Designing for Inclusion: Blended Learning in Entrepreneurship Education for Young Migrants

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Abstract: Young immigrants face challenges in integrating into social and work life, particularly due to limited access to networks, resources, and role models. Entrepreneurship may provide one possible pathway to boost their integration. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly taking a role in supporting the entrepreneurial competences development. However, comparatively little attention in the academic literature has been paid to how entrepreneurship education can be designed and delivered inclusively for culturally diverse young learners. Following a conceptual analysis approach, this paper presents the design and pilot implementation of a cross-border entrepreneurial mindset training programme developed within a Central Baltic Interreg project for young people aged under 25 with migrant backgrounds in Finland and Latvia. The programme aims to strengthen participants' entrepreneurial mindset and employability while supporting their understanding of the local social and business environment. Rather than focusing primarily on business creation, the programme approaches entrepreneurship as a transferable competence and a potential pathway towards greater agency, participation, and future opportunities. The six-module programme combines a self-paced MOOC learning environment with collaborative face-to-face activities, cross-border online interaction, and an international bootcamp. Its pedagogical design is based on learning by doing, structured reflection, practical problem-solving, peer interaction, and gradual progression from entrepreneurial awareness and opportunity recognition to idea development, value creation and the development of a longer-term entrepreneurial mindset. These components are intentionally designed as complementary rather than separate training activities, with each serving a distinct pedagogical purpose. Interwoven, they reinforce the learning process and create interconnected learning environments that support an integrated and iterative learning experience. The paper contributes to the entrepreneurship education literature by conceptualising an inclusive, cross-border pedagogical model specifically designed for young people with migrant backgrounds, a learner group that remains comparatively underexplored in entrepreneurship education research. It demonstrates how experiential, peer, blended, and inclusive learning principles can be combined within a coherent learning architecture in which digital, face-to-face, and international learning environments serve complementary pedagogical functions. In doing so, the paper broadens the discussion of entrepreneurship education and offers a practice-informed pedagogical model for designing entrepreneurship education for culturally diverse young learners.

Keywords: Blended Learning Environments, Engaging Diverse Learners, Experiential Learning, Entrepreneurship Education, Inclusive Pedagogy

1. Introduction

Young people with migrant backgrounds may face overlapping barriers when entering education, employment, and entrepreneurship in a new country. Limited professional networks, unfamiliarity with local institutions and business environments, language barriers, and difficulties in transferring previously acquired skills can restrict their opportunities for participation and advancement (Dabić et al, 2020; Ram et al, 2017; Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc, 2023). Entrepreneurship education can offer one way to strengthen agency, employability, and participation. Contemporary approaches increasingly view entrepreneurship not only as venture creation but as a broader competence involving opportunity recognition, initiative, problem-solving, collaboration, and the ability to transform ideas into value (Seikkula-Leino et al, 2021; Rodrigues, 2023).

However, access to entrepreneurship education does not in itself ensure inclusive participation or meaningful learning. Young people with migrant backgrounds may differ considerably in language proficiency, educational experience, entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence, and familiarity with local institutions and business cultures. Inclusive provision, therefore, requires attention not only to what is taught but also to how learning is structured and supported. Previous research highlights the importance of tailored, experiential, collaborative, and culturally responsive approaches for diverse learners (Henry et al, 2024; Baker et al, 2022; Eid and Akella, 2024). Yet comparatively little attention has been paid to integrating these principles into a coherent entrepreneurship education model specifically designed for young migrants.

Against this background, this paper aims to examine how principles of inclusive entrepreneurship education are incorporated into the pedagogical model of the cross-border entrepreneurial mindset training programme (EMI), designed for young people aged under 25 with migrant backgrounds in Finland and Latvia. Specifically, the analysis considers learners' needs, programme structure and content, the use of blended learning environments, and mechanisms for inclusive and experiential learning.

