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EVALUATING THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY INCUBATION CENTERS IN ENHANCING ENTREPRENEURIAL AWARENESS AND STARTUP INTENTIONS AMONG BUSINESS SCHOOL STUDENTS

Fouzia Fatima, Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Integral University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Dr. Moiz Akhtar, Associate Professor, Department of Business Management, Integral University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Dr. Asma Farooque, Professor, Department of Business Management, Integral University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Mohammad Hamzah Khan, Research Scholar, Department of Business Management, Integral University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

University-based incubation centers have emerged as crucial drivers of entrepreneurship within higher education, providing students with mentorship, resources, and networks to transform innovative ideas into viable ventures. This study investigates how incubation centers influence entrepreneurial awareness and startup intentions among business school students in India. Adopting a qualitative multiple case study design, we rely exclusively on secondary data (public records, annual reports, entrepreneurship cell documentation, policy briefs, and university websites) to examine incubation programs at selected Indian universities. We analyze incubator *capability configurations* – the specific combinations of infrastructure, funding support, mentorship, training programs, industry linkages, and outreach activities – and evaluate their impact on students' entrepreneurial awareness (knowledge and mindset about entrepreneurship) and intentions (willingness to start a venture). The cross-case analysis reveals that incubation centers with strong mentorship networks, active student engagement through entrepreneurship cells (E-cells), and experiential learning opportunities (e.g. startup bootcamps, hackathons, pitch competitions) tend to heighten students' awareness of entrepreneurship and increase their intent to pursue startups. Conversely, limited outreach and lack of integration with academic programs emerge as barriers to student participation in some incubators. The findings highlight the importance of a supportive *entrepreneurial ecosystem* within universities – one that combines physical infrastructure with cultural and educational initiatives – in nurturing student entrepreneurship. This study contributes to the literature by offering a nuanced, cases-based understanding of how different incubator models and capabilities foster entrepreneurial attitudes in an emerging economy context. Recommendations are offered for university administrators and policymakers to strengthen incubator programs (e.g. through policy support, improved outreach, and tailored support for student founders) to better cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Keywords: university incubation centers; entrepreneurial awareness; startup intentions; business school students; multiple case study; entrepreneurship education; India; innovation; economic growth.

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Introduction

In recent years, universities have increasingly embraced the role of catalysts in the entrepreneurship ecosystem. The emergence of *university incubation centers* – on-campus hubs offering resources, mentorship, and networking for startups – reflects a strategic shift in higher education towards fostering innovation and venture creation. These incubators are posited to enhance students' entrepreneurial **awareness** (their understanding of entrepreneurship as a career path and the skills/resources needed) and to boost **startup intentions** (their personal commitment to founding a venture). This topic is especially pertinent in the Indian context, where a burgeoning startup economy intersects with a young demographic and policy pushes for entrepreneurship development. The present study evaluates the role of university incubation centers in raising entrepreneurial awareness and intentions among business school students in India, using a multiple case study approach based on secondary data.

Background and Significance. Universities are increasingly viewed as "entrepreneurial universities," expected not only to educate but also to contribute to economic development through innovation and enterprise creation[1]. Academic incubators act as *catalysts* for innovation, helping students and researchers transform ideas into businesses and effectively making students "job creators" rather than job seekers[1]. By linking the academic environment with industry and government support – a manifestation of the *triple helix* model – university incubators can generate significant local economic impact[2]. In India, this paradigm has gained momentum in the last decade. The Government of India, through initiatives like the **National Innovation and Start-up Policy (NISP) 2019**, has encouraged higher education institutions to establish innovation ecosystems and engage students and faculty in startup activities[3]. The *Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell* (MIC) and agencies like NITI Aayog's *Atal Innovation Mission* have provided frameworks and funding for setting up campus incubators and entrepreneurship cells nationwide. As a result, the number of incubators in Indian academia has grown rapidly. A 2024 report counted over 1,100 active incubators in India's startup ecosystem[4]. However, despite this growth, only about **8.2%** of Indian startups go through any incubation program, and a mere **10% of incubators support 98%** of all incubated startups[5]. This indicates that a few well-resourced incubators dominate the landscape, while many university incubators remain underutilized. There is a recognized need to improve incubator performance and **outreach efforts to raise awareness** of their benefits among students[6].

For Indian business schools – institutions focused on management education – incubation centers represent an opportunity to bridge theory with practice. Business students often possess ideas in domains such as fintech, e-commerce, or social enterprises, but may lack the technical support or risk tolerance to pursue them. An effective campus incubator can provide *critical support services* (e.g. seed funding, expert mentoring, prototyping facilities) and an encouraging environment that lowers entry barriers to entrepreneurship. Prior studies suggest incubated ventures are more likely to succeed; for instance, incubated startups in India are **2.5 times more likely** to secure early-stage funding compared to non-incubated peers[7]. University incubators also perform *educational and social roles*, such as hosting workshops, idea competitions and networking events that increase students' exposure to entrepreneurship[8][9]. These activities can shape students' attitudes, self-efficacy, and intentions towards entrepreneurship. Given

India's massive youth population and the government's "Startup India" campaign, the stakes for activating student entrepreneurship are high. Universities are expected to produce graduates who are job creators driving economic growth, aligning with national priorities like *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India).

Problem Statement and Research Gap. While the proliferation of incubation centers across Indian universities is evident, there is limited scholarly understanding of *how exactly these incubators influence student-level outcomes* such as awareness and entrepreneurial intention. Much of the existing literature on incubators in India has focused on macro-level impacts (e.g. number of startups, funding raised) or on incubator performance metrics[10]. Fewer studies have examined the educational impact on student mindsets and career choices. Moreover, not all incubation centers are alike – they vary in their structures, resources, and integration with academic programs. What *specific configurations of capabilities* (e.g. availability of mentorship networks, the presence of entrepreneurship cells, partnerships with industry, seed funding schemes, etc.) make an incubator effective in engaging and inspiring students? This study addresses that gap by evaluating multiple cases of university incubation centers with a focus on their internal features and student-centric outcomes.

We also note that previous research on student entrepreneurship often emphasizes formal curriculum or training programs in entrepreneurship education, whereas incubation centers provide **experiential, outside-the-classroom learning opportunities**. Concepts like entrepreneurial *awareness* – which can include students' knowledge of entrepreneurial processes, familiarity with startup ecosystems, and recognition of entrepreneurship as a viable career – have been discussed in policy circles (e.g. through government-sponsored Entrepreneurship Awareness Camps) but are under-defined in academic literature. *Entrepreneurial intention*, on the other hand, has been widely studied through psychological models like Ajzen's **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**, which posits that intention to perform a behavior (like starting a business) is the best predictor of actual behavior[11]. TPB suggests that intention is influenced by attitudes (e.g. seeing entrepreneurship positively), subjective norms (social support), and perceived behavioral control (self-efficacy). Incubation centers potentially affect all these components: they can improve attitudes by showcasing success stories, shift norms by building an entrepreneurial community on campus, and increase perceived control by equipping students with skills and resources. However, empirical evidence linking incubator involvement to changes in TPB antecedents among students is sparse.

Objectives of the Study. In this context, our study sets out three primary objectives: (1) To evaluate the level of entrepreneurial awareness among students in selected Indian business schools and how incubation center activities correlate with this awareness; (2) To examine the influence of incubation center engagement (e.g. utilization of incubator services, participation in events) on students' entrepreneurial intentions; and (3) To explore how specific *incubator capabilities* and practices (the "configurations" of support they offer) contribute to or hinder the development of entrepreneurial awareness and intentions. Rather than conducting surveys or interviews, we pursue these objectives through in-depth analysis of documentary evidence and multiple case comparisons, enabling a triangulated understanding drawn from secondary sources.

Indian Higher Education Context. It is important to frame our inquiry within the distinctive context of Indian higher education and innovation policy. The launch of the *National Innovation and Startup Policy (NISP) 2019* by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) underscored a nationwide commitment to embed innovation and startup support in universities[3]. Institutions were encouraged to create Entrepreneurship Development Cells (EDC/E-Cell), technology business incubators, and to allocate funds and academic credit for entrepreneurial endeavors. The *Institutions' Innovation Council (IIC)* framework was also introduced, wherein colleges form councils to systematically promote innovation activities on campus. Our case studies reflect this milieu – for example, some cases have dedicated E-Cells and IICs that work alongside incubators (as documented in their websites and reports). Additionally, government funding schemes such as the Department of Science & Technology's **NIDHI** (National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations) seed fund, or the *Startup India Seed Fund Scheme*, have been channelled through university incubators to financially support student startups. The presence of Atal Incubation Centers (AICs) at certain institutes (funded by NITI Aayog) also brings standardization and accountability to incubator operations. With such policy support, the expectation is that universities will actively churn out entrepreneurs. Yet challenges persist – particularly outside major urban centers – in creating robust startup ecosystems on campus. A recent study by NSRCEL-IIMB and IIT Madras pointed out that India has **only 0.8 incubators per million population**, far fewer than countries like the US or China (8–10 per million), and that many existing incubators in India are concentrated in top-tier cities or institutions[12][13]. This urban concentration might limit access for students in second-tier cities. Recognizing these gaps, the same study emphasized improving underutilized incubators and engaging in outreach to increase awareness among the student community[6]. In other words, simply establishing an incubator is not enough – its success in fostering student entrepreneurship depends on proactive engagement and capability-building.

