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INFLUENCE OF INCUBATION CENTERS ON FOSTERING INNOVATIVE THINKING IN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

An innovative thinking process is essential for start-up entrepreneurs in India. Start-ups that enhance visibility are usually differentiated by their innovative approach. Thus, the role of incubation centers in fostering innovative thinking will significantly influence students' journey toward entrepreneurship. NEP 2020 also provides the roadmap for adopting incubation centres in HEIs and also to promote start-ups, even financial assistance is also being granted to incubation centers. Telangana is pioneering in promoting start-up ecosystems, this paper examines three broad objectives namely understanding the factors promoting innovative thinking processes, studying the role of incubation centers in promoting innovative thinking processes in HEIs of Telangana, and analyzing the Perceptions of students on the role of incubation centers in promoting innovative thinking process, and has formed an opinion that incubation centers have been playing an important role in developing the creative thinking process of the students. Hence, the paper urges the promotion of innovation centers among higher education institutions.

Keywords: HEIs, Innovative Thinking, and Incubation Centres.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are seeding centres for promoting start-up culture which is well proven in the case of IITs and IIMs where students have honed their skills with their professors in developing their inquisitiveness to viable products. There is much evidence that students and teachers together brought miracles on innovative lines by unleashing new products or new services. Today many start-ups in India are promoted by IIT graduates whose inquisitiveness on creativity is sharpened by the incubation centres at UG and PG level at university. Therefore, it is believed that incubation got a wide role in promoting the innovative thinking process of the students. Hence, to establish the statement, there is a dire need to study and test the hypothesis on the role of incubation centers in promoting innovative thinking process. However, it is worth recognizing the elements that impact innovation and creativity of the students before attributing the same to incubation center and teachers mentoring them. The literature available in various sources has been reviewed and the summary is explained below.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Baričević M, Luić L (2023)[1] examined the outcomes of learning the design thinking process and concluded that students can able to recognize characteristics of innovation, affects critical assessment and the design thinking process differ from students to students.

2. Alzaghal, Qadri & Mukhtar, Muriati. (2017)[2] in their study, strived to find out factors affecting the success of incubators and assessed that Small and Medium enterprises are pivotal for creativity, yield, assess the market strength, community spirit, economic progress, and alleviating job scarcity in developed and developing countries.

3. Hassan,N.A.(2020)[3] tried to establish linkage between higher educational institutions and business development centers and determined how pupils, scientists and business leaders can benefit from this linkage. The study found that a favourable environment fosters innovation, skill enhancement and job creation.

4. Kanja, Maksim and Liza (2023)[4] analysed in their study that, how business incubation process framework shapes the specific issues of the incubation and enhance the research scope for the future.

5. Christy, Nisa and Mingchang (2021)[5], made an attempt to find out how implantation approach of university fosters entrepreneurship and found that incubation centers promoting industry partnership and engagement, training to new entrepreneur, encourage start-ups, commercializing the innovations by intellectual property rights and paving the way for business transformation by associating Professors with industrialists.

6. Laurensia Claudia (2021)[6], examined on the efficacy of solution-oriented thinking on the artistic abilities and entrepreneurial insight and found significant difference between them. And the study proved that design thinking can be solicited to entrepreneurial learning, mostly in vocational schools.

7. Niyaz, Aruna,Riha, Madhura and Ujwala(2024) explored the function of incubation centers in fostering entrepreneurship among university students. It specifies the importance of students' understanding, viewpoints, education, and the factors of collaboration, policy, and regulatory structures.

These factors play a vital role in enhancing the effectiveness of incubation centers, which further leads to success. The study also expresses that when challenges are less, the incubation center plays a crucial role in its success.

8. Bhattacharya, Chawla, and Ravichandran (2015) tried to determine the effectiveness of population factors to measure the innovative scale and observe the relationship of innovation with age, gender, and length of service of employees. The paper has concluded that there is a strong association between age and length of service of employees on the creation of novelty deeds whereas the sex of the employees does not influence the innovation procedure., the study concludes that age and length of service seem to have strong influences on the innovation potential while gender did not seem to have a very significant impact on innovation process and thus age and length of service can be included as influencing measurement parameter for innovativeness in any innovation scale development.