The conceptual analysis draws on experience gained from designing and piloting the EMI training programme between May 2025 and August 2026. Two pilot cycles involving 23 young people have been completed to date by LAB University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Lab Futura (Latvia), providing valuable first-hand insights into the programme's pedagogical model.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a literature review. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 presents the research findings. The final section discusses the main findings and their implication and concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Migrant Integration Context

Young migrants may face overlapping barriers to participation in education, employment, and entrepreneurship, including limited access to professional networks, unfamiliarity with local institutions and markets, language barriers, constrained access to finance, and difficulties transferring previously acquired human capital across national contexts (Dabić et al, 2020; Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc, 2023; Ram et al, 2017). These constraints are not purely individual: migrant entrepreneurship is shaped by institutional conditions, labour-market structures, discrimination, gendered migration experiences, and opportunities to build relationships with local actors (Ram et al, 2017).

Entrepreneurship should therefore not be assumed to automatically generate integration. Evidence suggests that social integration, access to networks, and familiarity with the host environment can, in turn, enable entrepreneurial participation by providing information, legitimacy, resources, and market knowledge (Mago, 2020; Zhang et al, 2023). Reviews consequently call for more contextual approaches that connect individual entrepreneurial agency with wider social and institutional conditions (Dabić et al, 2020; Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc, 2023). For young migrants, entrepreneurship education may thus be relevant not only as preparation for venture creation, but also as a means of strengthening transferable competences, contextual knowledge, networks, and participation.

2.2 Entrepreneurship as a Transferable Competence

This broader role is consistent with contemporary entrepreneurship education, which increasingly treats entrepreneurship as a competence rather than solely as business creation. The European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp), for example, defines entrepreneurship as the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others, including economic, social, and cultural value (Seikkula-Leino et al, 2021). This framing extends entrepreneurship education beyond startup formation toward capabilities relevant to employment, civic participation, and self-employment.

Entrepreneurship education has been associated with the development of opportunity recognition, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, initiative, and career readiness (Rodrigues, 2023; Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). It may also contribute to psychological resources related to employability and resilience, although outcomes depend on learner characteristics and programme design (Tam et al, 2024). These competences are developmental rather than acquired through a single intervention: they require repeated opportunities to identify problems, generate and test ideas, interact with others, receive feedback, and reflect on experience (Wu et al, 2019). For young participants who may not initially identify as prospective entrepreneurs, a competence-based approach therefore allows entrepreneurship education to support agency and employability while retaining venture creation as one possible outcome rather than its sole objective.

2.3 Inclusive Entrepreneurship Education

The expansion of entrepreneurship education within higher education does not necessarily ensure inclusive participation. A European study by Henry et al (2024) shows that inclusivity in entrepreneurship education remains uneven, with underrepresented groups not consistently reached or supported. Inclusion, therefore,

concerns not only formal access but also whether programme structures, teaching practices, and support mechanisms enable diverse learners to participate meaningfully.

For learners with migrant backgrounds, this requires attention to different educational experiences, language proficiency, social networks, confidence, familiarity with local institutions, and access to entrepreneurial resources. Inclusive entrepreneurship education consequently benefits from tailored rather than uniform provision, particularly when learners begin from unequal positions in relation to networks, markets, and institutional knowledge (Henry et al, 2024; O'Brien and Cooney, 2024). A broad emphasis on value creation and enterprising behaviour may also be more appropriate for disadvantaged groups than a narrow focus on high-growth venture creation (O'Brien and Cooney, 2024).

Inclusive provision further depends on whose experiences, identities, and forms of knowledge are recognised in the learning process. Research on inclusive entrepreneurship education highlights the role of diverse role models, peer exchange, critical reflection, and educator capacity in widening participation and challenging conventional assumptions about who entrepreneurship is for (Eid and Akella, 2024). This shifts inclusion from a question of recruitment alone to one of pedagogical design.

2.4 Pedagogical Design for Inclusive, Blended, and Experiential Learning

Research on migrant and refugee education provides more specific guidance for such design. Culturally responsive and engaged pedagogies emphasise recognising learners' linguistic, cultural, and experiential resources rather than treating difference primarily as a deficit (Fruja Amthor and Roxas, 2016; Baker et al, 2022). Inclusive learning environments also depend on trust, a sense of belonging, meaningful peer relationships, accessible educator support, and opportunities for participation from diverse starting points (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012; Kotluk and Aydin, 2021). For migrant learners, pedagogical flexibility must therefore be combined with social interaction: flexible formats can accommodate differences in language proficiency, prior education, and life circumstances, while collaborative learning can strengthen participation, confidence, and connection to the learning community.