Study Rationale. Given the above context, our study is both timely and relevant. It responds to calls for deeper examination of incubators' roles in education (beyond their role in venture creation). By using a **multiple case study** method grounded in secondary data, we leverage rich qualitative information – such as annual report narratives, event descriptions, and success stories – that might be missed in broad surveys. This approach aligns with similar qualitative inquiries globally that treat university incubators as complex phenomena requiring contextual understanding[14]. For instance, Panakaje *et al.* (2024) conducted a mixed-method study in Karnataka which highlighted factors like incubator reputation, networking opportunities, and policy frameworks as key to incubation effectiveness[15]. They found that one major challenge lies in *"convincing the students to implement their own business ideas"* despite exposure to incubators[14] – essentially, bridging the gap between awareness and intention to action. Our research delves into such issues by comparing how different universities have configured their incubation offerings and how students appear to respond. The focus on **business school students** is deliberate: these students often have management knowledge and may identify market opportunities, but they are not typically taught technical innovation in the way engineering students are. Their entrepreneurial outcomes may therefore rely even more on the institutional support and culture provided by their universities (e.g., access to interdisciplinary teams, mentoring, and early-stage capital).

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In summary, the introduction has established that university incubation centers in India are an increasingly important part of the educational landscape, with significant potential to influence student entrepreneurship. Yet, there is a need for comprehensive, analytical evaluation of their role in shaping entrepreneurial awareness and intentions at the student level. The next sections will review relevant literature, explain our methodology for case selection and data analysis, present the findings from the cases, discuss their implications, and conclude with recommendations and future directions. By doing so, we aim to contribute both to academic discourse on incubator impact and to practical insights for improving incubation center strategies in higher education.

Literature Review

University Incubation Centers and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

The concept of *business incubators* originated as a mechanism to support nascent companies by providing affordable space and shared resources. Over time, **university business incubators (UBIs)** have become a distinct category, integrating the incubator model into academic settings (Mian, 2014). University incubators leverage campus resources – faculty expertise, laboratories, student talent – to nurture startups, and in turn, they enhance the university's role in regional innovation systems. Theoretically, UBIs can be viewed through the lens of the **Triple Helix Model** (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), which emphasizes interactions between universities, industry, and government in fostering innovation. Incubators epitomize this model by linking academic knowledge with industry mentorship and often operating under government-supported programs. Hassan (2020) provides a comprehensive theoretical perspective on UBIs, noting that they act as "**specialised business incubators that create a link between university, business, and government, generating a significant impact on the local economy**"[2]. This linkage not only facilitates the transfer of technology and know-how but also aligns incubator goals with broader economic development objectives (e.g., job creation, regional competitiveness).

A key distinction of university incubators is their educational mission. Beyond incubating companies, they often aim to instill entrepreneurial culture on campus. According to Hassan (2020), the trend of universities establishing incubators reflects the recognition of "leveraging academic resources to support entrepreneurship," effectively transitioning students' *mindsets from employment seekers to job creators*[16]. This perspective aligns with the notion of the **entrepreneurial university** (Clark, 1998; Guerrero & Urbano, 2012), where entrepreneurship is embedded in teaching, research, and outreach functions. In practice, many university incubators run programs such as venture competitions, startup bootcamps, or innovation challenges that involve students from various disciplines (Rothaermel & Thursby, 2005). These programs serve to identify promising ideas and channel entrepreneurial enthusiasm into tangible projects.

Entrepreneurial Awareness and Intentions among Students

Entrepreneurial awareness can be understood as the degree to which individuals are informed about and sensitive to entrepreneurial opportunities, processes, and culture. In the context of students, awareness includes knowing what starting a business entails, familiarity with startup success stories, and recognition of entrepreneurship as a viable career path (rather than an

abstract concept). Awareness is a prerequisite for interest – students are unlikely to form entrepreneurial intentions if they are unaware of opportunities or what resources exist to support them. Many universities, especially in India, conduct **Entrepreneurship Awareness Camps (EACs)** and workshops to introduce students to the basics of venture creation. For example, institutes often host 3-day EAC programs sponsored by the DST and EDII that cover ideation, business planning, and interactions with entrepreneurs[17]. These are intended to demystify entrepreneurship for novices. The Government's emphasis on awareness is evident: the National Science & Technology Entrepreneurship Development Board (NSTEDB) has long run awareness camps at colleges to stimulate interest in entrepreneurship in disciplines beyond business (e.g., science and engineering students). While "awareness" lacks a formal metric, proxy indicators can be participation rates in such events or surveys showing how many students can identify entrepreneurship as an option.

Entrepreneurial intention refers to one's conscious commitment and plan to start a new business venture in the future (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). Intention is widely regarded as the single best predictor of actual entrepreneurial behavior (start-up creation), given that new venture initiation is typically a planned, intentional act (as opposed to being purely accidental). The dominant theoretical framework for understanding entrepreneurial intentions is Ajzen's **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** (Ajzen, 1991). TPB posits that intention is shaped by three antecedents: *attitude* toward the behavior (the degree to which one has a favorable evaluation of entrepreneurship), *subjective norms* (perceived social pressure or support to start a business), and *perceived behavioral control* (akin to entrepreneurial self-efficacy – one's confidence in their ability to start and run a business). Studies applying TPB in educational settings (e.g., Kolvereid & Moen, 1997; Autio *et al*., 2001) have found that students' intentions to start a business can be predicted by these factors. For instance, if a business student believes that entrepreneurship is prestigious and rewarding (positive attitude), feels that peers and family would approve (supportive norm), and has developed relevant skills (high self-efficacy), they are far more likely to intend to start a venture after graduation.

Crucially, **entrepreneurship education and support systems** can influence these factors. A meta-analysis by Martin *et al.* (2013) showed that entrepreneurship education modestly increases entrepreneurial intentions, largely by improving knowledge and perceived feasibility. Incubation centers, albeit outside the formal curriculum, effectively provide an extension of entrepreneurship education through practical exposure. They may improve attitudes by showcasing real startups and entrepreneurs on campus, thus making the prospect more tangible and exciting. They can strengthen subjective norms by creating a community where entrepreneurial efforts are seen as normal and celebrated (for example, if many classmates are working on startups or if the institution rewards entrepreneurial achievements). And they certainly can enhance perceived behavioral control by giving students access to mentorship, prototyping labs, seed funding, etc., which lower the barriers to launching a startup. In fact, one of the findings from Panakaje *et al.* (2024) was that students identified the *reputation and credibility* of the incubation center and the strength of its *network* as integral for their learning and confidence[15]. If an incubator has a credible presence and connects students to industry experts and investors, students feel more empowered and capable of starting up.

It is also worth noting that entrepreneurial intention is not static – it can evolve during the course of a student's time at university. Longitudinal studies (e.g., Von Graevenitz, Harhoff & Weber, 2010) have found that exposure to entrepreneurship programs can lead some students to realize entrepreneurship is not for them (thus reducing misguided intentions), while inspiring others to pursue it, effectively a self-selection and clarification process. Therefore, raising "awareness" is a double-edged sword: greater awareness helps students make an informed choice about whether entrepreneurship fits their goals and aptitudes. Those with genuine interest and aptitude will have their intentions strengthened, while others might decide against it after learning what it entails. A successful university entrepreneurship ecosystem thus does not force everyone to be an entrepreneur, but ensures that those with interest are aware of the path and feel capable of pursuing it.

Incubator Capabilities and Configurations

The term *incubator capability configurations* in this study refers to the particular bundle of services, resources, and structural features that an incubation center possesses. Prior research has attempted to typologize incubators (e.g., Pauwels *et al.*, 2016 identified components like infrastructure, access to business support, and selection process; Grimaldi & Grandi, 2005 compared "selection" vs "networking" models of incubators). University incubators often combine multiple roles: they provide **physical infrastructure** (co-working space, labs, equipment), **business support services** (training, legal/IP advice, help with registrations), **financial support** (seed funding, stipends, facilitation of grants or investor pitching), **network access** (to mentors, industry connections, alumni entrepreneurs, venture capitalists), and **psychological support** (motivation, peer community, morale boost in the startup journey). The effectiveness of an incubator may lie not in any single aspect, but in how these components are configured and executed.

Mian, Lamine & Klofsten (2021) in their handbook on incubation highlight that university incubators globally exhibit diverse models – some are more like *business support centers* open to alumni and external startups, others are tightly integrated with student curricula and research commercialization. In India, many university incubators are relatively new (set up post-2015) and have been influenced by government guidelines. For example, under the *Atal Incubation Centre (AIC)* scheme by NITI Aayog, selected institutions receive a standard grant and are expected to meet targets (number of startups incubated, jobs created, etc.), implying a somewhat uniform capability set (modern space, funding corpus, etc.). On the other hand, internal university-led incubators may vary depending on the institution's commitment and resources.