9. Dr. Parul, Dr. Uttam, Dr. Reeta and Sujatha G L(2024) explored that incubation centers are the key to influencing entrepreneurial success as they encourage and help young graduates in setting up their businesses. It also works on networking and cooperation, gathering businessmen and industrialists, investors, and other stakeholders under one umbrella. The ups and downs of start-up companies also depend on networking, which in turn helps share knowledge and innovative ideas. This networking helps in raising money and partnerships. This study collected 271 responses and found that incubation centers plays a significant role in educational institutions by boosting and guiding start-up entrepreneurs such as skill enhancement, networking opportunities, changing entrepreneurial mindset, and encouraging newness.

10. Rosch, Tiberius, and Kraus (2023) studied that in the design thinking process of innovation, the influence of individual and organizational variables and the stages and outcomes of the project were identified. Design thinking assists in developing a product and brings newness in behavior and capabilities both at the personal and organizational levels. It nurtures an environment that allows individuals to contribute to creativity and learn lessons from failures. The study further suggests that at the team level, collaboration is needed which allows diverse views so that biases can be minimised.

11. Matraeva, Alena & Rybakova, Marina & Vinichenko, Mikhail & Oseev, Aleksander & Ljapunova, Natalia. (2020), in their study on the development of creativity levels in learners in higher educational institutions scrutinized the parameters, environment, and creation procedure at higher educational institutions. Furthermore, the systematic concept and applications are the driving force behind the creativity process of students. The study concluded by saying that creativity can take place in students based on various factors in certain conditions. The paper further added that the novelty of ideas is the key component of professional skills. The study augments the creation of a suitable environment for creativity at all levels and in all fields in the instructional process.

12. Dorota and Maciej (2018) determined that the socio-economic background of the family plays a major role in the creative thinking capability of children. As per the Latent growth curve model, creativity changes from one individual to another individual. The background of the family influences the newness in thinking but is not necessarily associated with growth. Moreover, it was also found that the involvement of parents in the performance of the child is not directly related.

13. Zhao, Xinhui & Yang, Juan. (2021), explored that parenting styles have a significant effect on student's creative thinking whereas parental neglect and excessive guardianship especially from the mother compared with the father go negatively with creativity. The study further discovered parental care contributes to the out-of-box thinking capability of female students, slow learners, and those from poor backgrounds which provides good results. The study unveiled the techniques for building this type of relationship and scrutinized the effects of various groups.

14. Jian Wang and Shibayama (2022), examined in their study that mentorship serves as means to inculcate and enhance creativity. The mentor's way of inquisitiveness and freedom have an impact on the mentee's creativity levels. The data-driven study emphasizes on PhD supervision and development expressing that no doubt mentorship takes time but its effects last for a long time. The study further advocates that self-management and investigation contribute to the effective transmission of creativity from mentors to mentees.

15. Dr. Shubhangi and Dr. Shital (2021) concluded that in their study on innovation and incubation centers in promoting entrepreneurship in select colleges in Mumbai, there is evidence of entrepreneurial cells in colleges but fails to serve the purpose of students. To infuse entrepreneurial skills among students' entrepreneurial development activities have been undertaken. However, it witnessed the absence of active participation of candidates even though the management considered seed money to boost the confidence of students but all went in vain followed by various reasons.

16. Niyaz, Arun, Riha Parvin, Madhura & Ujwala Kambali (2024), investigated on acceleration of entrepreneurship at the incubation centers of management institutes of Dakshin Kannada and found that by providing special attention to student's awareness, understanding, collaboration, framing of principles which further enriches the performance of incubation centers to climb the ladder of success. The study has adopted a mixed method of social capital theory and institutional theory and identified that teamwork serves as a key driver to uplift the productivity levels of innovation hubs in comparison with policies, awareness, perception, and joint efforts of students. In this connection, the study also revealed that the success of incubation centers relies on the availability of challenges, that is, the lower the challenges, the higher the chances of success of entrepreneurial centers. Furthermore, the study also reaffirms that the development of business incubators depends on the student's mindset, confidence, and regulatory framework.

