-depth interviews to provide a thorough knowledge of each participant's viewpoint of their entrepreneurship school experiences. Non-structured interviews provide flexibility, enabling the researcher to explore certain areas of interest in depth while ensuring general coherence among interviews (Shepherd, 2016). A structured interview guide was created based on essential topics to maintain uniformity in data collection; nevertheless, the unstructured approach permitted further probing when participants offered distinctive or notably insightful answers. This methodology facilitated the examination of the depth and intricacy of personal experiences.

The interview guide consisted of four main sections, each containing open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share freely. The first section, *Perceptions of Entrepreneurship Education*, included questions on the relevance, inclusivity, and impact of the entrepreneurship curriculum as perceived by each participant. The second section, *University Support for Entrepreneurship*, focused on the types of support available, including mentorship opportunities and resources that participants had accessed or needed. The third section, *Barriers and Challenges*, explored gender-related challenges, confidence issues, and structural barriers encountered by female students in their pursuit of entrepreneurial interests. The final section, *Personal Reflections and Recommendations*, offered participants the chance to discuss their personal motivations, provide suggestions for university improvements, and reflect on their entrepreneurial ambitions within the academic context.

Interviews were executed through Microsoft Teams, given the participants' geographical dispersion. This platform was chosen for its convenience and its transcription capability, which enabled precise and efficient data collection. With the participants' consent, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Recordings and transcripts were securely maintained on a password-protected device accessible solely to the researcher. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes,

facilitating a comprehensive discussion that offered both breadth and depth of participants' experiences and viewpoints.

Conducting remote interviews with Microsoft Teams posed certain obstacles, especially in ensuring participation and creating a comfortable virtual atmosphere. Participants were guaranteed the freedom to resign from the study at any moment, alleviating concerns and promoting open, candid interactions. This flexibility honored participants' autonomy and highlighted the study's dedication to ethical research techniques.

3.4 Data Analysis

A method that systematically identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to conduct data analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method was selected to guarantee a comprehensive and significant comprehension of the participants' experiences and viewpoints. To guarantee the rigor and profundity of the analysis, it was conducted in a series of stages.

All interview transcripts were evaluated on numerous occasions during the initial phase of data familiarization. Thus, the researcher was able to engage with the data in a comprehensive manner and gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' responses. The researcher then conducted the coding procedure. The primary focus of the manual classification of each transcript was the study's objectives, which were centered on essential words, phrases, and ideas. References to the entrepreneurship curriculum, university resources, personal experiences, and gender challenges were specifically sought during the coding process.

The subsequent phase involved the development of the theme. The initial codes were organized into broader thematic categories to capture the participants' recurring perspectives. For instance, the codes associated with "motivation" and "curriculum relevance" were categorized under the overarching theme of "The Influence of University

Education on Entrepreneurial Engagement.” This enabled a more structured presentation of the data. The themes were eventually reviewed and refined by the researcher. Themes were reassessed for coherence and distinction during this phase. This process guaranteed that each theme accurately conveyed the essence of the relevant data and that the themes were clearly defined.

Lastly, the themes were thoroughly refined and detailed during the finalization of sub-themes and themes. The finalized themes, in conjunction with sub-themes, served as the foundation for the structured reporting of the findings. Significant comparisons among the participants’ experiences were enabled by this procedure.

Through this thematic analysis, five key themes emerged: (1) the influence of university education on entrepreneurial engagement, (2) experiences and viewpoints on entrepreneurship education, (Dhiman) university support systems and resources, (Dhiman) barriers and challenges for female students, and (Dhiman) recommendations for improvement and personal reflections. The use of thematic analysis ensured that all relevant aspects of participants’ experiences were thoroughly explored, allowing for a comprehensive and organized presentation of the findings.

3.5 Assessment of the Quality of Data

To guarantee the validity and reliability of qualitative research findings, it is essential to guarantee the quality and rigor of data (Enworo, 2023). To enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data, the study implemented numerous strategies. For instance, credibility was assessed by checking the data for consistency by cross-referencing themes across participant responses. In addition, the researcher conducted member verification by administering summaries of the findings to participants. This strengthened the credibility of the study by enabling the participants to verify that the interpretations accurately reflected their views and experiences.

The study provided comprehensive descriptions of the data collection process, research context, and sample to improve transferability. The study's conclusions are applicable beyond the University of Vaasa because of the rich contextual information that allows readers to evaluate the relevance of the findings to similar contexts or populations. Nonetheless, the establishment of an auditing record was executed to ensure reliability. This notebook recorded each phase of the research process, with the creation of interview guides, code frameworks, and reflective notes. The audit log strengthens the credibility of the findings by allowing subsequent researchers to duplicate the research methods.

On the whole, confirmability was ensured through the integration of reflective techniques. The researcher maintained a reflective notebook during the study procedure to recognize and mitigate any potential personal biases or assumptions. This approach guaranteed that the study's interpretations were based on the participants' experiences, rather than influenced by the researcher's prejudices, hence improving the confirmability of the results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance was essential to the research process, safeguarding the rights, confidentiality, and autonomy of participants throughout the study. This research complied with the ethical norms and criteria established by the University of Vaasa, securing approval from the institution's ethics committee before initiating data collecting. In accordance with ethical research standards (Bryman, 2016), the study instituted certain essential safeguards to safeguard participants and uphold the integrity of the research process.

Informed consent constituted a major element of the investigation. Every participant was provided with an information sheet detailing the study's objective, their involvement in the research, and their rights as participants. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any moment without incurring any repercussions. Informed oral consent was acquired from each participant prior to the interviews. To maintain secrecy

and anonymity, all identifiable information was rendered anonymous. Pseudonyms replaced participants' names, and any potentially identifying information—such as specific course or program titles—was generalized in the report. This guaranteed the protection of participants' identities and the preservation of their privacy throughout the investigation.

Concerning data security, all audio recordings and transcripts were saved on a password-protected device, accessible solely to the researcher. Security procedures were taken to protect the data during the study. Upon concluding the research, all personal data will be safely eradicated, in compliance with the institution's data retention policies. Ultimately, the analysis prioritized the minimization of harm.

The researcher established a conducive interview atmosphere, guaranteeing that participants felt at ease disclosing their experiences. Sensitivity was exercised in discussing gender-related hurdles, and participants were permitted to omit any questions that caused discomfort. Compliance with these ethical criteria safeguarded participants and enhanced the integrity and reliability of the research outcomes. By maintaining ethical standards, the study could reliably and ethically guide the development of more inclusive educational programs for female entrepreneurs.

3.7 AI declaration

This thesis includes the use of artificial intelligence tools to enhance its quality and coherence. Specifically, *QuillBot* paraphrasing tool was used to improve the clarity, grammar, and language flow of the text. The content, ideas, and analyses presented in the thesis remain the author's own original work, and the AI tools were employed solely as aids for linguistic refinement. Additionally, all AI-generated suggestions were critically evaluated and modified as necessary to ensure alignment with the academic requirements and objectives of the thesis. The use of such tools does not replace the authors independent intellectual effort but complements the writing process to deliver a polished final

document. The author affirm that all interpretations, arguments, and conclusions are entirely my responsibility and reflect my independent intellectual effort.

4 Findings

4.1 Influence of University Education on Entrepreneurial Engagement

The findings (Table 1) underscore three primary domains in which university education impacts women's entrepreneurial participation: curricular relevance, practical application, and motivation and aspiration. The comments offer a detailed insight into female students' perceptions of the entrepreneurship education provided and how these experiences influence their entrepreneurial aspirations. These findings illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of existing university programs, providing critical insights on the enhancement of entrepreneurial education to support women's ambitions more effectively.

Most of respondents identified curriculum relevance as a significant strength of their university education. The programs were characterized as inclusive and comprehensive, integrating technical expertise with entrepreneurial acumen while accommodating varied viewpoints. One respondent commended the equilibrium of male and female entrepreneurial perspectives, which cultivated a feeling of fairness in the educational setting.