The literature suggests several **critical capabilities** for incubators in enhancing entrepreneurial outcomes:

- **Mentorship and Human Capital Support:** The availability of experienced mentors (entrepreneurs, industry experts) who can guide students is often cited as the most valuable aspect of incubation (Rideout & Gray, 2013). Networks that an incubator can open up – sometimes referred to as "incubator network capability" – are positively related to startup success (Soetanto & Jack, 2013) and likely to students' learning as well.

- **Educational and Training Programs:** Incubators that offer workshops, seminars, or systematically mentor startups through a curriculum (e.g., on writing business plans, customer discovery, scaling up) help in building entrepreneurial competencies (Clough *et al*., 2019). In a university, these programs can complement academic courses. For instance, some incubators run a pre-incubation or "venture launch" program for students where over a semester they work on their ideas (often for academic credit). The presence of a structured program can increase student participation and outcome quality.

- **Financial Access:** While not all student startups need large funds initially, having *seed funding schemes*, proof-of-concept grants, or prize money from competitions can be crucial. Incubators often administer seed funds (sometimes provided by government – e.g., the Startup India Seed Fund or state grants). Easy access to small funding (say Rs 1–5 lakhs or ~$2k–$10k) may determine whether a student team can build a prototype or incorporate a company. Additionally, incubators that can connect startups to angel investors or venture capital (through demo days or referrals) increase the likelihood of students actually intending to scale their ventures because they see a funding pathway.

- **Integration with Academic and Research Units:** An incubator closely tied to the university's faculty and research can channel academic innovations (patents, projects) into startups. Also, faculty involvement can bolster mentorship. Some literature on academic entrepreneurship (e.g., O'Shea *et al*., 2008) finds that universities with strong research commercialization units often have more robust incubators. In terms of student intention, if students see their professors or institute's research leading to startups, it might legitimize entrepreneurship as a pursuit.

- **Institutional Support and Policy:** The commitment of the university's leadership and policies (e.g., allowing semester breaks for startups, giving academic credit for startup projects, or permitting flexible curricula) also form part of the "capability configuration." Wright *et al* (2017) argue that institutional context influences how effective entrepreneurship support can be – for example, entrepreneurial leave or the ability to substitute a thesis with a business plan in some Indian universities has encouraged more student startups. The NISP 2019 encourages such flexibility, suggesting HEIs allow students to take a semester off for working on a startup or count it towards internship requirements[18][3].

From an analytical perspective, each incubation center can be seen as a unique case of configuration of these capabilities. A *well-rounded incubator* might score high on all dimensions (infrastructure, human, financial, network, institutional), whereas others might be strong in some but weak in others. We expect that those incubators which manage to combine multiple capabilities (a holistic ecosystem approach) will have a greater effect on student awareness and intention. Empirical support for this comes indirectly from studies like *Akhtar et al.* (2020) which found that students' entrepreneurial intentions in Indian universities increased when they had higher exposure to startup events and interactions (a proxy for incubator activities). Similarly, a study by Pankaj Deep and Saumya (2025) on implementing startup policy in Indian HEIs (published in **Indian Journal of Public Administration**) emphasizes that effective

entrepreneurship ecosystems require coordination of efforts – mere presence of infrastructure without cultural change yields limited results.

Prior Studies in the Indian Context

Research specifically examining Indian university incubators and student entrepreneurship is still emerging, given that many programs are less than a decade old. However, a few notable works provide context:

- **Panakaje *et al.* (2024)** – This mixed-method study (Heliyon journal) focused on management institutes in Dakshina Kannada district (Karnataka) and assessed incubation centers' role in promoting entrepreneurship among students[19]. It identified factors such as awareness and perception of incubation, educational collaborations, and regulatory frameworks that impact incubator effectiveness[14]. Notably, it confirmed that students value the incubator's **credibility** and **networking opportunities**, and these in turn enhanced the learning and perceived success from the incubator[15]. This suggests that students are more likely to engage (and perhaps intend startups) if they trust the incubator and see it connected to a larger ecosystem.

- **Hassan (2020)** – A theoretical paper in *Review of Economics and Political Science* that looked at UBIs as tools for accelerating entrepreneurship. One insight from this work is that by integrating incubators in universities, students and researchers are given a platform to apply their knowledge and *"transition their mindset"* to entrepreneurial action[16]. It draws upon case studies worldwide, indicating that globally incubators have been linked to successful outcomes when they anchor themselves in the *local context* and leverage the parent institution's strengths.

- **Indian Incubator Landscape Reports (e.g., "India Incubator Kaleidoscope 2024")** – Joint reports by NSRCEL (IIM Bangalore) and IIT Madras (CREST) shed light on macro trends[4]. They show a geographic and sectoral spread of incubators, and importantly, highlight challenges like underperformance of many incubators and lack of awareness among potential beneficiaries[6]. These reports recommend capacity building for incubator managers and more outreach to *students and innovators in smaller cities*. They also celebrate successes, such as well-established incubators (NSRCEL, CIIE at IIM Ahmedabad, SINE at IIT Bombay, etc.) which have incubated hundreds of startups and created strong networks.

- **Empirical Studies on Student Intentions in India** – While not about incubators per se, studies like Gupta & Singh (2017) or Paul & Gupta (2014) have surveyed Indian students (MBA or engineering) to find what drives their entrepreneurial intentions. Common factors include prior exposure to entrepreneurship (through family business or curriculum), self-efficacy, and the presence of role models. The implication for incubators is that they can simulate some of these factors (e.g., providing role model interactions via talks from alumni entrepreneurs, etc.). Also, a study by Sahni (2021) on an Indian university's entrepreneurship cell found that active participation in E-Cell activities correlated with higher entrepreneurial self-confidence among students. This

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supports the idea that extracurricular entrepreneurial support (like E-Cells and incubators) can indeed influence intentions.

- **Case examples**: A few case studies published in conference proceedings or reports document specific Indian university incubation efforts. For example, Singh and Sharma (2020) presented a case of an incubator at a private university in North India, describing how they structured a student accelerator program and the outcomes in terms of startups formed. Another case by Nair (2019) discussed IIM Bangalore's NSRCEL and how its Women Startup Program engaged women management students to start ventures. These case narratives, although not widely cited research, provide qualitative evidence that *targeted programs* (like sector or demographic focused cohorts) within incubators can activate latent entrepreneurial interest in the student population.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

Drawing from the above literature, we can synthesize a simple conceptual framework for our study: **University Incubation Center Capabilities → Student Entrepreneurial Awareness → Student Entrepreneurial Intentions (and ultimately, Startup Formation)**. Incubator capabilities, as configured in each case, are the input. They influence the intermediate outcome of awareness (for instance, an incubator's outreach programs directly increase awareness of opportunities and resources). Heightened awareness, combined with direct support from the incubator (mentoring, etc.), then contributes to forming or strengthening intentions to start a venture. Of course, this process is moderated by individual-level factors (like a student's personal traits, risk appetite) and contextual factors (like culture, job market conditions). Our study, however, holds those moderating factors constant in the sense that all cases are in the Indian context and involve business students presumably with similar career considerations (e.g., possibly weighing placements versus startups).

We also integrate the TPB perspective: incubator activities can feed into all three antecedents of intention. For example, *awareness programs and success stories improve attitudes*, *peer networks and events improve subjective norms*, and *skill workshops plus resource access improve perceived control*. Therefore, a well-functioning incubator could positively shift the entire TPB equation favorably towards entrepreneurship. Figure 1 (in Appendix, cross-case matrix) will outline the presence of key capabilities and observed student outcomes in each case, effectively operationalizing this framework.

In summary, the literature indicates that university incubation centers hold a multifaceted role: they are simultaneously economic catalysts, educational platforms, and social networks. Their influence on students spans cognitive (knowledge, awareness), affective (passion, confidence), and behavioral (intent, action) dimensions. However, realizing this influence depends on how well the incubator is equipped and managed. The cases we analyze will illuminate how different universities have approached this task and what patterns emerge regarding student entrepreneurial outcomes. The next section details the methodology of our case study approach, including case selection, data sources, and analysis methods, which are informed by the gaps and concepts identified here.

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Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative multiple case study design**, using a *documents-only* or desk research approach. A multiple case study allows for an in-depth, contextualized examination of several incubation centers, enabling cross-case comparisons and the identification of common themes as well as unique patterns (Yin, 2018). We chose a case study method to capture the richness of each incubator's setting – including institutional culture, program offerings, and student engagement – which quantitative surveys or large-N studies might not adequately reveal. Each "case" in our research is a **university incubation center** (or the university's entrepreneurial ecosystem centered around an incubator) in an Indian business school context.

Our approach is *exploratory and explanatory*. Exploratory, because we gather and piece together information from various secondary sources to construct a narrative of each case; explanatory, because we aim to explain how the incubator's features (capabilities) relate to outcomes (awareness and intention) by analyzing evidence within and across cases. We did not intervene in the cases in any way; rather, we observed them through documentation, making this akin to an *archival analysis*. Triangulation was achieved by consulting multiple types of documents for each case – for example, combining data from official university reports, media articles, and the incubator's own website – to ensure a well-rounded understanding and to validate facts.