17. C.D. Rosita, Yana, and M. Subali Noto (2023) conducted a qualitative study on the role of Business ICs in student start-ups and revealed that students who took part in the entrepreneurial activities at the incubation centers had successfully established digital start-ups. These centers motivate and assist in the job creation and expansion of student-run enterprises. This paper advocates that start-up accelerators promote in cultivating entrepreneurial skills and novelty thinking.

Gaps in Literature:

Most of the researchers focused either on incubation centers and start-ups or incubation centers, entrepreneurship, success factors of incubation centers, and student's interests. The review of literature also discusses the mentor, and mentee relations on creativity there is barely any evidence that meticulously focuses on innovative thinking processes or thinking differently. So, this paper attempts to cement such gaps with the following examples.

Objectives:

1. Understanding the factors promoting innovative thinking process
2. Role of incubation center in promoting innovative thinking processes in HEIs of Telangana
3. To study the impact of incubation centers on the innovative thinking process of the participants

Need for the study: Many higher educational institutions have set up incubation centers but not having any accountability towards fulfilling the target, so genuine research is a must to put these institutions in streamline. Hence, there is a dire need to study how the existing incubation centers can be effectively reformed to make the students more involved and sharpen their creative skills, because it is the creativity of a researcher that ultimately leads to innovation.

Coverage of the study: The research covers all the innovation cells of Telangana to cover secondary data, however, the primary data shall be collected only from those incubation centres which have MOUs with HEIs and the government of Telangana and are actively involved in accommodating the ideas of students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The first objective will be executed through secondary data available on factors impacting the innovative thinking process and the second objective too will be examined from secondary sources, such as several incubation centers available in Telangana and various activities carried out by such centers will be tabulated to gain the ground on the role of incubation center in promoting innovative thinking process in higher education institutions of Telangana. The third objective will be executed purely through Primary data by a structured questionnaire for which Mann-Whitney U test is applied on the following hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant association between a student joining in incubation center and his innovative thinking process.

Alternative hypothesis: There is significant association between a student joining in incubation center and his innovative thinking process.

Sample size: The primary data of this paper is collected from 100 respondents of whom 50 shall be male students and 50 shall be Female students pursuing their UG or PG courses at various HEIs.

Factors promoting innovative thinking process:

Innovation is a continuous process since human evaluation. There are many factors that influence one to think innovatively. The existing literature is highly evident that there are seven factors stimulating innovation such as crisis, examination, diversity, collaboration, creativity, adjustment, resilience[7].

Moreover, the innovation management system recognizing several elements for success like environment, management, strategy, assistance, processes, assessment and enhancement in the creative activities irrespective of the size of the organization[8]. For any scientific progress, innovation playing the major role but when it comes to threats to humanity, it may be environment factors which causes diseases like Alzheimer's disease, obesity and various infections related diseases. In this regard creativity- training programs have been built and provided to produce creative and useful scientific ideas for public health at the University of Texas School of Public Health to health science students[9].

A study on the design thinking for innovation states that a number of individual and organization related factors were identified, which will influence the design thinking process for better innovation. Design thinking hinge on specialized principles like user needs and distinct methods like visualization, creative thinking and experimentation etc. helps to solve any problems related to various fields[10].

Role of incubation center in promoting innovative thinking process in the HEIs of Telangana:

Telangana State Innovation Cell - TSIC	16(sixteen)
WE-Hub	9(nine)
Telangana Hub	2(two)
Agriculture Hub	6(six)
Telangana Artificial Mission	1(one)
Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (J-Hub)	1(one)
Overall	35(thirty-five)

Source: TSIC

The Higher Education Institutions (HEls) and TS government have collaboratively carried out thirty-five programs to facilitate aspiring youth entrepreneurs and cultivate novelty and startup culture among learners in the state. The above table conveys a list of incubation centres along with programs undertaken. In Telangana, six institutions Telangana State Innovation Cell, Women Entrepreneurs Hub, Telangana- Hub, Agriculture-Hub, Telangana AI Mission Hub, and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Hub collectively conducted a sum of 35 programs.