Nonetheless, drawbacks were observed, including the application of obsolete theories in certain courses, which impeded their relevance to contemporary entrepreneurial difficulties. Moreover, some respondents believed that the limited duration of certain courses hindered their capacity to connect thoroughly with the material and comprehensively investigate intricate entrepreneurial principles.

Table 1 framework matrix on influence of university education on entrepreneurial engagement.

IDI No.	Sub-themes		
	<i>Curriculum Relevance</i>	<i>Practical Application</i>	<i>Motivation and Aspiration</i>
1.	<i>The curriculum was good, but the course duration was short, leaving less room for deeper training and exploration.</i>	<i>They showed us how to identify problems in the community and use them as business opportunities. We have visited large companies like Wärtsilä which provided real-world insights on identifying</i>	<i>The university motivated me to continue working on my business idea, even providing follow-ups and guidance.</i>

		<i>problems and creating solutions.</i>	
2.	<p><i>...very relevant, especially for students like me interested in combining technical knowledge with business.</i></p> <p><i>The programs have balanced, focus on male and female perspectives, made it feel inclusive and well-rounded.</i></p>	<p><i>They give some starter packs, some materials mean some task sheets, and some presentations regarding the entrepreneurs. Those have the study materials they provided.</i></p> <p><i>The summer school program provided a balanced and inclusive view of entrepreneurship with a focus on both female and male entrepreneurs.</i></p>	<p><i>Before entering, I had no idea about entrepreneurship. I just attended for the experience of summer school.</i></p> <p><i>Learning from the real stories of entrepreneurs was good for my curiosity about starting something innovative.</i></p>
3.	<p><i>Every course's materials were quite different... The basic content was different from each, but somehow I missed something in materials because I focused more on practical things...Not like that, actually, in here everyone was the same.</i></p>	<p><i>The first course involved making a Canva for entrepreneurship, identifying five problems, and then creating only one solution.</i></p> <p><i>...In the scouting course, we worked with companies, analyzed five companies, and selected one based on its superior potential, providing insights into real-life business environments.</i></p>	<p><i>My experience was mind-blowing. It gave me confidence... I can do it, and I can make something innovative.</i></p> <p><i>If I didn't do this course, I wouldn't know I could do this in such an innovative way.</i></p>
4.	<p><i>relevant ... jump starter kit... It helps you decompose a problem into why it's a problem, your revenue, your cost, your early adopters.</i></p>	<p><i>The education was practical for me because they brought in experts who shared real-life experiences. We worked on projects where we had to come up with a new problem and solve it hands-on... The first course included ideation and venture creation, where respondents worked on defining problems and proposing solutions.</i></p>	<p><i>I grew up surrounded by family members running businesses—my mom with her food business, my dad in transport, and my uncle in construction... I've always wanted to create something of my own, a food business or restaurant, but I'm still studying the environment here before deciding.</i></p>

5.	<i>The process was quite relevant, especially for students interested in startups and innovations.</i>	<i>We had to imagine problems and create business solutions in a group during the first week, and later evaluate startups...</i>	<i>Listening to different entrepreneurs' testimonies helped us understand the real struggles of running a business...</i>
6.	<i>The courses I took made me rethink my career path. They emphasized problem-solving, which I now apply to my business...We studied outdated theories, which made it hard to connect to modern entrepreneurial challenges.</i>	<i>In the first week, we had to imagine some problem and create a business to solve it in a group. It was a practical thing for us.</i>	<i>Listening to different entrepreneurs' testimonies helped us find out if we have interested in entrepreneurship or not.</i>
7.	<i>In my opinion, the courses were structured in a perfect way... it gave a very good overview, logically built from coming up with an idea to financing startups...</i>	<i>Our university organized a startup workshop where we had to pitch real business ideas, and that experience was invaluable....I wish there were more hands-on projects; most classes focused on theory.</i>	<i>Seeing my professor's journey inspired me to explore entrepreneurship...University education helped me believe that starting a business was achievable, even for someone with no background like me.</i>
8.	<i>In my opinion, the courses were structured in a perfect way... it gave a very good overview, logically built from coming up with an idea to financing startups...</i>	<i>In the first week, we had to come up with an idea for a company, work in a team, and present a pitch. It was really nice.</i>	<i>It was motivating to meet people who have entrepreneurs and to see their challenges and opportunities during their journey....</i>

(Source: Author produces, 2024)

In the same vein, the practical application of entrepreneurial knowledge was a central component of the university experience. Hands-on projects, workshops, and company interactions were highly regarded by most of the respondents, as they enabled them to implement theoretical knowledge in practical situations. For example, one participant emphasized an assignment in which they identified community issues and devised innovative solutions, while another participant valued the opportunity to work with actual companies to evaluate their potential. The “jump-starter kit” and Canva for entrepreneurship were also effective in deconstructing business challenges into actionable steps. Their learning was further enhanced by visits to organizations such as Wärtsilä and

startup seminars, which provided them with critical insights into the realities of entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, Table 1 shows that most of the respondents' motivations and objectives were significantly influenced by their exposure to real-world entrepreneurial journeys. The respondents were motivated to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career path and were bolstered in their confidence to take the first steps by hearing firsthand accounts from entrepreneurs. Some respondents found the exposure to be revelatory; one respondent acknowledged that they had no prior interest in entrepreneurship but was motivated after participating in a summer school program. A respondent shared how their professor's entrepreneurial voyage encouraged them to believe in their potential, and professors also played a vital role in this motivational process. Furthermore, the university's structured follow-ups and mentorship were crucial in the maintenance of students' entrepreneurial aspirations.

These findings indicate that university education was instrumental in encouraging entrepreneurial engagement among women by integrating pertinent curricula, practical learning experiences, and motivational factors. Nevertheless, there have still opportunities for development, such as the need to update antiquated theories, extend course durations, and increase the availability of experiential learning opportunities. By addressing these disparities, universities can offer a more comprehensive and empowering entrepreneurial education, thereby providing women with the confidence, skills, and support necessary to succeed in the entrepreneurial world.

4.2 Experiences and Viewpoints on Entrepreneurship Education

The value of networking, the structure and duration of the course, and real-world exposure have the three primary areas of focus in the framework matrix on experiences and viewpoints on entrepreneurship education, as shown in Table 2. The responses offer some

insight into the ways in which students consider the design and delivery of entrepreneurship education, thereby revealing the strengths and deficiencies of their experiences. These results underscore the significance of developing comprehensive educational programs that strike a balance between well-structured courses, practical learning, and networking opportunities.

The connections they established with peers, mentors, and professionals during their courses were highly valued by most of respondents, who focused on networking opportunities. In addition to providing ongoing support and collaboration, these relationships extended beyond the classroom for many. One participant shared that the coaches assured them that their “doors have always open” for future ideas, while another noted that the networks, they have established during the program include acquaintances from various countries and universities. Nevertheless, it was noted by a few respondents that the entrepreneurs with whom they interacted were not diverse, as most of the guest speakers and mentors were male. In order to guarantee that students have exposed to a more diverse array of experiences and role models, it was imperative that there be a greater representation of female entrepreneurs.

Along with that, the structure and duration of courses were frequently discussed, with nearly all of respondents admitting that the content was pertinent and influential, nevertheless the courses’ brief duration restricted their efficacy. There were numerous individuals who characterized the summer school programs as hurried, which hindered their capacity to completely comprehend and apply the lessons. The integration of the summer school modules into the primary curriculum as semester-long courses was proposed by one respondent to facilitate a more profound level of engagement. Another emphasized the significance of providing courses on specialized subjects, such as fundraising and entrepreneurial finance, to enhance the current curriculum and resolve specific deficiencies in entrepreneurial education.