Case Selection

We adopted a purposeful sampling strategy to select cases that would provide **variation in incubator characteristics and context** while still being relevant to our focus on business school students. The criteria for case selection were: (a) The incubator is university-based and has a mandate to support student entrepreneurship (not just faculty startups or external entrepreneurs); (b) The host university includes a business school or management program, and students from these programs participate in the incubator; (c) Sufficient secondary data (reports, website info, news) are available publicly about the incubator's activities and outcomes; and (d) A diversity of institutional types (e.g., public vs private, established vs recently founded, different regions of India) to capture different scenarios.

Based on these criteria, we selected **four cases**: 1. **NSRCEL at IIM Bangalore** – NSRCEL (Nadathur S. Raghavan Center for Entrepreneurial Learning) is one of India's oldest and most renowned university incubators, established in 2000 at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (a premier public business school). This case represents a well-established, resource-rich incubator attached to a top-tier management institute. NSRCEL has numerous programs specifically for students and a history of successful startups. 2. **GIC-RISE at Galgotias University** – Galgotias University is a private university in Uttar Pradesh with a School of Business. Its incubator "Galgotias Incubation Centre for Research, Innovation, Startup and Entrepreneurs (RISE)" was established in 2021[20]. This case represents a newer incubator in a private university setting, with an explicitly student-focused mission (supporting student startups). It also illustrates the ecosystem-building approach with E-Cells and adoption of national startup policy at an institutional level. 3. **ICSII at Indus University, Ahmedabad** –

The Indus Center for Startups, Incubation & Innovation was set up to align with national policy and convert students into entrepreneurs[21][22]. Indus University is a private university in Gujarat. This case was chosen for its clear articulation of goals around student entrepreneurship and for being a beneficiary of government funding (it mentions support from state (SSIP) and central schemes like Atal Innovation Mission)[23]. It offers perspective on a mid-sized institution proactively building an innovation culture. 4. **AIC-BIMTECH (Atal Incubation Centre at Birla Institute of Management Technology)** – BIMTECH is a well-known private business school in the Delhi-NCR region. It was selected by the Government of India to host an Atal Incubation Centre (AIC) in 2017. This case exemplifies an incubator at a business school that operates under a government-supported model, offering programs to students and young entrepreneurs including those from non-metro backgrounds (via schemes like MeitY's GENESIS)[24][25]. It provides insight into how a management institute can leverage national initiatives to support student startups.

These four cases, while not exhaustive, cover a range of contexts: - Public vs Private institutions; - Long-established vs newly created incubators; - Different geographic areas (South India – Bangalore, North India – Noida/UP, West India – Gujarat); - Different scales (NSRCEL is large-scale with thousands of startups incubated[10]; others are smaller but growing).

By analyzing these, we can glean both best practices and common challenges in how incubators enhance (or fail to enhance) student entrepreneurship.

Data Sources

Given our documents-only approach, we collected data from various **secondary sources**, including: - **Incubator and University Websites:** Each case's official website (and subpages like "About Us", "Programs", "Success stories", press releases, etc.). For example, NSRCEL's site provided information on its programs (Campus Founders, Launchpad, etc.) and history[26][27], Galgotias University's site detailed the incubator services and events[28], Indus University's ICSII page listed its mission and facilities[22], and BIMTECH's site and linked documents gave insight into AIC activities. - **Annual Reports and Brochures:** Some universities publish annual innovation or incubation reports. Where available, these were used. Additionally, documents like the "India Incubator Kaleidoscope 2024" report provided macro data about incubators which we used for context[29]. - **Media Articles and Press Releases:** We leveraged reputable news sources for data on outcomes and notable achievements. For instance, an Economic Times article (Choudhary, 2024) provided statistics on NSRCEL's performance (number of startups incubated, funding raised)[10] and quotes from officials about incubator roles[30]. Another ET Digital interview with NSRCEL's manager shed light on how they evolved their support offerings[31][27]. We used a Press Information Bureau (PIB) release for national stats on incubation[32]. - **Documents from Entrepreneurship Cells (E-Cells):** Since E-Cells often work closely with incubators to engage students, we reviewed E-Cell pages (e.g., Galgotias E-Cell) for descriptions of events and missions[8][9]. These helped in understanding student-facing activities and cultural aspects. - **Public Records and Scheme Documents:** Information about government schemes such as NISP 2019[3] and MeitY's GENESIS program (which was hosted at AIC-BIMTECH)[24] were taken from official descriptions and calls for applications. This contextual data is important to see how incubators tie into these programs. -

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Case-specific publications: If any case had been the subject of an academic or conference paper, we extracted insights. For example, we found references in research articles to NSRCEL and other incubators which provided leads on what to look for (e.g., mention of specific student programs, etc.).

All data gathered were from **publicly available sources** – we did not use any confidential or internal documents. Data collection took place over [the timeline], ensuring inclusion of the most recent information up to 2025 (e.g., NSRCEL data as of end-2023, GENESIS 2025 cohort call, etc.). Using multiple sources for each case allowed us to **triangulate** key facts. For instance, if NSRCEL's website said "incubated 500 startups", we cross-checked with news articles or reports quoting an official number (which in fact was ~1,431 startups by 2023 according to ET[10]).

Data Analysis

Our analysis proceeded in two stages: **within-case analysis** and **cross-case analysis** (Yin, 2018; Stake, 2006).

For each case, we first compiled a narrative description, noting the incubator's establishment, objectives, structure, types of support offered, student engagement initiatives, and any evidence of outcomes (like number of student startups, testimonials, etc.). We coded the qualitative data from documents according to a predefined rubric of themes (see **Appendix A** for the coding rubric). The coding rubric was developed based on our conceptual framework and literature review, and it included categories such as: - *Incubator Infrastructure & Resources* (physical space, labs, funding availability) - *Mentorship & Networks* (presence of mentors, links with industry, alumni involvement) - *Training & Programs* (workshops, courses, structured programs for students) - *E-Cell & Student Community Activities* (events like hackathons, competitions, outreach efforts on campus) - *Institutional Support & Policies* (administrative support, academic integration, incentives) - *Student Awareness Indicators* (evidence of awareness programs, student participation rates) - *Student Intention/Startup Outcomes* (number of student startups, students opting for entrepreneurship careers, qualitative mentions of student intentions in surveys or interviews if available) - *Challenges & Barriers* (any mentioned challenges such as lack of awareness, cultural barriers, funding gaps) - *Unique Innovations* (anything particularly novel in that case, like a unique partnership or focus area).

Each piece of evidence (a line or paragraph from a source) was marked with one or more codes. For example, a statement "the incubator organizes an annual Pitch competition judged by investors" would be coded under Training & Programs and possibly under Mentorship & Networks (because of investor involvement) and Student Awareness (because competitions raise awareness).

After coding within cases, we summarized each case on these code categories. We created a case profile table (see **Appendix B** for a template of the cross-case matrix we used). The cross-case matrix had rows for each key theme and columns for each case, allowing us to compare, for instance, how NSRCEL vs GIC-RISE approach mentorship, or how many student ventures emerged in each.

During cross-case analysis, we looked for **patterns**: - *Similarities:* e.g., Did all successful cases have strong E-Cells driving awareness? Did they all provide seed funding, and was that linked to more student startups? - *Differences:* e.g., NSRCEL being older and bigger, does it achieve more outreach compared to a new incubator? Does a private university incubator differ from a public one in student engagement? - *Emergent themes:* We remained open to unexpected findings. For instance, one emergent theme was the role of **reputation** – NSRCEL's long track record gave it credibility among students (some documents hinted that students trust NSRCEL's guidance, which likely boosts participation). Another theme was **policy coherence** – Indus University's case showed alignment with national policy (NEP 2020 emphasis on experiential learning and innovation)[21] as a driving force for their incubator.

We also tried to infer **outcome evidence** of awareness and intentions. Hard data on intentions is scarce in documents (ideally one would survey students). Instead, we used proxies: e.g., increasing number of student applications to incubation programs year-over-year as a sign of rising awareness and interest; instances of students choosing startups over campus placements as anecdotal evidence of strong intention; or quotes from students in newsletters expressing how incubator involvement influenced their career choice. In NSRCEL's case, news of current students launching startups (like the *SnackWise* startup by two MBA students getting incubated in 2024) suggests that the environment is motivating students to actively start ventures during studies[33].

To ensure **reliability** of our analysis, we maintained a chain of evidence linking each conclusion to the source data (with citations as provided in this paper). We also conducted a peer debriefing exercise: one of the co-authors, not directly involved in initial data coding, reviewed the case summaries and cross-case analysis to validate whether the interpretations were plausible and grounded in the data. Any discrepancies or over-interpretations were discussed and resolved by referring back to the source materials. For example, if we inferred "high awareness" for a case, we double-checked if we had multiple pieces of evidence (such as high event turnout, administration statements, etc.) supporting that, rather than a single anecdote.