The following table displays the number of programs held by various individual incubation centers in Telangana.

Telangana State Innovation Cell - TSIC	
School Innovation Challenge Program	Youth for Social Impact-TSIC -A Social Welfare Residential Degree College sand Tribal welfare Residential degree Colleges Student creativity Program
School Innovation Challenge District Level Boot camps	Youth for Social Impact -TSIC- A Kakatiya University Faculty Orientation
School Innovation Challenge SIC Post-program	YFSI-TSIC- An Orientation Program for Government Polytechnic Faculties.
Youth for Social Impact -TSIC- A GDCs Faculty Orientation Program	Youth for Social Impact-TSIC- A Reboot Session for the Government Polytechnic Faculty.
Youth for Social Impact -TSIC- A GDCs Student Innovation Program	YFSI-TSIC- A Government Polytechnic Student Innovation Program
Youth for Social Impact -TSIC- A ITI Faculty Orientation Program	YFSI-TSIC- Students Immersion program for 4 weeks
Youth for Social Impact -TSIC- A ITIs Student Innovation Program	YFSI-TSIC- Innovation boot camp and showcase
Youth for Social Impact -TSIC- A Social Welfare Residential Degree College sand Tribal welfare Residential degree Colleges Faculty Orientation Program.	TSIC - Innovation Immersion Program for RGUKT, Basar.

It can be noticed from the above table, that the programs undertaken by Telangana government, that major participants (4920) found in the YFSI - A Government Degree Colleges Student Innovation Program from 110 GDCs which is for 6- day hybrid learning model for students where teachers helping students in completing learning modules and submitting innovative ideas through infrastructure and technology available in the college premises within working hours. Similar program Faculty Orientation program was undertaken by YFSI-Kakatiya university where teachers were on boarded and help students' engagement model which is also for 6-day module. However least students (37) participated in YFSI – four weeks Students Immersion program along with mentoring and brainstorming sessions for 30 days and also took part in programs like Innovation boot camp and showcases- YFSI from multiple colleges across Telangana.

Incubation centers of Telangana and its programs:

Women Entrepreneurs Hub		Telangana-Hub	Agriculture-Hub	T-AIM	Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (J-Hub)
WE Alpha Road show@ Bhavan's Vivekananda College, Sainikpuri, Secunderabad.	WE Alpha Road show@ St. Anns College for Women, Mehdipatnam, Hyderabad.	Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and T-Hub, Beyond the Innovation@ Institute of Aeronautical Engineering	Ag-Hub - Design Thinking Program for PG 1.0	T-AIM - Academic Grand Challenge	Hackathon league regional level
WE Alpha Road show@ Loyola Academy, Jeedimetla, Hyderabad	WE Alpha Road show@ Saanvi Degree College	AIC T-Hub Beyond the Innovation@ BVRIT – Narsapur	Ag-Hub - Design Thinking Program for UG 2.0		
WE Alpha Road show@ BVRIT-Hyderabad.	WE Alpha Road show@ Sumathi Reddy Institute of Technology for Women, Warangal		Agriculture-Hub - Design Thinking Program for Postgraduates & Researchers 3.0		
WE Alpha Road show@ Badruka College PG Centre, Kachiguda, Hyderabad.	First cohort of WE Alpha.		Agriculture-Hub - Idea Sprout 1.0 Program		
WE Alpha Roadshow@ Hyderabad Institute of Technology and Management			Agriculture-Hub - Idea Sprout 2.0 Program		
			Ag-Hub - Idea Sprout 3.0 Program		

Initially, Women Entrepreneur-HUB was the only Incubator that was supported by the state government to promote women's entrepreneurship by setting up Incubation centres and avail Government services and a Worldwide cooperative network of businesses led by women to flower. It can be observed from the above table that, majority of students (108) participated in the WE Alpha Roadshow program undertaken by Bhavan's Vivekananda College, Sainikpuri, Secunderabad who were interested in entering into the entrepreneurial journey.