Even so, real-world experience was recognized as an additional indispensable element of entrepreneurial education. Most respondents highly valued the practical learning opportunities, including internships, guest lectures, and case studies. One participant described their internship with a startup during the program, which allowed them to gain insights that were not possible to replicate in the classroom. Additionally, an additional respondent emphasized the invaluable value of tools such as PitchBook, which have frequently employed in the workplace, in supporting their learning. Nevertheless, it was observed by a few respondents that the case studies and guest seminars were beneficial; however, there was a lack of emphasis on entrepreneurial failures, which have essential for comprehending the realities of business.

Table 2 framework matrix on experiences and viewpoints on entrepreneurship education.

IDI No.	Sub-themes		
	<i>Value of Networking</i>	<i>Course Duration</i>	<i>Structure and Real-World Exposure</i>
1.	<i>It was great meeting people with similar ambitions and learning from presenters who have active entrepreneurs.</i>	<i>The course design was good, but everything was rushed due to the short duration.</i>	<i>They taught us how to think like entrepreneurs, focusing on innovation driven by problem-solving.</i>
2.	<i>That summer school program provided access to mentorship, networking sessions, and practical learning materials, which were very helpful for getting a real sense of what entrepreneurship involves.</i>	<i>I participated in all three courses held at summer school. The first one was Intrapreneurship. I forgot the third one, sorry... The balance approach of the summer school focusing on both genders made the experience feel inclusive and practical.</i>	<i>Nearly three or four entrepreneurs came to meet us. They revealed their stories to us and discussed problems in the real world. ...Almost all the entrepreneurs who came to meet us were males.</i>
3.	<i>I got a lot of networks during the course, but funding was a different challenge...Mentorship was excellent. Professors...supported us</i>	<i>It was a summer course, just three weeks long, but I believe it should be included as a main or optional course in every semester to have a longer impact.</i>	<i>We met many entrepreneurs, but only one was a woman. Most were men, joining online from different</i>

	<i>every time we reached out, providing detailed guidance on assignments and presentations.</i>		<i>countries...The practical approach, like problem-solving and company scouting, provided real-world exposure to entrepreneurship.</i>
4.	<i>The people I met have still my friends. They're from different universities and countries, and those memories and networks will last. ... The coaches said their doors have always open to us if we have any ideas. That kind of ongoing support was very reassuring.</i>	<i>The course was divided into three parts: ideation and venture creation, international entrepreneurship, and another I couldn't attend due to work. It lasted three weeks.... If this course were made into a regular, semester-long course, it could have an even bigger impact...</i>	<i>We had speakers from Peru, Ireland, and Australia who shared their experiences.... Only two female speakers joined, compared to about 4-5 males.</i>
5.	<i>We got the chance to meet students from many countries, which will help in building networks...</i>	<i>A course on how to raise funds in Finland would be really beneficial...</i>	<i>We learned from existing startups, and real-world entrepreneurs shared their testimonies.</i>
6.	<i>We got the chance to meet students from many countries, which might help in building networks important for running a business.</i>	<i>The summer school covered ideation and valuation, international entrepreneurship, and startup scouting and valuation.</i>	
7.	<i>Networking events held by the university introduced me to investors and like-minded peers...I wish there were more collaborations with entrepreneurs from outside the academic bubble.</i>	<i>The short-term courses were impactful but lacked depth...A longer, more comprehensive course on entrepreneurial finance would have been beneficial.</i>	<i>I interned with a startup during the program, which taught me things the classroom couldn't...The case studies were useful, but we needed exposure to real entrepreneurs sharing their failures.</i>
8.	<i>We met really nice people from the venture capital side and the entrepreneurship side, which helped build networks.</i>	<i>I particularly liked the first and third weeks because they were very relevant and structured well.</i>	<i>We had access to a tool called PitchBook, which was a valuable resource used in the workplace.</i>

(Source: Author produces, 2024)

The significance of inclusivity and diversity in entrepreneurship education was also underscored by the responses. Although the international representation of guest lecturers was appreciated by respondents, several of them observed the underrepresentation of female entrepreneurs among the speakers and mentors. For example, one participant disclosed that most of the guest entrepreneurs were male, with only one or two women in attendance. This discrepancy implies that the curriculum should include a greater number of female perspectives to offer a comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship and motivate women to pursue entrepreneurial careers.

Therefore, Table 2 illustrates that networking, course design, and practical exposure have essential components of effective entrepreneurship education; however, there have opportunities for enhancement. Universities should contemplate the extension of the duration of short-term courses, the integration of these courses into the primary curriculum, and the provision of specialized modules to address specific deficiencies. Furthermore, the program's inclusivity and relevance can be improved by encouraging a greater diversity of guest presenters and mentors. Universities can establish a more comprehensive and impactful learning environment that better prepares students for entrepreneurial success by addressing these areas.

4.3 University Support Systems and Resources

The framework Matrix on University Support Systems and Resources, as illustrated in Table 3, explores the ways in which universities facilitate entrepreneurial aspirations by providing mentorship, gender-related initiatives, and access to essential resources such as funding and networking. The assets and limitations of current university efforts in promoting entrepreneurship, particularly for female students, have been collectively elucidated by these dimensions. Although the responses emphasize certain effective practices, they also emphasize substantial voids that must be rectified in order to establish an entrepreneurial ecosystem that was both inclusive and empowering.

Beginning with mentorship and guidance, research findings suggest that it was one of the most highly regarded elements of university support. The respondents emphasized the positive impact of having experienced mentors who provided practical insights and valuable feedback on their business concepts. Professors were recognized for their ability to motivate students to approach complex questions with clarity and the ability to think globally.

In addition, students were guaranteed that they could always receive assistance due to the presence of a dedicated entrepreneurial support office. Nevertheless, a limited number of respondents noted that the mentorship opportunities were not equitably distributed, frequently requiring students to compete for attention, which created a sense of exclusivity. According to these results, universities must ensure that all students receive equitable benefits and increase the availability of mentorship opportunities.

Mixed responses have been obtained regarding gender-specific support. Although several respondents perceived that the programs were devoid of overt discrimination, they also noted a dearth of customized initiatives that were designed to address the distinctive obstacles encountered by female entrepreneurs. The curriculum included examples of female entrepreneurial success tales that were appreciated; however, they were perceived as incidental rather than intentional endeavors.

The significance of representation was underscored by the fact that the presence of female mentors served as an uncommon source of inspiration for certain respondents. Nevertheless, other individuals emphasized that most of the respondents' current support systems appeared to be designed with male entrepreneurs in mind. This implies that universities must take additional measures to implement programs that directly empower women and address their specific needs, despite the fact that equality in treatment was present.

Table 3 framework matrix on university support systems and resources.

IDI No.	Sub-themes		
	<i>Mentorship and Guidance</i>	<i>Gender-Specific Support</i>	<i>Access to Networking and Funding Opportunities</i>
1.	<i>They guide you through the process and provide follow-ups but offer no financial support.</i>	<i>Women were treated equally, and mentors were encouraging, but there was no content specific to female entrepreneurs.</i>	<i>The university helps you find investors if your idea shows promise after six months, but no direct financial aid was offered.</i>
2.	<i>The summer school provided mentorship and networking sessions. They helped refine ideas by explaining any wrong sides and supporting with their opinions based on experience.</i>	<i>The program included examples and stories of female entrepreneurs, which highlighted unique challenges and success, but it wasn't specially for females.</i>	<i>They didn't give any solution for financial aid. They gave only the subject materials, not beyond that... ...No, I didn't ask about managing financial support, and they didn't mention anything about it either.</i>
3.	<i>Our professors were amazing, guiding us with detailed answers whenever we sought help,... Mentors inspired us to think big, encouraging us to look at entrepreneurship internationally.</i>	<i>There was no specific support for women, but everyone was treated equally. Professors gave the same attention to both men and women.</i>	<i>There was no funding or sponsorship guidance provided, which would have been helpful, especially for women entrepreneurs... If someone had sponsored my idea of mushroom-based leather, I would definitely pursue it.</i>
4.	<i>We were told there's an office we can always approach for support if we have any entrepreneurial ideas...Having access to experienced mentors reassures me that I'm not alone in pursuing entrepreneurship.</i>	<i>I haven't seen any programs specifically for women entrepreneurs. The summer course was open to everyone, not geared toward females...Programs empowering women entrepreneurs would go a long way, as women have naturally strong and impact entire societies when they succeed.</i>	<i>There was no direct funding offered, but I believe they would connect us to investors if we came up with a viable idea...</i>
5.	<i>Mentors were available to refine ideas and provided ongoing support if needed.</i>	<i>Resources and opportunities were equal for male and female respondents, without additional support for women.</i>	<i>We didn't get information about funding, only about running and evaluating businesses.</i>
6.	<i>Mentors helped refine our ideas and guided us during the summer school. They promised future help if needed.</i>	<i>Here, they don't face discrimination between male and female, so they don't provide gender-specific resources.</i>	