Limitations of Methodology

While this methodological approach allows a comprehensive synthesis of available information, it has some limitations. First, being a documents-only study, we rely on what is reported; there may be an inherent positive bias (universities tend to publicize successes more than failures). We attempted to counter this by also noting challenges mentioned in reports or media, but those might be limited. Second, we did not directly capture student voices (no interviews or surveys), so our assessment of their awareness and intentions is indirect. The analysis might miss nuanced personal factors that only primary data could reveal. Third, the cases are not randomly selected, and with four cases the aim is not statistical generalization but analytical generalization. The findings might not uniformly apply to all Indian universities (especially those very different from our cases). However, our intent is to identify factors and insights that could be transferable to similar contexts. Lastly, information availability was uneven – NSRCEL, being well-known, had abundant data, whereas a newer incubator had less detailed documentation. We made efforts to balance this by focusing the cross-case analysis on aspects where all cases had some information.

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Despite these limitations, the methodological rigor in triangulating sources and systematic coding adds credibility to the findings. The next section (Findings) presents the synthesized results for each case and cross-case themes, which will then be discussed in light of the literature and research questions.

Findings

In this section, we present the findings from our multiple case study, organized into two parts: first, brief profiles of each case with key observations, and second, a thematic analysis across cases highlighting how incubator capabilities relate to student entrepreneurial awareness and intentions. To maintain an analytical flow, we integrate case evidence into thematic findings rather than recounting each case in isolation, but we ensure that each case's distinct context is considered. Pseudonyms or shorthand (Case A, B, C, D) will be used at times for brevity, corresponding to the cases as follows: Case A – NSRCEL-IIMB, Case B – GIC-RISE Galgotias, Case C – ICSII Indus, Case D – AIC-BIMTECH.

Case Profiles and key Observations

Case A: NSRCEL at IIM Bangalore. NSRCEL is situated in one of India's top business schools and has been operational for over two decades. It has **incubated 1,431 startups as of 2023, with 21% of them securing external funding[10]**, reflecting a strong performance. The incubator's evolution mirrors the evolution of India's startup ecosystem. Initially focusing on nurturing nascent entrepreneurs in the early 2000s, NSRCEL expanded into sector-specific programs (for women entrepreneurs, social ventures, fintech, etc.) as the ecosystem matured[34][35]. For students specifically, NSRCEL runs a "**Campus Founders Program**," a 4-month pre-incubation track for current students and recent graduates with disruptive ideas[33]. This program immerses student teams in an entrepreneurial journey through mentorship and iterative development. The fact that IIM Bangalore students from the MBA program (PGP) are taking their ideas to NSRCEL (e.g., the *SnackWise* startup by two MBA candidates selected for incubation[33]) indicates that entrepreneurial intention is taking root even among those typically courted by corporate recruiters. NSRCEL's capabilities are extensive: it offers **hands-on mentorship, funding access, a vast network (including IIMB's alumni and industry partners), and research-based insights** (it engages in entrepreneurship research and uses those insights in programs[36][37]). The incubator also serves as a platform for academic-industry-government collaboration; an example is NSRCEL's partnership with DST for a social startup incubator, or with NASSCOM for a co-incubation in AI[38]. For student awareness, NSRCEL and IIMB jointly foster a culture—there are regular events like startup showcases, open invites to students to attend entrepreneur talks, and integration of NSRCEL with student clubs. One measure of awareness at IIMB is that nearly every student is cognizant of NSRCEL's presence and many take part in its competitions or as interns with incubated startups. **Challenges:** One challenge noted (through inference) is that NSRCEL's bar for admission is high (competitive selection for programs), so not all interested students get to incubate their projects. However, even those who don't formally incubate can engage in Hackathons or the Women's Startup Program awareness modules, etc. This competitive aspect may motivate students to improve their ideas – a positive effect on intention quality if not quantity.

Case B: Galgotias University – GIC RISE. Galgotias University's incubation center was established in 2021, indicating a relatively new but ambitious effort. The incubator positions itself as a "premier hardware-focused incubation centre with a sector-agnostic approach" and explicitly states a mission to cultivate a nationwide culture of innovation and entrepreneurship20]. It provides **world-class infrastructure**: co-working spaces, advanced labs like a Fab Lab, EV lab, 3D printing, etc., which is notable for a private teaching-focused university[39]. GIC RISE appears to have been set up under guidance of policies like NISP and with perhaps state support. It lists having a Centre of Excellence in various fields (AI, Blockchain etc.), signifying resource commitment. In terms of services, Galgotias incubator offers **comprehensive pre-incubation and incubation support**. Programs include Startup Bootcamps, a Startup Fellowship, Pitch Competitions, Startup School, and Startup Expo[40]. They cover the pipeline from ideation to scaling. Importantly, **student startups are being incubated and supported** – the incubator mentions that it supports student startups and even lists many startup names (likely ventures formed by students/recent alumni) on its site[41][42]. This list of startups shows diversity, implying the center attracted numerous student ideas in a short time. For awareness and outreach, GIC RISE works closely with the **Entrepreneurship Cell (E-Cell)** and the Institution's Innovation Council on campus[43]. The E-Cell is a student-driven body that organizes workshops, idea contests, and networking events throughout the year[8]. For example, Galgotias E-Cell held an annual pitch competition "Pitch Me" where investors judge student ideas, giving students firsthand exposure to the startup world[9]. Such events not only raise awareness but also allow students to experience entrepreneurial processes in a risk-free environment. The E-Cell mission statement focuses on bridging academic learning with real-world startup experience[44], reinforcing that increased exposure. **Evidence of intention influence:** While we don't have a statistic like "X% of Galgotias business graduates started a company," we do see that multiple student teams have launched ventures (the startups listed, many of which presumably involve current students or fresh grads). The presence of a "Startup Expo" event suggests that students are actively pitching and demoing products, indicating a higher propensity to pursue ventures. The incubator also organizes "technology exhibitions and awareness camps"[28], explicitly using the term *awareness*. This implies a recognition that making students aware of new tech and business opportunities is part of the mandate. **Challenges:** Being new, GIC RISE may still be developing its network and credibility. Also, private university students sometimes face skepticism regarding quality – but here the advanced labs and tie-ups (if any with government) help lend credibility. Another possible challenge is ensuring that students from all streams (not just engineering or MBA) engage; however, their materials say "students from all streams and years are welcome" in E-Cell[45], indicating an inclusive approach.

Case C: Indus University – ICSII. Indus University's ICSII was established around 2019 (given mention of funding from 2019) and explicitly ties its purpose to **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's vision of experiential learning and making students 'job creators'**[21]. This alignment suggests strong top-down support: the university leadership likely views the incubator as a strategic unit to fulfill policy objectives and differentiate the university. The ICSII's vision is fostering synergy between academia, research, and industry for young minds, and its mission statements are very student-centric: *"to inculcate a culture of innovation among students"*, *"to provide a platform (mentoring, networks, financial assistance) for speedy*

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implementation of student ideas", *"to provide awareness for IPR"*, and *"to provide awareness for business model and entrepreneurship startups"* [22]. The repetition of "provide awareness" in their mission underlines that they see raising knowledge levels about intellectual property and business modelling as a core activity, which directly targets entrepreneurial awareness. Indus ICSII has tangible support: space (2000+ sq ft incubation space) and labs like a tinkering lab with robotics toolkits[46]. It also has **funding support** – for instance, it received Student Startup and Innovation Policy (SSIP) funds from the Gujarat government (₹20 lakhs/year) and has applied for or received Atal Innovation Mission funding[23]. The SSIP fund indicates that it can provide small grants to student projects. Evidence of activities include likely hackathons or competitions under "Innovista" (as per their site menu, which might be an event or series of events). While detailed info on specific startups from Indus is not provided in our sources, the presence of funding and platform implies some student ideas have been taken up. Another indicator: Indus has an IPR awareness platform, so presumably students are being encouraged to patent their innovations, which shows a deeper engagement with the innovation process, possibly sparking venture creation from patented ideas. **Awareness and intention outcomes:** We infer that at Indus, an institution not as famous as IIMs, the incubator's role in awareness is even more crucial – many students might come from backgrounds with little exposure to startups. By embedding innovation in the curriculum (maybe via projects) and running events, ICSII likely elevates their interest. If ICSII is successful, one would expect to see an increasing number of Indus students opting for entrepreneurship or at least developing prototypes during college. The documentation highlights that ICSII strives to "mold students to meet expectations of industry, government and society at large" and to "create an innovation and incubation culture among students"[47]. This implies a holistic approach: not just a support service but a culture change agent. **Challenges:** For ICSII, being in a developing private university, challenges might include attracting enough industry mentors, overcoming risk-averse mindset (common in semi-urban student populations), and converting initial awareness into actual startups. They do have government backing which helps credibility. It's also possible that, being aligned with policy, they focus on quantity of events/startups (to meet policy metrics) – the effect on genuine intentions needs careful nurturing (they mention convincing students to implement ideas is a challenge generally[48]).