These principles align with entrepreneurship education research, which consistently favours experiential and learner-centred methods over content transmission alone. Problem-based tasks, collaboration, experimentation, feedback, and reflection are particularly suited to developing competences such as opportunity recognition, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Rodrigues, 2023). Structured reflection is important because it enables learners to interpret experience, recognise progress, and connect practical activity with changes in confidence, attitudes, and entrepreneurial mindset (Wu et al, 2019).

Blended learning can extend these opportunities when different learning environments are assigned complementary pedagogical functions. A systematic review by Chen et al (2021) shows that online and blended entrepreneurship education can increase flexibility and access, but educational technologies are most effective when closely connected to learning activities and course objectives. Self-paced digital environments can support preparation, repetition, and individual progression, while face-to-face sessions provide immediate interaction, facilitator support, collaborative problem-solving, and experiential application. For culturally and linguistically diverse learners, this combination can reduce barriers to participation without replacing the relational dimensions of learning that are central to inclusion (Baker et al, 2022).

Cross-border interaction can add a further dimension by exposing learners to different social, cultural, and entrepreneurial contexts. International collaborative activities require participants to communicate across perspectives, negotiate meaning, and apply ideas beyond their immediate environment. Recent cross-border entrepreneurship education initiatives similarly combine virtual collaboration, intensive face-to-face learning, and practical entrepreneurial tasks to support intercultural and experiential learning (Bogdanova et al, 2025). Within such designs, digital, face-to-face, and international environments are not parallel delivery channels but rather interconnected learning spaces that serve different functions.

Taken together, the literature identifies six principles particularly relevant to inclusive entrepreneurship education for culturally diverse learners: experiential learning, structured reflection, flexible access, peer interaction, culturally responsive/contextualised learning, and individualised support. Cross-border collaboration may further extend these principles by exposing learners to different cultural and entrepreneurial contexts. These principles provide the analytical lens through which the EMI pedagogical model is examined.

3. Methodology

The conceptual analysis approach was used to examine the pedagogical model of the cross-border entrepreneurial mindset training programme (EMI) for young people aged under 25 with migrant backgrounds in Finland and Latvia.

The EMI training programme was designed from May to December 2025 and piloted in Finland and Latvia in 2026. The first pilot cycle was implemented from January to March 2026, and the second pilot from June to August 2026. Between the two pilot cycles, the programme was refined according to the findings and conclusions from the first pilot. So far, 23 young people have taken part in the programme, of whom 14 are in Latvia and 9 are in Finland.

This research does not evaluate the outcomes of the EMI training programme. Instead, it examines the pedagogical model. In particular, the study focuses on the following key components: learners' needs, structure and content of the programme, the use of a blended learning environment, and the mechanisms of inclusive and experiential learning. This approach is suitable for the current stage of the training programme, in which it has been designed and piloted, but the programme's results have not yet been evaluated.

The analysis covers the following data: the programme curriculum; the content of the six-module MOOC programme; session plans and educational materials from the face-to-face sessions, webinars, and the international face-to-face, multi-day bootcamp; and the informal guidelines for mentoring. These documents were produced jointly by the project team in Finland and Latvia, based on previous experience in providing entrepreneurship education and integration activities for migrants. In addition, the notes of programme designers and trainers gathered during the development and piloting of the training programme provide further insights.

The authors acknowledge that two of the three authors were directly involved in the design and pilot implementation of the EMI training programme. This provides an insider perspective and detailed contextual knowledge, but also creates a potential risk of researcher bias. To address this, a third author, who has not been directly involved in the design or implementation of the training programme, was invited to contribute with an independent perspective and balance the insider and outsider viewpoints.

4. Results

4.1 Programme Design Principles: Responding to Learner Needs

The EMI training programme was designed for young people aged under 25 with migrant backgrounds. There were no restrictions by ethnic or educational background, employment status, or previous entrepreneurial experience. Therefore, the programme addresses learners who may differ considerably in their educational, professional, and entrepreneurial experiences. Against this background, the analysis identified four interrelated design principles that shaped the programme: diverse starting points, the need for contextual learning, the need for supported progression, and the need for interaction and social learning.