T-HUB collaborates with Atal Incubation Centre to support tech-based social enterprises that leverage entrepreneurial drive and technological advancement, aiming to assist India in meeting its Sustainable Development Goals. This process includes idea definition, market research, business model creation, pitch development, and practicing and delivering pitch.

The Agriculture Hub at Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Hyderabad enabling a platform to promote food and Agri-tech start-ups and entrepreneurship to inspire Indian students present across nation (PAN). It has undertaken design thinking program for UG, PG students and researchers. It has also built program on idea generation like idea sprout 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0, where top ideas were shortlisted and awarded.

TS government has launched Telangana AI Mission (T-AIM) in collaboration with NASSCOM. Emerging Technologies Wing of ITE&C Department serves as a center of the world for Artificial Intelligence and promotes social innovation. It has conducted an Academic Grand Challenge program where many students have been registered from various higher educational institutions.

The J-Hub at JNTUH organizes Hackathon events which are further influenced by the Challenges posed by the Industry and Start-ups structured as league competitions for stakeholders.

Analysis of Primary data: A total of 100 students were surveyed about the basic profile of the candidate and innovative thinking process which can be seen in the following table.

Gender	50(Male)	50(female)
Age	77(<20years)	23(> 20 years)
Institution	66(Universities)	34(Private affiliated Colleges)
Helpfulness of Incubation centers	57(yes)	43(No)
Influence of parental background	71 (Yes)	29(No)
Recognition of creativity by the mentor	68(Yes)	32 (No)
Innovative thinking before joining incubation centers	33 (Good)	67 (Poor)
Improvement in innovative thinking process after joining incubation centers	70 (Good)	30 (Poor)

It is observed from the primary data that most of the students have admitted that there is parental influence on the creative thinking process of the students and at the same time majority of them have agreed that incubation centers help improve the innovative thinking process. However, this majority agreement cannot be generalized unless the supporting hypothesis is tested with proven non-parametric tools like the Mann-Whittney U-test.

Testing of Hypothesis:

The null Hypothesis of this research paper is that there is no significant connection between a student joining in incubation center and his innovative thinking process. This hypothesis is tested with the help of Mann- Whitney U-test, a non-parametric tool generally used to compare any performance before and after specific training or exposure. The hypothesis is tested at 95 % confidence intervals.

Innovative Thinking Process

Before Joining Incubation centers	After Joining Incubation centers	
	Good	Poor
Good	33	67
Poor	70	30

U- test = [(A-D)-1 / (A+D)

= (33-30)-1 / (33+30) = 0.0317 is the calculated value.

The degrees of freedom for the above table that is (C-1) (R-1)= (2-1) (2-1)= 1 degree of freedom at which the U value is equal to 1.479.

Thus, the computed value of 0.0317 is lower than the table value of 1.479. Therefore, the Null hypothesis is to be accepted. It reveals that the association between a student joining the incubation center and his/her innovative thinking process is insignificant.

CONCLUSION

The secondary data furnishes the list of programs undertaken at various incubation centers in Telangana. These hubs empower women-led business ventures, business development paths, idea articulation, market analysis, business strategy formulation, a hub for food and agri-tech innovation, leading AI centers, fostering social innovation and help to face industry challenges and competitions. Furthermore, TSIIC displays various programs that witness the participation of students and teachers in orientation programs, innovation programs and district-level boot camps. A survey of 100 respondents affirms that parental care has a greater impact on the creative thinking process. Nevertheless, the contribution of the incubation centers cannot be avoided. Though the Null hypothesis of the study established an association between participating in an incubation center and improvement in the innovative thinking process of the students could not be rejected, this paper attempts to conclude that incubation centers must be more aggressively promoted among the HEIs as the participants to a larger extent admitted that their creative thinking process is improved after joining incubation process and their mentors are recognizing the creative ideas put forward from time to time.

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