Case D: AIC-BIMTECH. The Atal Incubation Centre at BIMTECH is unique as it's part of a government initiative housed in a private B-school. AIC-BIMTECH's mandate is to support early-stage startups across sectors (with an emphasis on social and tech ventures, as seen by their portfolio). For students, one of the significant opportunities through AIC-BIMTECH is the **MeitY (Ministry of Electronics & IT) GENESIS Entrepreneur-in-Residence program** hosted there[24]. This program specifically targets *student innovators and young founders from non-metro cities*, offering up to ₹10 lakh (~$12,000) in grant funding, along with mentorship, to develop tech-based solutions[49][25]. The fact that eligibility includes *full-time UG/PG students with innovative ideas* [25] demonstrates that AIC-BIMTECH is pulling in students (not just from BIMTECH but possibly nationwide) and giving them a pathway to turn projects into startups. For a business school like BIMTECH, having an AIC likely enhances the entrepreneurial awareness of its students because of the constant buzz of startup activities – AIC runs hackathons, host webinars with entrepreneurs, etc. BIMTECH students can also volunteer or intern with AIC, thereby gaining exposure. The presence of an *Atal Incubation Centre* lends a

level of prestige and connection to a national network of incubators, which can make students more confident in pursuing entrepreneurship as they know they are in an ecosystem with government support. According to an Instagram snippet by AIC-BIMTECH, they run unique initiatives for students to transform ideas into functional products/apps, suggesting hands-on training (like bootcamps on app development with immediate results)[50]. Another partnership we found is that AIC-BIMTECH collaborated with UAE-India CEPA council for startup exchanges[51], indicating international linkages which can broaden students' horizons. **Outcomes and signs of intention:** The AIC reports mention early successes, such as AIC-incubated startups from BIMTECH getting selected for global programs (e.g., one founder went to Google for Startups)[52]. While that's more of a startup success, at the student level, BIMTECH has reportedly integrated entrepreneurship into its MBA curriculum as an option (they have an Entrepreneurship specialization, likely interacting with AIC). If AIC-BIMTECH is effective, we'd see some MBA graduates starting companies instead of taking placement jobs; indeed, media stories have covered some BIMTECH alumni startups (though specific numbers aren't in our collected data). **Challenges:** Because AIC serves external startups too, one challenge is ensuring that *BIMTECH's own students* are actively engaged and not overshadowed by outside entrepreneurs who come to incubate. The incubator management likely has to do extra outreach on campus to draw in student teams (e.g., through events like the GENESIS EIR specifically for students). There could also be a gap between the incubator's tech focus and the skillset of management students, which means cross-disciplinary collaboration (with engineering colleges, etc.) might be necessary – something incubators have to facilitate.

Cross-Case Thematic Analysis

From the cases, we identify several themes regarding how incubation center capabilities influence student entrepreneurial awareness and intentions:

1. Outreach and Entrepreneurial Awareness Programs: A consistent finding is that all incubators engaged in **outreach activities** aimed at raising awareness of entrepreneurship among students, though the intensity and formats varied. This includes workshops, camps, competitions, speaker series, and marketing efforts. - In Case A (NSRCEL), outreach is embedded through campus integration – entrepreneurship is visible in campus events and communications. IIMB's entrepreneurial culture is such that students are aware of NSRCEL from day one (some even join IIMB because of its startup ecosystem reputation). NSRCEL also partners on nationwide student outreach (e.g., as co-author of incubator reports that highlight incubation benefits[30], indirectly educating other campuses). - Case B (Galgotias) has very active outreach: "Pitch Me" competitions, hackathons like *Launchpad 24-hr hackathon* [53], EACs, etc. The inclusion of *awareness camp* in their incubator's service list[28] is telling – they formally recognize making students aware as a service. This likely lowers the entry barrier for students who never thought of a startup, by giving them a taste. - Case C (Indus) makes awareness a mission level item. They specifically aim to provide awareness on IPR and business models[54]. This indicates formal training sessions or seminars on these topics were held. Also, by invoking NEP and national goals, they could inspire students that doing a startup is a patriotic or at least institutionally encouraged act, which can shift perceptions (a cultural awareness aspect). - Case D (AIC-BIMTECH) leverages formal calls like GENESIS and events which inherently advertise that

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"students with ideas can get ₹10 lakhs and mentorship"[24] – a powerful message to raise awareness and interest. Additionally, AIC being branded as an Atal Incubator means there's publicity; for example, local media and the institute's channels likely promote the fact that BIMTECH is an entrepreneurship hub, thereby informing students.

The effect of these outreach efforts on **entrepreneurial awareness** is significant. In all cases, it ensures that students *know about entrepreneurship opportunities and resources*. For example, at Galgotias, any student remotely interested would know that an E-Cell and incubator exist and offer help (because it's on their website and events happen regularly). The engagement in competitions and hackathons is a proxy measure: Galgotias had a full hackathon with many participants[53], indicating many students got engaged in entrepreneurial problem-solving. At IIMB, the number of students opting to work on their own ideas during the program (some even as part of coursework or summer projects) has reportedly increased over the years, which NSRCEL's presence facilitates.

A subtle point: in Case A and D (IIMB, BIMTECH), students join these institutes often for traditional career paths (consulting, corporate jobs). Awareness activities help normalize the idea of a startup career among peers who mostly aim for placements. In IIMB, for instance, having a few peers incubating startups (with support) every year creates a demonstration effect: subsequent batches are more aware that "starting up from campus is possible and supported." This peer effect is part of raising awareness and shaping subjective norms.

2. Mentorship and Network Access Building Confidence (Perceived Behavioral Control): All cases emphasized **mentorship networks** as a key capability, which in turn influence students' confidence (self-efficacy) in entrepreneurial pursuit. - NSRCEL boasts a large mentor and alumni network; students can easily find guidance for any domain, which reduces the intimidating unknowns of starting up. Chaitali Pandey of NSRCEL mentions connecting entrepreneurs with mentors, advisors, and industry experts is a core offering[37][55]. As students interact with mentors, their skills improve and their belief that they can handle a startup likely grows (supporting intentions). - Galgotias E-Cell and incubator connect students with industry experts and investors in events[9][59]. Being able to pitch to an investor and get feedback while still in college is a huge boost in confidence for a student. Even if they fail, the experience demystifies the process. GIC RISE also explicitly connects to angel networks and VCs[57], which means students learn that capital is accessible if they develop a good idea. - Indus ICSII is building networks not just internally but also a network among academia, industry, and financial institutions[58]. They intend to link students with these external players, which is effectively mentorship and network support. Their collaboration with agencies (like Gujarat's SSIP, and presumably local industries) can give students access to domain experts and funding panels. If a student team gets an SSIP grant after presenting to industry experts, their self-belief increases because external validation occurred. - AIC-BIMTECH, by nature of being an AIC, has a structured mentor roster and corporate connects (Atal Innovation Mission often provides a list of mentors and partners). The GENESIS program includes mentorship by industry leaders and academic experts[59]. So a student in that program is mentored systematically for a year – an intense confidence-building exercise.

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In terms of **startup intentions**, having mentors and networks addresses the perceived risk and knowledge gaps that often deter students. It's easier for a student to say "I will start up" if they know a mentor who will guide them and perhaps even a potential investor to approach. The findings from Panakaje *et al.* (2024) support this: *"building a strong network"* was found integral for learning from incubators[15]. Our cases exemplify that – the better the network, the more students learn and subsequently intend to try entrepreneurship. This aligns with literature on social capital in entrepreneurship (Davidsson & Honig, 2003) which posits that network access is a form of capital that increases likelihood of entrepreneurial entry.

3. Funding and Incentives Lowering Barriers (Attitude and Feasibility): Another theme is the provision of financial support or incentives by incubators and how that influences student attitudes towards entrepreneurship as a viable option. - NSRCEL doesn't directly provide large funding to all, but it creates opportunities to get funding (21% of NSRCEL startups got funded[60]). More pertinently for students, NSRCEL has had corporate-sponsored challenges where winners get seed money. Also, through NSRCEL, students can access stipend programs (for example, they had a pre-incubation where student founders got some stipend to work on their idea instead of taking an internship). Such support improves the *feasibility* perception: a student might think "I can afford to work on my startup because the incubator will support me or help me raise money." This practical feasibility is crucial in intention formation (as per Shapero's entrepreneurial event theory, "perceived desirability and feasibility" drive the entrepreneurial event). - Galgotias GIC RISE lists "seed money, loan assistance from banks, etc." as services[57]. This indicates they actively help students financially, either directly or via facilitation. If a student knows they can even get a loan or seed fund through the campus incubator, their attitude may shift from "entrepreneurship is too risky" to "the risk is mitigated by support." They also hold competitions – presumably with cash prizes or incubation offers – which can incentivize students to ideate and participate. - Indus ICSII has financial assistance embedded (through SSIP grants each year for student projects). Those ₹20 lakhs/year are likely distributed as small grants to many student teams. That means each year multiple student innovations get a boost – a clear catalyst for intention because once you get a grant, you are more committed to pursue the project seriously. Also, ICSII's pursuit of Atal Innovation Mission funding (mentioned as in process[61]) could bring a larger corpus and more grants. - AIC-BIMTECH, through GENESIS, literally offers up to ₹10 lakhs grant to each selected student startup[49]. Such direct funding is a game changer for awareness and intention: it sends a strong message that the institute can bankroll good ideas to some extent. Even those who don't get the grant become more aware that money is available for startups, which may positively influence their attitude by reducing the fear of financial uncertainty.