Diverse participants' backgrounds are reflected in the gradual progression of the learning material, accessible explanations, introductions to the topics, different engagement models, and tasks to revisit concepts.

The need to understand social, economic, and cultural environments in relation to entrepreneurship justified the use of culturally grounded business content enriched with local examples. Contextual learning is most prominently realised through mentoring, which is designed to support participants' confidence in applying newly acquired knowledge and to facilitate their engagement with the local environment.

Entrepreneurship can involve ambiguity and uncertainty. The programme, therefore, doesn't ask learners to produce a complete business concept. It gradually moves from awareness and recognition of opportunities to the creation and validation of ideas. The programme consists of several interrelated parts because a purely self-paced online course would not, by itself, create opportunities for peer exchange, collaborative problem-solving, or networking. Thus, in addition to various forums and opinion-exchange tasks, the programme includes face-to-face workshops, webinars, and a bootcamp.

To better respond to the learners' needs, the programme is designed to create repeated opportunities to practise and reflect on behaviours associated with an entrepreneurial mindset. Entrepreneurship education

provides a contextual framework for developing and practising transferable competences relevant to work life. The blended format also provides opportunities to develop digital competencies.

4.2 Structure and Progression of the Six-Module Programme

The programme combines self-paced online learning, collaborative face-to-face activities and webinars, individual mentoring, and an international bootcamp. It is structured as a gradual progression rather than as a collection of independent topics. A primary foundation-setting environment is the MOOC course. Its six modules constitute a progression from entrepreneurial awareness and contextual understanding towards opportunity recognition, idea development, value creation, and a longer-term entrepreneurial mindset. Each module introduces a new area of learning while also building on concepts, reflections and activities introduced earlier.

Module 1, *Developing a Successful Entrepreneurial Mindset, introduces the* entrepreneurial mindset and entrepreneurship through mindset growth, adaptability, and personal development. It engages learners through personal story-sharing, interactive exercises, and a self-assessment task. Module 2, *Navigation Business Landscape*, continues developing awareness and moves to opportunity recognition by exploring entrepreneurial qualities and contexts. It covers cultural differences in business practices, professional communication and email writing, building trust and networking. Sharing their cultural experiences and reflecting on the effective use of their skills, learners move to identifying opportunities and building connections.

Module 3, *From Idea to Opportunity*, moves learners from recognising opportunities in different contexts towards formulating potential business ideas. Along with studying statistical and theoretical information on traditional and social entrepreneurship, learners exchange inspirational ideas, seek community opportunities, and test different strategies to turn ideas into businesses. Module 4, *Frame It Until You Make It*, introduces tools for structuring, testing, and communicating an idea. In contrast, Module 5, *Creating Value from Your Ideas*, shifts attention towards creating value, understanding customers, managing resources and taking initial action. These modules cover business modelling and analysis, pitching ideas, a simple business plan, money matters, finding support for a business, visibility, and marketing basics. The modules challenge students to create a visual board, analyse bad ideas, produce an elevator pitch, and fulfil a resource treasure hunt.

The final module, *Mindset for Long-term Success*, moves beyond the immediate business idea to the longer-term entrepreneurial mindset required to continue learning, adapting, and acting under the conditions of uncertainty typical of the target group of learners. The module creates a kind of “return to the learner” point that highlights the significance of an individual's mindset in sustaining entrepreneurial activity. Rather than treating entrepreneurial mindset, intercultural competence, wellbeing and adaptation as discrete learning outcomes assigned to individual models, the programme distributes these themes across the curriculum. Learners encounter them repeatedly through different activities, with increasing contextual complexity. This creates opportunities for revisiting, reinterpreting, and refining rather than for one-time exposure.