7.	<i>My mentor at the university provided the guidance I needed to refine my business idea...Mentorship opportunities were limited; we had to compete for attention.</i>	<i>It was empowering to have female mentors who understood the unique challenges we face.... Most support systems felt designed for men; women's perspectives were often overlooked.</i>	<i>The university helped us secure seed funding, which was a game-changer for my startup... Networking events focused too much on male-led industries, leaving little space for female entrepreneurs.</i>
8.	<i>We had practical tasks, final presentations, and feedback from experienced professionals, which was very useful.</i>	<i>There was no real distinction made between female and male respondents, but everyone was free to personalize their learning experience.</i>	<i>The course provided practical knowledge, networking opportunities, and tools, but there wasn't much focus on funding.</i>

(Source: Author produces, 2024)

When it comes to networking and funding opportunities, the findings show a significant gap in the resources available to students. Many respondents stated that, while universities hosted networking events and provided tools for connecting with investors, there was little to no direct financial support for entrepreneurial endeavors. For example, one participant expressed unhappiness that their creative business idea was not explored owing to a lack of sponsorship. Another emphasized the focus of networking sessions on male-dominated industries, which reduced the usefulness and inclusiveness of these chances for female entrepreneurs. These findings encourage institutions to reconsider their strategy, making financial assistance mechanisms and networking activities more inclusive and accessible.

A further important lesson from the table was the impact of inclusion on entrepreneurial confidence. While many respondents praised equal treatment of male and female students, the lack of dedicated programs for women made others feel unsupported. One participant, for example, indicated that women-specific programs could magnify the impact of entrepreneurship education due to the social power of female entrepreneurs. The presence of female mentors was motivating for certain individuals. However, it was clear that more representation and focused programs have required to fully address gender inequities.

In summary, Table 3 indicates that institutions have made significant progress in offering general mentorship and facilitating networking opportunities. The deficiency of focused

assistance for women and the lack of direct funding alternatives hinders the efficacy of these programs. Enhancing mentorship accessible, implementing gender-specific efforts, and diversifying funding methods have essential for bridging these inequalities. These steps would not only improve the entrepreneurial climate in universities but also provide ambitious female entrepreneurs with the necessary tools, confidence, and resources for success.

4.4 Barriers and Challenges for Female Students in Entrepreneurship

A useful resource for understanding the barriers and challenges experienced by female students pursuing entrepreneurship includes in (Table 4), the framework matrix on barriers and challenges for female students in entrepreneurship. The results show that despite frequent efforts to promote inclusivity, several systemic, psychological, and cultural hurdles still exist and limit women's capacity to fully participate in entrepreneurship. These difficulties have made worse by a lack of institutional representation and assistance, which puts prospective female entrepreneurs on an unfair playing field.

Initially, gender bias persists as an implicit obstacle, regardless of whether the environment prioritizes equality. Although several respondents reported that they did not encounter overt discrimination within their university programs, they emphasized the impact of broader societal and cultural biases on their entrepreneurial experiences. For example, certain respondents noted that societal norms frequently prioritize male leadership, even within families, which presents additional obstacles for female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the absence of female entrepreneurs in mentorship roles and guest speaker sessions was perceived as a squandered opportunity to motivate and empower female students. These results indicate that, even though universities may promote inclusivity in their immediate surroundings, external gender biases continue to permeate entrepreneurial ecosystems and influence women's experiences.

A notable theme was self-esteem and confidence, which surfaced as both a challenge and a domain where mentorship had a transforming influence. Numerous respondents recognized that societal expectations and cultural conventions frequently undermine women's confidence, especially in areas such as Asia. One participant illustrated how familial dynamics favored male brothers in business, which diminished her confidence from a young age. Mentorship was often identified as an effective means of surmounting these psychological obstacles. Mentorship provided encouragement and advice, enabling female students to cultivate self-confidence and follow entrepreneurial aspirations despite cultural restrictions. However, the absence of prominent female role models was identified as a lost opportunity to enhance confidence and legitimize female achievement in entrepreneurship.

Table 4 framework matrix on barriers and challenges for female students in entrepreneurship.

IDI No.	Sub-themes		
	<i>Gender Bias</i>	<i>Self-Esteem and Confidence</i>	<i>Financial and Institutional Barriers</i>
1.	<i>Being from an Asian country, women often lack self-esteem and confidence, which affects their entrepreneurial journey.</i>	<i>Encouragement from mentors helped overcome self-doubt and built confidence in pursuing business ideas.</i>	<i>Women have often more cautious about taking risks, which can hinder business progress without sufficient support.</i>
2.	<i>...I didn't face any challenges regarding gender. They treated both male and female equally.</i>	<i>I didn't feel like that. They said females also can do businesses like us...</i>	<i>They just gave ideas, not financial aids or solutions for funding.</i>
	<i>Almost all the entrepreneurs who came to meet us were males. There was only one female, and she wasn't an entrepreneur.</i>		
3.	<i>Specific gender barriers? No, everyone supported us equally...</i>	<i>Women have to manage both household responsibilities and business, which can be challenging, but with strong ideas and good support, they can succeed.</i>	<i>Funding was the biggest hurdle for women. Universities should indirectly support funding to encourage women to pursue entrepreneurship... In my home country, capital was hard to come by, and I had to rely on family support for my first business.</i>
	<i>However, meeting more female entrepreneurs would have been more inspiring. Female entrepreneurs can understand the unique struggles of other women.</i>		

4.	<i>One female speaker mentioned how, as a woman, some business partners expect more than just business to help you progress, a challenge men don't usually face... Balancing family life and entrepreneurship was a significant challenge for women, something men typically don't face.</i>	<i>I don't need special attention, but if I had it, it would certainly help me as a female entrepreneur.</i>	<i>Pitching competitions for female entrepreneurs with funding for the winners would be a great way to encourage us.</i>
5.	<i>The participant noted no bias at the university but highlighted challenges in her home country, such as societal preferences for male leadership.</i>	<i>Most mentors were male; there were only two or three female mentors.</i>	<i>A course on funding systems and processes in Finland would make starting a business easier.</i>
6.	<i>In Nepal, parents often trust brothers more than sisters to run businesses. It starts at home.</i>	<i>Bias reduces confidence. Women from Asia have often not confident enough to come forward and do business by themselves...</i>	<i>We don't know the exact funding opportunities in Finland. A course on raising funds would help...</i>
7.	<i>I often felt underestimated by male classmates during group projects... Investors asked me about my family plans, which never happens to male entrepreneurs.</i>	<i>Initially, I doubted whether I could handle the pressure, but mentorship helped me overcome that... It's hard to be confident when societal expectations constantly undermine you.</i>	<i>Accessing funding as a woman was difficult; the system seems rigged against us... There weren't enough financial aid options tailored to women-led initiatives.</i>
8.	<i>I didn't notice any challenges or barriers related to gender in the course. It was very inclusive.</i>	<i>For some women who need reassurance, seeing other successful females as guest speakers could be motivating.</i>	<i>The course didn't focus on funding, but tools like PitchBook and ideation frameworks were helpful.</i>

(Source: Author produces, 2024)

The third issue, financial and institutional obstacles, was seen as a significant hindrance to women's entrepreneurial advancement. Respondents consistently highlighted the deficiency of financial assistance specifically designed for women entrepreneurs, with one individual proposing that institutions may enhance their involvement in linking female students to financing options. Moreover, several respondents indicated that funding procedures frequently appear prejudiced against women, as investors pose inquiries regarding family intentions—a worry seldom aimed towards male entrepreneurs. Others emphasized the absence of organized training on finance systems and processes, especially in Finland, which they contended would greatly facilitate the entrepreneurial journey. Many

women encounter difficulties in actualizing their business concepts due to inadequate financial backing or a lack of understanding of funding procedures.