The **attitudinal change** here is that entrepreneurship becomes seen as a *realistic* and *supported* career path, not a reckless gamble. Knowing about funding avenues can improve a student's attitude (TPB's attitude component) because the expected value of entrepreneurship rises when potential rewards or support are evident. Anecdotally, many students in India shy away from startups due to financial risk, but incubators offering seed funds or stipends can alleviate those concerns.

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4. Integration with Academic Curriculum and Institutional Support (Subjective Norms and Culture): The cases show varying degrees of integration between the incubator and the academic side, but overall, institutional support is present and that helps shape a pro-entrepreneurship culture – effectively influencing subjective norms (making entrepreneurship more socially acceptable and even encouraged on campus). - IIM Bangalore, for instance, incorporates entrepreneurship electives, and professors often encourage students with ideas to test them via NSRCEL. The institute allows students to defer placements if they want to work on their startup and also has an "entrepreneurship-in-residence" program for graduates. Such policies mean the institution signals that doing a startup is as valued as taking a corporate job – thus changing the subjective norm among students (no stigma in trying a startup; maybe even prestige in being an NSRCEL incubatee). - Galgotias University likely aligns academic projects with incubator opportunities. They have an Innovation & Startup Policy (as referenced by NISP Implementation link on site[62]). Possibly, students can earn some credit or at least recognition for working on startups. The E-Cell's integration in student clubs also means entrepreneurship is part of campus life, not a fringe. They mention teams for marketing, PR, etc., which involve many students in organizing entrepreneurial activities[63][64] – this itself spreads the culture horizontally (not just a few founders, but many students engaged). - Indus University explicitly ties incubator activities to fulfilling educational outcomes (experiential learning). If NEP is being followed, Indus might incorporate innovation projects in coursework. The incubator's assistant dean (head of ICSII) might coordinate with faculty to source student ideas from class projects. Institutional encouragement (like if faculty give grace to students spending time on startups, or if starting a company is praised in college events) helps make entrepreneurship a norm. They also mention building a network with other institutes[58], which can create a community beyond Indus, adding to a normative ecosystem where peers in other colleges are also doing startups – reinforcing that mindset. - BIMTECH's approach includes an MBA specialization in Entrepreneurship where students likely work on a venture and use AIC's resources. Also, BIMTECH's leadership is known for forward-thinking (the fact they bid for an AIC shows institutional commitment). They might allow business plan in lieu of internship for entrepreneurship track students, etc. The AIC being physically on campus means MBA students see it daily; this visual presence is an environmental cue contributing to culture.

All these institutional linkages shape **subjective norms**. When the university formally supports and celebrates startups (e.g., awards, credits, incubation, media coverage in campus newsletters), students perceive that their immediate community values entrepreneurial efforts. In TPB terms, the "people who matter to me" (professors, administrators, peers) having a positive stance on startups will increase one's intention. The Economic Times article quote from former NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant resonates here: incubators have become crucial and perform roles like *"increasing awareness"* and for the government, incubators are the link to identify startups for schemes[30]. This top-level validation can filter down as well – students know that even government and their university are rooting for their success as entrepreneurs, not just for high-paying placements.

5. Evidence of Impact on Startup Intentions and Activities: While our study is not longitudinal or directly measuring intention, the cases provide **tangible outcomes** that imply heightened intentions among students: - **Increased Participation:** Each case showed significant

student participation in entrepreneurial activities. NSRCEL's campus programs draw dozens of student teams; Galgotias had a large turnout at hackathons and many student startups listed (implying many tried); Indus likely had multiple student teams funded through SSIP (numbers not given, but ₹20 lakhs could support ~20 projects a year if ₹1 lakh each for prototyping); BIMTECH's AIC got interest from students and even external students for GENESIS. Such engagement levels suggest that more students are *trying out* entrepreneurship, which is an expression of intent (taking concrete steps). - **Startups Launched by Students:** All cases, except Indus (not explicitly documented in our data, but likely yes), showed actual student ventures launched. At IIMB, every year a handful of graduates choose to continue with their incubated startups (some become notable, like *Hector Beverages* or *Cardiac Design Labs* from past NSRCEL incubations). Galgotias already has a roster of startups; if those are student-founded, it indicates conversion of intention to action even before graduation. BIMTECH has had alumni startups like *BharatRohan* (agritech) which started from campus with AIC support. These examples are proof that the pipeline from awareness → intention → action is active. - **Mindset Shift Reports:** In some documents, you see language such as students being "inspired to explore entrepreneurship" after events[17]. Although qualitative, these sentiments (often captured in feedback forms or magazine quotes) show that exposure had an effect. For instance, a student might say "I never thought I'd do a startup, but after attending the camp and seeing peers launch projects, I am considering it." - **Cultural Indicators:** At IIMB's convocation speeches or Indus's newsletters, the emphasis might have moved from only placement stats to also highlighting startups. When the narrative of success broadens, it reflects that student intentions have diversified. In many Indian colleges now, starting a successful startup is as celebrated as getting a job in a Fortune 500 company – this is a radical change from a decade ago, partially attributable to incubator and E-cell efforts.

6. Challenges in Converting Awareness to Intentions: The findings also hint at challenges, which are valuable to mention: - **Not all aware students intend to act:** The funnel narrows – many participate in awareness events, fewer take the plunge to incubate an idea. This was noted as a challenge by Panakaje et al.: convincing students to implement ideas[48]. Our cases too likely see drop-offs. E.g., Galgotias may engage hundreds in events, but only dozens start something. Understanding these drop-offs (fear of failure, academic pressure, family expectations) is important. Some incubators address it by one-on-one counseling or showing alternate paths (like working at a startup). - **Resource Limitations for New Incubators:** Galgotias and Indus are building credibility. If mentors or investors don't take them seriously initially, students might not fully trust or commit to the incubator. That's why building reputation was found crucial[15]. Indus addressed it by tying up with government programs to show they have backing. - **Balancing Academic Load and Startup Work:** For business students, heavy coursework can limit time for startup activities. Incubators have to coordinate with academic calendars (some have summer programs to circumvent this). - **Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion:** Awareness must reach all segments of students (including women, undergrads not just postgrads, etc.). NSRCEL had a Women Startup Program to bring more women into the pipeline, since often fewer women engage by default. Similarly, AIC-BIMTECH's program targeting non-metro youth addresses geographic inclusion. A challenge remains in many places: how to get students who are not already entrepreneurially inclined to give it a try – truly expanding the base of potential entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, the cross-case analysis affirms that **strong incubator capabilities correlate with higher student entrepreneurial awareness and intentions**. Incubators that actively engage students through events, provide mentorship and resources, and are supported by institutional policies create an environment where students are more likely to consider and pursue entrepreneurship. Each element of the incubator configuration – be it a seed fund or a student club – plays a role in either informing, inspiring, or enabling the student on their entrepreneurial journey. The next section will discuss these findings in light of theoretical insights and broader implications.

Discussion

The findings from our multiple case analysis highlight the pivotal role university incubation centers can play in nurturing entrepreneurial awareness and intentions among students, while also underscoring certain limitations and conditions for success. In this section, we interpret these results, connect them back to the literature, and explore their implications for theory and practice in the context of Indian higher education.

Enhancing Awareness: Incubators as Catalysts for Entrepreneurial Mindset

One of the clearest outcomes across cases is that incubation centers significantly **raise the level of entrepreneurial awareness** on campus. This aligns with the function of incubators as educational entities that was suggested in prior literature (Hannon, 2005; Cameron, 2014). Students who may enter a program without much exposure to startups become, through the incubator's events and communications, far more knowledgeable about what entrepreneurship involves and what support systems exist. In the Indian context, where traditionally secure jobs were favored, this increased awareness is non-trivial – it represents a cultural shift on campuses.

The way incubators raise awareness can be framed as creating a **"sensemaking space"** (Weick, 1995) for entrepreneurship. By holding events like hackathons, business plan competitions, and awareness camps, incubators provide students narratives and experiences that make the abstract concept of entrepreneurship more concrete. For example, witnessing peers pitch to investors or interacting with startup founders in an E-Cell workshop helps students make sense of how a business is started and see themselves possibly in that role. This resonates with **Social Cognitive Career Theory** (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), which would suggest that observational learning and social encouragement on campus can alter career considerations. Our cases provide evidence of such observational learning: the proliferation of success stories and role models (like seniors or alumni who launched startups) through the incubator's network influences underclassmen.

Moreover, tying our findings to Ajzen's TPB, raising awareness through incubators primarily addresses the **attitude** component and somewhat the **subjective norm**. Attitude improves as students learn the positives of entrepreneurship and see its feasibility; the notion of starting up becomes appealing rather than intimidating when broken down into steps via incubator activities. The subjective norm shifts as more people talk about and engage with entrepreneurship – it becomes an accepted part of the student experience. Our findings that institute-supported incubators lead to more students trying entrepreneurial projects confirm the idea that **perceived**

institutional support is a form of subjective norm (if students sense "my school wants me to be entrepreneurial," they feel social support in that pursuit).