The progression of the programme is not limited to the thematic sequence of the six modules. A second layer of progression is created through the movement of learners between different learning environments. Learners typically begin by exploring concepts and completing individual tasks in the MOOC, then bring their emerging understanding into collaborative face-to-face workshops. Mentoring provides opportunities to connect learning with individual goals, while webinars extend learning across borders. The bootcamp provides an intensive context for applying and communicating accumulated learning. Reflection enables learners to reconsider and refine the ideas, feeding into subsequent learning activities. Thus, the learner repeatedly moves between individual exploration, collaboration, personalised guidance, application, and reflection.

Taken together, the programme combines a thematic progression across six modules with an iterative pedagogical progression across multiple learning environments. The former provides structure and scaffolding; the latter enables learners to encounter the same developing ideas through different modes of learning.

4.3 Complementary Functions of the Blended Learning Environments

In the programme, blended learning is conceptualised as a pedagogical architecture in which learning environments perform different but interconnected pedagogical functions. Experiential learning, peer interaction, reflection, and iteration connect those environments into a coherent learning process.

The analysis identified the MOOC as the programme’s primary foundation-setting environment. Its functions extend beyond content delivery: by combining conceptual input with individual application tasks and scheduled progression, it prepares learners for subsequent collaborative activities. The analysis indicates that face-to-face

workshops perform a complementary application and interaction function. Activities are structured around discussions, collaborative problem-solving, experiential exercises and reflection, thereby extending the individual preparation undertaken through the MOOC. Webinars offer cross-cultural perspectives, allowing broader discussions and the exchange of peers' perspectives.

Mentoring offers contextualisation and individualised guidance, helping participants connect new knowledge to their personal goals and ideas as well as to a new cultural environment. It adds a level of individualisation that cannot be provided through group activities. The bootcamp introduces perspectives and interactions beyond the immediate learning group. Reflection and feedback connect different experiences by enabling learners to revisit and modify their understanding.

The analysis, therefore, suggests that the added pedagogical value of the blended design lies not in the coexistence of multiple learning formats but in the deliberate distribution of complementary pedagogical functions across them and in the iterative movement of learners between these environments.

4.4 Inclusive and Experiential Learning Mechanisms

Several mechanisms of inclusive and experiential learning are incorporated into the programme design. However, their integration is uneven. Experiential learning, peer interaction, scaffolded progression, flexibility, and reflection are strongly embedded across the learning environments, whereas some aspects of culturally responsive learning and individualisation depend substantially on mentoring and facilitator practice rather than being systematically embedded across all programme components.

The MOOC course starts with a scaffolded entry as we do not assume learners' prior entrepreneurial expertise. The first modules establish basic concepts before asking learners to formulate ideas, thus reducing unnecessary knowledge barriers and creating a foundation for subsequent knowledge application.

Course activities are not merely comprehension questions; they stimulate learners to identify opportunities, analyse problems, formulate ideas, develop business models, make decisions under constraints, and revise thinking. Applying a learning-by-doing mechanism, the programme combines experiences with reflection and further experimentation. Iterative programme design makes learning by doing even stronger as it becomes part of a learning cycle from activity through reflection to revision and new application.

The structure of the programme, combining individual, collaborative and supportive learning environments, provides multiple routes into participation. The multiple participation modes structure is intended to support inclusive participation.

The international component is not an attractive add-on. Peer interaction is a learning resource through which learners encounter various perspectives, interpretations, business cultures, and approaches to problem-solving. Thus, diversity becomes part of the learning environment.

Experiential learning and an entrepreneurial mindset are connected through iteration. Learners do not have to get the idea right the first time. The programme design allows them to test the idea, receive feedback, and reflect and improve it. It is exactly the mindset the programme strives to develop in the learners.

4.5 Integrated Pedagogical Model

The conceptual analysis shows that the programme is characterised by an integrated pedagogical architecture that interconnects different elements and links the learner's needs with specific design principles, learning environments, and pedagogical mechanisms.

The starting point is the diversity of learners' educational, professional and entrepreneurial backgrounds. This informs a set of design principles that guide both the content and structure of the programme. The design principles are implemented through a combination of learning environments with complementary functions: MOOC-based self-paced learning, face-to-face workshops, webinars, mentoring, and an international bootcamp. The environments are not strictly sequential: learners move between them as they develop, apply, and reconsider their ideas.