Another dimension of complexity exists at the convergence of these issues, where cultural norms, gender bias, and financing disparities collide. One respondent described an instance in which a female entrepreneur articulated her challenges with unreasonable expectations from business partners—an issue that men have unlikely to encounter. Such situations illustrate the intersection of systemic gendered expectations and institutional deficiencies, resulting in distinct obstacles for women that have challenging to mitigate through broad assistance.

Subsequently Table 4 shows that women entrepreneurs confront a variety of obstacles, both internal and external. There has been some success in making campuses more welcoming to people of all backgrounds, but women still face obstacles such as underrepresentation, inadequate funding, and systemic cultural biases. Broadening mentorship opportunities, incorporating funding-specific courses, and prioritizing female presence in entrepreneurial programs have all necessary steps for institutions to overcome these obstacles. More women would be empowered to overcome institutional and social obstacles to success, and the entrepreneurial landscape would become more equal as a result.

4.5 Personal Reflections

Female students' comments on their motivation and resilience in entrepreneurship, as well as suggestions for improving university education, have detailed in Table 5, which also includes a thorough framework matrix. University reform recommendations, female role models' impact, and individual drive and perseverance make up the bulk of the data. Eight female students shared their stories, highlighting the importance of female presence in business and the need for more inclusive educational programs. The research shows that

these factors have very important for students' development of entrepreneurial spirit and their ability to overcome obstacles.

A substantial portion of respondents emphasized the necessity of university-sponsored activities designed exclusively for female students pursuing entrepreneurship. They proposed that institutions provide women-centric programs, networking opportunities, and conferences aimed at promoting female engagement. Most responders believe this would enhance engagement and foster confidence. Furthermore, it was underscored that entrepreneurship education ought to be more seamlessly included into the core curriculum instead of being presented as standalone short-term courses.

Respondents said this would offer female students more reliable and accessible opportunities to acquire and enhance their business abilities. Moreover, there was a significant agreement on the necessity for institutions to enhance mentorship programs by incorporating additional female mentors. Numerous respondents highlighted the prevailing imbalance, noting the scarcity of female mentors relative to their male counterparts, and emphasized the necessity of rectifying this inequality to foster a more supportive and relevant atmosphere for women.

Another sub-theme emphasizes the critical effect played by female role models in influencing the entrepreneurial ambitions of female students. Most of the respondents indicated that witnessing successful female entrepreneurs significantly enhances their drive, enabling them to visualize their own success in the industry. The responses underscored the necessity for universities to engage more female entrepreneurs as speakers at events, mentors for students, and narrators of their own experiences.

They observed that learning about the experiences of successful women in entrepreneurship will bolster confidence and offer practical suggestions. For many, observing women who had surmounted analogous hurdles instilled a belief that entrepreneurship was both attainable and a legitimate career path. The existence of female

role models was deemed crucial for inspiring pupils and providing them with a concrete representation of success in business.

Alongside the influence of female role models, personal motivation and resilience were identified as essential factors in the entrepreneurial trajectories of most of the respondents. Numerous respondents contemplated their intrinsic motivation, frequently stemming from the aspiration to address tangible issues or develop novel solutions. For many, entrepreneurship represented not merely a job option but also a vehicle for societal influence. Respondents discussed how their preliminary entrepreneurial endeavors, including the establishment of small enterprises, contributed to the development of their confidence and resolve.

These experiences provided them with a foundation to imagine on a larger scale and participate in global entrepreneurship. Concurrently, many respondents acknowledged the challenges they faced, both as women and as aspiring entrepreneurs. The majority of responders viewed these issues not as obstacles, but as opportunities to develop resilience and perseverance. The ability to overcome challenges was often described as an intrinsic trait of their entrepreneurial character, and respondents conveyed assurance that their individual resilience would promote enduring success.

Table 5 framework matrix on recommendations for improvement and personal reflections.

IDI	Sub-themes		
No.	<i>Suggested University Improvements</i>	<i>Role of Female Role Models</i>	<i>Personal Motivation and Resilience</i>
1.	<i>Offering rewards and organizing women-specific programs or conferences would encourage more participation.</i>	<i>Having women share their success stories would motivate others to take steps toward entrepreneurship.</i>	<i>You need to encourage yourself and focus on goals to overcome challenges.</i>
2.	<i>If we could meet female entrepreneurs, it would be a good turning point for</i>	<i>Meeting female entrepreneurs and having their stories shared with us</i>	<i>Before entering, I had no idea about entrepreneurship. I</i>

	<i>the female students... University can network with women entrepreneurs and female students to share their stories. It will be a great help to inspire and give ideas to female students.</i>	<i>would have made a difference in inspiring us as women.</i>	<i>attended to gain experience, but learning from the stories inspired me to think about starting something innovative.</i>
3.	<i>Universities should provide more time for entrepreneurship education and offer it as a main course instead of a short summer course...They should include guidance on funding and sponsorship, which was crucial for women.</i>	<i>Meeting female entrepreneurs would be incredibly helpful. Women understand women's struggles better and can inspire others.</i>	<i>My motivation was innovation. The idea of creating something entirely new and impactful drives me...The online business I started in Bangladesh gave me initial confidence, but this course showed me how to think and act on a global scale.</i>
4.	<i>Universities could organize female-only entrepreneurship programs, bring in successful female entrepreneurs as speakers, and provide mentors specifically for women... Teach women how to balance family life and entrepreneurship to avoid abandoning one for the other.</i>	<i>Seeing women succeed in entrepreneurship motivates me. It shows me I can achieve the same, or even more.</i>	<i>For me, a life without positive impact was not well-lived. Entrepreneurship allows me to create jobs, provide financial freedom to families, and contribute to society.</i>
5.	<i>Adding female mentors and addressing gender-specific challenges globally would enhance inclusivity.</i>	<i>Hearing from successful women entrepreneurs would inspire confidence and participation.</i>	<i>If we really want to solve a problem, we will find a great solution. That itself was motivating.</i>
6.	<i>Universities can offer courses about financial systems and address challenges female entrepreneurs face...</i>	<i>There were only two or three female mentors compared to a much higher number of male mentors. This should be balanced....</i>	<i>If we want to solve a problem, we will motivate ourselves. Doing business was a solution to a problem.</i>
7.	<i>Universities need to integrate more case studies on female-led businesses into the curriculum... Better support systems for funding and mentorship would go a long way.</i>	<i>Seeing successful female entrepreneurs speak on campus was incredibly inspiring...Role models helped me envision a future where I could succeed in business.</i>	<i>My cultural background taught me resilience, which I apply to my entrepreneurial journey... The challenges I faced only strengthened my determination to succeed.</i>

8.	<i>Inviting more female speakers with entrepreneurial experience might help balance perspectives...</i>	<i>We had two female speakers, and one of them coached us during group work. It was helpful to see her perspective...</i>	<i>The practical tasks, feedback, and tools provided a strong foundation if I ever decide to pursue entrepreneurship...</i>
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(Source: Author produces, 2024)

Although the themes of personal motivation, female role models, and university advancements were addressed separately, it was clear that the respondents were interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The personal motivation and resilience of students have directly influenced by the presence of supportive university programs, female mentors, and role models. For instance, students may be motivated to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors by exposure to female entrepreneurs, which in turn boosts their internal motivation. Furthermore, the availability of resources such as mentorship and funding can mitigate some of the obstacles that women encounter, thereby enhancing their entrepreneurial aspirations. Therefore, the data indicates that universities have essential in the establishment of an environment that simultaneously addresses the structural and psychological factors that have associated with female entrepreneurship.

The outcomes of this study underscore the necessity for universities to establish educational frameworks that become more inclusive and supportive, and that acknowledge and address the unique challenges encountered by female entrepreneurs. In addition to offering technical education, universities should prioritize the development of psychological and motivational skills by implementing customized programs, mentorship, and role models. Additionally, the data indicates that external factors, including the availability of role models and the support provided by universities, have a profound impact on personal motivation and resilience. Female students have more likely to flourish in entrepreneurship when they experience support and empowerment from both the academic environment and the broader entrepreneurial community.

Overall, analyzing the information demonstrates a number of critical insights that can be used to inform the development of more effective educational strategies for female entrepreneurs. Universities have a substantial responsibility to establish an environment that encourages female entrepreneurship. This can be achieved by adjusting the curriculum and offering meaningful support systems and role models. The personal reflections of the respondents indicate that, although universities have essential in influencing students' entrepreneurial aspirations, the drive and resilience necessary to succeed in entrepreneurship have fostered by personal experiences and the external encouragement provided by mentors and role models. Universities can assist female students in surmounting obstacles and attaining greater success in the entrepreneurial sector by addressing these interconnected aspects.

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

The study identifies five key aspects that jointly illustrate the impact of university education on female students' entrepreneurial involvement and ambitions. Themes are intricately linked, illuminating the strengths and weaknesses of existing entrepreneurial education and facilitating the development of a redesigned framework to improve inclusivity and efficacy. By comprehensively addressing these themes, institutions can more effectively assist female students in navigating challenges and accomplishing their entrepreneurial potential.

The first theme, curriculum relevance, underscores the essential function of material in influencing students' entrepreneurial viewpoints. respondents broadly recognized that inclusive curricula, which include male and female entrepreneurship experiences, foster a just and stimulating learning atmosphere. The amalgamation of technical talents with entrepreneurial concepts was deemed highly advantageous by many. Nonetheless, challenges like as the reliance on antiquated ideas and the restricted length of courses impeded their capacity to thoroughly interact with the subject or comprehensively examine intricate entrepreneurial concepts. These deficiencies indicate that universities should

emphasize the revision of their courses to incorporate contemporary entrepreneurial issues and varied case studies that reflect the experiences of women. Furthermore, prolonging the time of courses may for a more profound examination of subjects, enhancing comprehension and skill acquisition.

The practical application was identified as a prominent element, with respondents placing significant value on hands-on learning opportunities. Respondents emphasized the significance of real-world experiences, including project work, workshop participation, and company visits, in closing the divide between theoretical knowledge and practical abilities. Instruments such as the “jump-starter kit” and initiatives like startup scouting were notably efficacious in assisting students in recognizing company prospects and formulating inventive solutions. Notwithstanding these characteristics, some respondents observed that male-dominated contexts in practical settings rendered them disadvantaged, highlighting the necessity for more inclusive experiential learning opportunities. Customized programs that tackle these gender-specific obstacles can guarantee that female students are both included and empowered to thrive in entrepreneurial environments.

Motivation and aspiration were notably noted in the findings, with respondents emphasizing the crucial influence of exposure to entrepreneurial role models. Professors, guest speakers, and peers frequently acted as sources of inspiration, enhancing students’ confidence and motivating them to view entrepreneurship as a feasible career option. The scarcity of female role models diminished the motivational influence for several participants. Although the accounts of successful entrepreneurs were motivational, the absence of comparable female characters hindered women’s ability to identify with these narratives. To address this gap, universities must enhance the visibility of female entrepreneurs by inviting them as guest lecturers, integrating their experiences into course content, and engaging them as mentors. This method would not only motivate female students but also affirm their ambitions and assist in deconstructing prevailing preconceptions.

The fourth theme, university support structures and resources, highlighted both strengths and deficiencies in institutional initiatives to assist female entrepreneurs. Respondents valued overarching support systems, including mentorship initiatives and networking gatherings. Nonetheless, these possibilities were frequently constrained or competitive, resulting in certain students lacking sufficient assistance. Additionally, there was an absence of gender-specific programs designed to address the distinct problems encountered by women entrepreneurs. Moreover, respondents emphasized the lack of direct funding opportunities and insufficient direction on obtaining financial resources, which constituted substantial obstacles to engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors. These findings indicate the necessity for more inclusive and accessible support services. Enhancing mentorship programs to incorporate gender-specific efforts, allocating special funds for women entrepreneurs, and creating networking events that cultivate substantial connections for female students could markedly improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem within colleges.

The final theme was barriers and challenges, which encapsulated the systemic and psychological obstacles that female students encounter in the field of entrepreneurship. Despite the fact that overt discrimination was uncommon in university environments, the experiences of respondents were still influenced by societal norms and external biases. Women's confidence was frequently undermined, and their opportunities were restricted by gender biases, which were both implicit and explicit. These challenges were further exacerbated by the underrepresentation of female mentors and lecturers, which resulted in women lacking relatable figures to inspire and guide them. Limited access to funding and the absence of customized financial support systems were also significant obstacles. These results emphasize the necessity of addressing societal and institutional biases by implementing deliberate policy modifications. In order to establish a more equitable and empowering entrepreneurial education system, it is imperative to enhance female representation, cultivate an environment that actively combats implicit biases, and provide targeted support.

By incorporating these five themes into a unified strategy, the revised framework is designed to resolve the gaps and challenges identified in the findings. It necessitates the implementation of revised curricula that align with contemporary challenges and incorporate a variety of entrepreneurial experiences, as well as experiential learning opportunities that guarantee female students' equal participation. In addition, the framework underscores the significance of enhancing the visibility of female role models, broadening mentorship programs to encompass gender-sensitive initiatives, and offering accessible funding and networking opportunities. These measures can be implemented by universities to establish an environment that encourages female students to surmount obstacles, develop self-assurance, and succeed in the field of entrepreneurship. Not only does this comprehensive approach improve the inclusivity and efficacy of entrepreneurial education, but it also advances the more general societal objectives of innovation and gender equality.

5 Discussion

5.1 Theoretical contribution

The findings of this study underscore substantial contributions to the theoretical understanding of the ways in which university education affects the entrepreneurial engagement of female students, particularly within the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Cognitive Theory. The interplay of personal beliefs, social reinforcement, and perceived control in shaping entrepreneurial behavior is emphasized in these frameworks, which is in close alignment with the experiences of the respondents. As an illustration, respondents frequently noted the importance of inclusive curricula in providing a fair representation of the entrepreneurial experiences of both men and women. The assertion by Bullough et al. (2022) that equitable representation within educational content promotes positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship among female pupils is corroborated by this observation. Nevertheless, this investigation also identified outdated theories and inadequate course durations as obstacles, diverging from Ganna et al. (2020), who underscore the significance of contextually pertinent, up-to-date curricula to effectively cultivate entrepreneurial intent.

In addition, practical learning has become a critical component of entrepreneurship education, as respondents have emphasized the importance of experiential opportunities like internships, corporate collaborations, and startup boot camps. These findings support Donaldson et al. (2023) assertions that entrepreneurial readiness is significantly enhanced by hands-on engagement, which aligns theoretical knowledge with real-world application. Nevertheless, the gendered dynamics within these practical environments were also observed, as numerous respondents expressed distress in male-dominated settings. Jenkins (2024) argues that experiential learning is universally beneficial for students, but women necessitate customized interventions to address implicit biases and foster confidence. Subsequently, the necessity for institutional structures to proactively resolve these

challenges is underscored by the participants' call for more female-led startups and mentorship programs.