Across these environments, several pedagogical mechanisms connect the learning activities. Practical tasks and problem-solving activities support experiential learning; collaborative and cross-border interaction enables peer learning; iteration enables learners to modify their ideas and approaches. These mechanisms provide continuity between otherwise different learning environments. Through this interconnected process, the programme is

designed to foster entrepreneurial learning and transferable competences that enable agency and action in employment, entrepreneurial, and other professional contexts.

The resulting architecture can therefore be understood as a movement from learner needs, through inclusive design principles and complementary learning environments, towards active and experiential learning processes and the development of entrepreneurial competences. Importantly, this is not a linear progression, as reflection, feedback and iteration create continuous movement between the stages. In this sense, the blended format functions as an integrated pedagogical structure.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The conceptual analysis of the EMI training programme shows how pedagogical principles identified in the literature as relevant to inclusive entrepreneurship education are incorporated into a programme for young people with migrant backgrounds. The programme responds to differences in learners' educational, professional, entrepreneurial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds through scaffolded entry, gradual progression, contextualised content, flexible participation, and individualised guidance. These features align with research emphasising tailored and culturally responsive approaches that recognise both individual agency and wider social and institutional conditions (Dabić et al, 2020; Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc, 2023; Henry et al, 2024; O'Brien and Cooney, 2024; Fruja Amthor and Roxas, 2016; Baker et al, 2022).

The programme also adopts a broad understanding of entrepreneurship as a transferable competence rather than focusing solely on venture creation. Its progression from entrepreneurial awareness and opportunity recognition to idea development, value creation, and a longer-term entrepreneurial mindset creates opportunities to practise competences such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, initiative, and opportunity recognition (Seikkula-Leino et al, 2021; Rodrigues, 2023; Rodriguez and Lieber, 2020). Experiential activities, peer exchange, feedback, reflection, and iterative idea development further enable learners to move between action, reflection, and revision (Wu et al, 2019; Eid and Akella, 2024).

The blended structure supports these principles by assigning complementary functions to the MOOC, face-to-face workshops, webinars, mentoring, and the international bootcamp rather than treating them as separate delivery formats (Chen et al, 2021; Baker et al, 2022). However, the principles are not equally embedded. Experiential learning, peer interaction, reflection, flexibility, and scaffolded progression are integrated throughout the programme, whereas contextualisation and individualisation depend more strongly on mentoring and facilitator practice. Moreover, structural barriers identified in migrant entrepreneurship research, including access to finance, professional networks, and institutional support, cannot be fully addressed through the training programme itself.

The paper contributes to entrepreneurship education literature by presenting an inclusive, cross-border pedagogical model designed for young people with migrant backgrounds, a comparatively underexplored learner group. It shows how digital, face-to-face, individual, and international learning environments can be interconnected to support inclusive and experiential entrepreneurial learning. For application in other contexts, the findings suggest that the model should not simply be replicated as a combination of learning formats; its content, mentoring, support mechanisms, and connections to the local environment need to be adapted to learners' cultural, linguistic, and institutional contexts.

The research has several limitations. First, it examines the programme's pedagogical model rather than its outcomes; further research should therefore evaluate changes in learners' knowledge, skills, and competences. Second, the programme was developed for young people with migrant backgrounds in Finland and Latvia, and differences in migration contexts, educational systems, institutional support, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds may affect its applicability elsewhere. Third, two of the three authors were directly involved in programme design and implementation, creating a potential risk of researcher bias, partly addressed through the involvement of a third author without direct involvement in the programme.

Acknowledgement

The Central Baltic Interreg Programme 2021-2027 project 'EMI – Empowering Migrant Youth Through Development of Entrepreneurial Mindset' (No. CB0600330) is co-funded by the European Union.

Ethics Declaration

This paper reports on the design and implementation of the cross-border entrepreneurial mindset training programme (EMI) for young people aged under 25 with migrant backgrounds in Finland and Latvia. It does not involve human-subject research, the collection of personal data, or the reporting of participant-level findings. Formal ethical approval was therefore not required.

AI Declaration

English is not the authors' first language; Grammarly was employed to ensure grammatical accuracy and improve stylistic consistency.

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