At the same time, it was also highlighted that the influence of role models was another recurring theme, with respondents emphasizing the motivational impact of professors and guest speakers who shared their entrepreneurial journeys. This aligns with SCT's emphasis on observational learning, as supported by Dhiman (2023), who argues that exposure to relatable success stories enhances students' self-efficacy. However, the underrepresentation of female entrepreneurs among these role models was frequently cited as a limitation, reflecting broader societal biases that shape perceptions of entrepreneurship. This finding diverges from Bullough et al. (2022), who suggest that increasing visibility of female entrepreneurs has been a key focus in progressive educational environments. The limited representation observed in this study suggests that institutional efforts to promote gender diversity in entrepreneurship education remain inadequate.

Motivational factors, on the other hand, identified in the findings also support TPB's emphasis on perceived behavioral control as a determinant of entrepreneurial intent. Respondents reported feeling inspired by exposure to entrepreneurial success stories and follow-up mentorship provided by their universities. These experiences align with the findings of Donaldson et al. (2023), who emphasize the role of structured mentorship in reinforcing entrepreneurial confidence and persistence. However, the absence of gender-specific motivational programs highlights a gap in the application of TPB, suggesting that tailored initiatives are needed to foster entrepreneurial aspirations among female students, particularly in male-dominated disciplines.

The study also points to significant gaps in institutional support, particularly in mentorship, funding, and networking opportunities. While respondents appreciated the availability of general mentorship, many noted that these opportunities often required competition, creating exclusivity. This observation contrasts with Krieger et al. (2022), who argue that

mentorship programs in progressive educational systems are designed to be universally accessible. Furthermore, the absence of direct funding mechanisms and the gendered nature of networking events were significant concerns, highlighting disparities that align with the findings of Jenkins (2024) regarding unequal access to resources. These structural gaps hinder the realization of SCT's potential in promoting inclusive social reinforcement and support systems.

Moreover, barriers such as gender bias, self-esteem challenges, and financial constraints were also prevalent themes in the findings. Respondents acknowledged societal biases that prioritize male leadership and reported experiencing reduced confidence due to implicit stereotypes. These challenges resonate with the observations by Bullough et al. (2022), who argue that cultural norms continue to undermine women's entrepreneurial engagement despite institutional advancements in equality. The transformative impact of mentorship in addressing these barriers was also highlighted, supporting SCT's emphasis on the role of social learning and reinforcement in overcoming psychological obstacles. However, the lack of systematic representation of female entrepreneurs within university programs limits the effectiveness of these efforts.

The integration of theoretical insights and empirical findings reveals both progress and persistent challenges in fostering entrepreneurial engagement among female students. While universities have made strides in offering inclusive curricula and experiential learning opportunities, the absence of targeted interventions for women underscores a critical gap. These findings extend the discussions by Elomäki et al. (2020) and Krieger et al. (2022), suggesting that while structural equality is emphasized in Nordic education systems, implicit biases and insufficient representation of women remain unaddressed. The participants' experiences thus illustrate the need for universities to actively bridge these gaps through gender-specific programs and resource allocation.

Overall, the study's findings affirm and extend existing theoretical frameworks by highlighting the dynamic interplay between curriculum design, experiential learning, mentorship, and gender-specific challenges in shaping female entrepreneurial engagement. By addressing the identified gaps, universities can better align their educational strategies with the principles of TPB and SCT, creating a more inclusive and empowering environment for aspiring female entrepreneurs.

5.2 Managerial implications

The managerial implications drawn from this study highlight the pressing need for universities to take a proactive role in addressing gender-specific barriers and fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. A key recommendation is to ensure that entrepreneurship curricula could both inclusive and contextually relevant to the challenges faced by female students. Respondents frequently noted that while certain aspects of the curriculum were balanced, the inclusion of outdated theories limited the practical application of the content. This observation resonates with the insights of Stoker et al. (2024), who emphasize that entrepreneurial education must address the unique societal and structural challenges faced by women. Thus, universities should revise their curricula to feature case studies and success stories of female entrepreneurs, showcasing their ability to navigate such challenges while contributing to innovation and economic growth. By including diverse perspectives, universities can make entrepreneurship education more relatable and empowering for female students.

The findings also underscore the importance of experiential learning opportunities, which respondents identified as pivotal in enhancing their entrepreneurial readiness. Practical components such as internships, business simulations, and collaborative problem-solving projects were highly valued but were often inaccessible due to implicit gender biases. This reflects the arguments made by Aman et al. (2024), who suggest that female students benefit significantly from experiential learning environments tailored to their unique needs.

Universities should consider developing women-focused startup incubators, entrepreneurial boot camps, and project-based learning modules that foster equitable participation. Such initiatives should explicitly address the dynamics of male-dominated spaces, ensuring that female students feel supported and confident to engage fully in these opportunities.

Further, mentorship emerged as a crucial driver of entrepreneurial confidence and self-efficacy among respondents. Many respondents highlighted the transformative impact of personalized mentorship in navigating challenges and clarifying entrepreneurial goals. This finding aligns with the work of Lee et al. (2023), who emphasize the role of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial ambitions, particularly among women who face systemic barriers. However, the competitive nature of existing mentorship opportunities often left some students without adequate access to guidance. Universities should establish structured mentorship programs specifically for female students, involving successful women entrepreneurs as mentors. These programs could provide targeted advice on overcoming gender-related obstacles, thereby addressing issues such as self-doubt and lack of representation in entrepreneurial spaces.

Furthermore, networking opportunities were another area where respondents identified significant gaps. While they acknowledged the value of connecting with industry professionals and peers, many noted that networking events often centered around male-dominated industries, limiting their relevance and accessibility. This finding resonates with insights from Nyakudya et al. (2024), who argue that gender-sensitive networking platforms are crucial for fostering female participation in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Universities should create women-specific networking events, mentorship workshops, and collaboration opportunities that connect female students with investors, industry professionals, and successful women entrepreneurs. These platforms can serve as safe and inclusive spaces where women can share experiences, access resources, and build professional relationships that support their entrepreneurial goals.

Funding accessibility, however, remains a persistent challenge, as respondents frequently noted the lack of financial support for their entrepreneurial ideas. Many expressed frustrations over the absence of dedicated funding mechanisms for female-led ventures, which reflects broader systemic issues. In these regards, Haltia et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive funding initiatives in addressing such disparities. Universities should establish seed grants, venture funds, and scholarships specifically for women entrepreneurs. Additionally, providing financial literacy training tailored to the unique challenges faced by women—such as confidence in pitching ideas and navigating funding processes—can empower female students to pursue their ventures with greater assurance. Collaborating with external stakeholders, including venture capital firms and government agencies, can further enhance the financial resources available to female entrepreneurs within academic settings.

Another critical issue identified in the findings was the absence of targeted institutional support for female students. Although respondents acknowledged the rarity of overt discrimination, they frequently felt unsupported due to implicit biases and the absence of gender-specific programs. This is consistent with the results of Kovaleva et al. (2023), who emphasize the necessity for universities to actively challenge stereotypes and cultivate an inclusive environment. In order to identify and rectify implicit biases in their interactions with students, faculty and program coordinators should participate in training. Additionally, universities should enhance the visibility of female role models in entrepreneurship programs to broaden the exposure of students to a variety of perspectives and success stories. This would not only serve as an incentive for female pupils, but it would also establish their legitimacy in entrepreneurial environments.

In an effort to effect systemic change, it is imperative that universities, policymakers, and private organizations collaborate. Implicit biases and structural barriers continue to restrict the entrepreneurial potential of women, even though Finnish universities have made substantial progress in the pursuit of gender equality (Ekblad, 2024). Targeted funding and

recognition should be implemented by policymakers to encourage universities to establish gender-sensitive entrepreneurship programs. In addition, resources such as mentorship networks, funding opportunities, and real-world business exposure can be obtained through partnerships with private organizations. The objective of these collaborative endeavors should be to establish a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that facilitates a variety of routes to success.

Lastly, it is imperative to cultivate resilience and reflective practices among female students in order to overcome psychological obstacles and maintain entrepreneurial aspirations. Self-reflection was frequently emphasized by respondents as a critical component of confidence development and the ability to handle obstacles. By integrating reflective practices into entrepreneurship education, such as mentorship sessions, peer discussions, and journaling, female students can enhance their resilience and clarify their motivations. This method is consistent with the findings of Galvão et al. (2024), who underscore the importance of reflective practices in the development of self-awareness and the establishment of long-term objectives. Universities can ensure the sustained engagement of female students in entrepreneurial pursuits by incorporating these practices into entrepreneurship programs, which will enable them to surmount societal and institutional barriers.

Universities can foster an environment that promotes diversity, innovation, and equitable access to opportunities by addressing structural, cultural, and psychological barriers to female entrepreneurship through the implementation of these managerial implications. These strategies are not only consistent with Finland's dedication to gender equality, but they also contribute to the overarching objective of cultivating an inclusive and dynamic entrepreneurial environment.

5.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

Although this research offers valuable insights into the impact of university education on the entrepreneurial aspirations of female students, it is not without its limitations. These constraints underscore the potential for future research to enhance and refine our comprehension of this significant subject matter, particularly in the Finnish context.

The relatively small sample size, which comprises eight female students from the University of Vaasa, is a primary limitation. The findings may not be generalizable to other institutions in Finland or beyond, despite the fact that the in-depth qualitative approach facilitated the collection of rich data. In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence female entrepreneurship, future research could implement comparative studies across multiple institutions or larger sample sizes. The generalizability of the findings would be further enhanced and a more nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences of female students would be provided by incorporating diverse demographic variables, such as field of study, socioeconomic background, and cultural heritage.

An additional constraint is the dependence on self-reported data, which may be susceptible to biases such as recall inaccuracies or social desirability. Respondents may have underreported challenges or overstated positive experiences as a result of their perceived expectations. In order to address this issue, future research could implement mixed-method approaches that involve the integration of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to verify the results. Additionally, longitudinal research designs would enable the investigation of the manner in which university education influences entrepreneurial aspirations over time, thereby documenting the development of attitudes, skills, and behaviors.

The primary focus of the study is the Finnish higher education context, which is distinguished by a relatively supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem and progressive gender equality policies. Although this concentration is crucial for comprehending the unique challenges and opportunities in Finland, it restricts the generalizability of the results to other contexts with distinct cultural or institutional frameworks. Cross-cultural research has the potential to investigate the impact of gender norms, educational systems, and entrepreneurial policies on the entrepreneurial engagement of women. Comparative studies between Nordic countries and those with varying levels of gender equity would offer valuable insights into the influence of socio-cultural factors on entrepreneurial aspirations.

The investigation prioritizes educational and institutional variables, including mentorship, curriculum relevance, and support systems. Nevertheless, the extent of the examination of broader societal and familial influences, which are essential in the formation of women's entrepreneurial intentions, was limited. The impact of societal norms, family expectations, and individual agency on entrepreneurial aspirations could be the subject of future research. A more comprehensive comprehension of the obstacles and opportunities for female entrepreneurship would be achieved by investigating these external factors.

Additionally, the focus of this study was on female students who were already enrolled in entrepreneurship courses, which may have resulted in the exclusion of individuals who may have refrained from enrolling in such courses as a result of systemic or cultural obstacles. The reasons for the non-participation of women in entrepreneurship education could be the focus of future research. Investigating these factors would assist in the identification of obstacles during the pre-enrollment phase, including self-doubt, lack of interest, and perceptions of entrepreneurship as a male-dominated field.

The efficacy of gender-specific interventions and programs is an additional area that warrants further investigation. Although this study underscored the necessity of

customized mentorship, networking, and funding opportunities for women, it did not assess the efficacy of current gender-focused initiatives. Future research could evaluate the influence of these programs on the entrepreneurial aspirations and outcomes of women. The long-term benefits of specific interventions, such as female-only startup incubators or role model programs, could be assessed using experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

Subsequently, the study is still lacking in the integration of technological and digital entrepreneurship. Future research could explore the impact of digital entrepreneurship education on female students as the entrepreneurial landscape is gradually transformed by digital tools and online platforms. Investigating the availability of digital resources, online mentorship, and virtual entrepreneurial communities may reveal novel methods for empowering women in the field of entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, this study offers a fundamental comprehension of the correlation between university education and the entrepreneurial aspirations of female students. However, additional research is required to resolve its constraints and investigate novel perspectives. The development of more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems would be supported, and our understanding would be improved by extending the scope, methodology, and contextual variables of all future research.

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Appendix 1. Interview guideline

A Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

On

Navigating the Academic Ecosystem: University Education and Women's Entrepreneurial Ambitions

Confidentiality Statement

Thanks for agreeing to take part in this study. You are not required to take part in the interview at all, and you can leave at any time without any consequences. It is important to keep your identity confidential during the study, and this conversation will follow that rule.

To protect your privacy, all of the opinions and information you give during the interview will be changed to make them anonymous. In the final report, your name, academic program, or university, as well as any other information that could be used to identify you, will be left out or changed. If you agree, the interview will be recorded to be sure it is accurate. However, only those involved in the research will be able to listen to it because it will be stored safely on a device that needs a password.

It is only going to be used for Master's thesis project. The information gathered will not be given to anyone outside the research team. As soon as the study is over, all the data will be safely stored or thrown away, depending on the institution's ethics standards. You can talk to the researcher at any time if you are worried about your safety or how your data is being used. You understand and agree to these terms by going ahead with the interview.

Beginning from here

SL. No.:

...../...../2024: Date

1. Opening Questions

1.1 Can you briefly tell me about your background, your current academic program, and your interest in entrepreneurship?

1.2 How did you first become interested in entrepreneurship?

2. Section 1: Perceptions of Entrepreneurship Education

2.1 How would you describe your experience with entrepreneurship education at your university?

2.1.1 *Follow-up:* What specific courses or programs have you participated in?

2.2 How relevant and inclusive do you find the entrepreneurship courses and materials offered to students?

2.2.1 *Follow-up:* Do you feel the curriculum addresses the unique challenges or needs of female students in entrepreneurship?

2.3 In what ways has your university education influenced your decision to pursue or not pursue entrepreneurship?

3. Section 2: University Support for Entrepreneurship

3.1 What kinds of support have you received from your university to help you pursue entrepreneurship (e.g., mentorship, funding, networking opportunities)?

3.1.1 *Follow-up:* Can you describe any specific instances where university support helped you with your entrepreneurial goals?

3.2 Do you feel that the university provides sufficient resources and opportunities for female students interested in entrepreneurship?

3.2.1 *Follow-up*: Are there any areas where you feel the university could improve its support for female entrepreneurs?

3.3 Have you had access to role models or mentors, particularly female mentors, in your entrepreneurial journey? How has this influenced your ambitions?

4. **Section 3: Barriers and Challenges**

4.1 Have you faced any specific challenges or barriers related to gender while pursuing entrepreneurship at your university?

4.1.1 *Follow-up*: Can you give examples of any incidents or situations where you felt disadvantaged?

4.2 How do you perceive the culture within your university in terms of supporting women in entrepreneurship?

4.2.1 *Follow-up*: Do you feel that stereotypes or biases affect female students' participation in entrepreneurship?

4.3 What strategies or actions have you taken to overcome the challenges you've encountered? (if any)

5. **Section 4: Personal Reflections**

5.1 What motivates you to pursue entrepreneurship despite any challenges you have faced?

5.2 What changes or improvements do you think universities could make to better support women's entrepreneurial ambitions?

6. **Closing Questions**

6.1 Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experience with entrepreneurship education and support at your university?

6.2 Would you be willing to participate in follow-up interviews if needed?