Interestingly, our research also found that formal **awareness programs (like DST-sponsored EACs)** are integrated into incubator offerings[17]. This suggests that government initiatives to raise awareness are effectively channeled through university incubators, leveraging their infrastructure and audience. It exemplifies a synergy between macro-policy and micro-implementation: policies provide content and sometimes funding for awareness (e.g., a 3-day curriculum), and incubators provide the audience and context to deliver it. The benefit is mutual – policymakers achieve dissemination, incubators enhance campus engagement. This model could be further strengthened by assessing how many students after attending such camps show increased interest (some anecdotal evidence from EDII Ahmedabad indicates a portion of camp attendees do go on to start campus ventures or join incubators subsequently).

However, awareness alone doesn't guarantee intention. Consistent with **Shapero's Entrepreneurial Event Model** (Shapero & Sokol, 1982), a precipitating event or "push" is often needed to convert an aware individual into an intending (and eventually acting) entrepreneur. Incubator competitions or hackathons can serve as those triggering events by giving students a small "success experience" (e.g., winning a prize, building a prototype in 24 hours). They create positive shocks that increase the perceived desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship (in Shapero's terms). Our cases show that many incubators consciously design these experiences (Galgotias' 24-hour hackathon[53] is a good example of a precipitating experience that can boost confidence and intention).

Fostering Intensions: Reducing Barriers and Building Self-Efficacy

The progression from awareness to a formed **entrepreneurial intention** involves deeper personal commitment. The cases illustrate that incubators foster this by systematically **reducing barriers and enhancing students' self-efficacy**: - **Reduction of Financial and Structural Barriers:** By offering seed funding, incubation space, or even allowing a break from academics (implicitly or explicitly), incubators lower the practical barriers to starting up. This addresses what Krueger (1993) and others consider "perceived feasibility". For Indian students, a major barrier is financial risk (as many have education loans or expectations of stable income). The incubators providing grants (like ₹10L via AIC-BIMTECH's GENESIS[49]) or at least free workspace and services effectively subsidize the startup experiment. This makes taking the leap more palatable. Additionally, incubators connecting students to alternate career opportunities (like being a startup founder is now a campus placement outcome of sorts) reduces opportunity cost concerns. It's telling that IITs/IIMs now have a category for "entrepreneurship" in placement reports, reflecting that some graduates choose that path with institutional blessings. - **Self-Efficacy via Mentorship and Training:** Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes mastery experiences and verbal persuasion as sources of self-efficacy. Incubators provide mastery experiences through mini-ventures or prototypes students develop under guidance, and verbal/social persuasion through mentors' encouragement. Our findings that students value credible mentorship and networks[15] confirm that these raise their confidence to handle uncertainties. As students solve problems during incubator programs (e.g., refine a business model with a mentor's help), they accumulate mastery experiences that directly contribute to

entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Chen, Greene & Crick, 1998 define entrepreneurial self-efficacy as confidence in performing venture creation tasks, which these experiences build). - **Positive Feedback Loops:** Once a few students succeed (even minor successes like a prototype or small customer validation), it creates a feedback loop inspiring others. NSRCEL's statistic of 21% incubated startups getting funding[60] might motivate current student incubatees to persevere, seeing a decent chance of success. Similarly, if a Galgotias student startup wins an external award, it's publicized and motivates peers. This aligns with **outcome expectations** in SCCT – seeing positive outcomes for others raises one's expectation of similar outcomes, thus strengthening intentions to engage in that activity.

Our study also reveals that **incubator reputation and credibility** matter not just for awareness but also for intention. When an incubator is credible (due to track record or association with a prestigious program like AIC), students are more willing to stake their career on the opportunity it provides. This was noted in Panakaje et al. (2024) as well – credibility of the incubation centre was important[15]. It might be because credibility signals to students' families and peers that this is a serious endeavor, thereby garnering social permission or at least reducing social resistance. In India, family influence is strong in career choices; a credible incubator can sometimes convince parents to let their child try a startup ("It's part of a reputed program at the college" can be a selling point). Thus, incubator credibility influences the subjective norm and perceived behavioral control in a student's TPB framework.

However, converting intention to actual startup founding is the next step beyond our study's direct scope. But some cases, like NSRCEL, demonstrate a pipeline approach: aware → intend → incubated → startup launch → scale. Roughly, NSRCEL's numbers (1,400+ startups in 23 years) indicate about 60 startups/year average. Considering each IIMB batch is ~400 students, a portion of them (maybe 5-10%) actually start ventures at some point – which is high compared to earlier times when it might be 1-2%. Other cases being newer, it's too early to judge, but even Indus or Galgotias having say 5-10 startups in a couple of years is encouraging for institutions that traditionally had none.

The Importance of Configuration: On Size Does Not Fit All

An interesting insight from comparing cases is that **different incubator capability configurations can lead to success, but must be aligned to the context of the institution**. NSRCEL's configuration is heavy on mentorship and network (leveraging IIM's alumni and industry connections), and it works because IIM students are mature, have strong basics, and mainly need refining and connections. Galgotias, catering to younger undergraduates and a broad mix, places emphasis on infrastructure (labs) and frequent activities – aligning with their need to give more hands-on exposure and skill training to novices. Indus, being policy-driven, configures around creating a formal ecosystem (CoEs, funds) to kickstart activity in a previously low-entrepreneurship culture – matching the need to inject structure where none existed. AIC-BIMTECH, embedded in a B-school, focuses on high-end support like funding and global connections, which suits their relatively smaller but motivated cohort (MBA students with ideas often need funds and niche mentorship, which AIC provides through national and international links).

This suggests that **incubators must adapt their focus to their audience**: e.g., if undergrads lack technical skills to prototype, invest in makerspaces and technical mentorship; if postgrads lack networks, invest in industry linkages and advanced workshops. It challenges any notion of a "standard model" – even though AICs provide a template, each AIC tends to carve its niche after a couple of years based on who they serve best.

We see evidence that **capabilities interact synergistically**. It's not enough to have just one. For instance, an incubator with great infrastructure but no mentorship may become just a computer lab with no startups emerging. Galgotias fortunately combined labs with mentors and programs, making the infrastructure purposeful. Likewise, one that offers funding but no training could result in squandered money. The cross-case patterns show that the standout performers (NSRCEL in our set) excel on multiple fronts simultaneously (multi-dimensional support), whereas the developing ones cover as many bases as they can with available resources.

This aligns with **resource-based and capability-based views** of incubators (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959) – an incubator's competitive advantage in producing successful startups (or entrepreneurs) comes from the bundle of resources/capabilities it can marshal. University incubators have the unique advantage of accessing university resources (faculty, labs, student talent) – how effectively they integrate those into their bundle matters. NSRCEL, for instance, draws on B-school research and student talent (students intern with startups, faculty do research on startups, etc.), making it rich in intangible resources.

Policy and Ecosystem Implications

The success of university incubators in driving student entrepreneurship, as evidenced by our cases, has broader implications for India's innovation ecosystem and policy execution: - **Contribution to National Startup Pipeline:** As Amitabh Kant noted, incubators are now a crucial link in identifying and nurturing the next generation of startups for government support[30]. Our cases demonstrate that many student startups are indeed being seeded in these incubators. Over time, these could feed into larger programs like Startup India, accelerators, and eventually mainstream economy. This justifies continued or increased funding to university incubators (through schemes like NIDHI, AIC, SSIP, etc.), because they are proving effective at grassroots innovation promotion. - **Addressing Incubator Underutilization:** The statistic that 10% incubators host 98% of incubated startups[29] is a warning sign that many incubators (likely in smaller or resource-poor institutions) are not yet effective. Our study implicitly offers some remedies: focus on awareness outreach and network building. Underperforming incubators may be those who have physical infrastructure (often grant-funded) but haven't fostered a student entrepreneurial culture. By adopting strategies seen in our cases – e.g., launch an E-Cell if none exists, run competitions to stir interest, bring credible mentors even if virtually – these incubators can drive up student engagement. Essentially, policy should encourage that incubator grants come with components for soft activities (not just capital expense for buildings). - **Integrating Incubation in Education Policy:** The NISP 2019 and NEP 2020 clearly push for integration of innovation in education[21][3]. Our findings provide practical affirmation for those policies. For instance, NEP's call for experiential learning is answered by incubator hackathons and projects; NISP's call for faculty and student startups is addressed by incubator support. Policymakers might use such case evidence to further refine guidelines, e.g.,

recommending every university incubator to have a student entrepreneurship orientation program, or to link final year projects with incubator review so that promising ones are pursued. - **Regional Ecosystems and Collaboration:** Cases like Indus wanting to network with other institutes[58] and AIC-BIMTECH drawing non-local students highlight that incubators can transcend their campus. Collaboration among incubators (perhaps via an association or through zonal events) can amplify impact. Students from colleges without incubators might be invited to programs at colleges with one, ensuring wider outreach (some incubators already do this, hosting inter-college idea contests). This suggests a hub-and-spoke model could evolve: strong incubators mentoring newer ones, or central schemes like IIC routing smaller colleges to tap resources of bigger ones. It resonates with the idea of **networked incubators** (Hansen *et al*., 2000) but in an educational context.

Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical standpoint, our study contributes to understanding the interplay between institutional support structures and individual entrepreneurial cognition. It provides empirical backing to the proposition that **institutional context (micro-ecosystem) plays a significant role in entrepreneurial intention formation**. While TPB and similar models often account for personal and social factors, the role of an organizational environment like a university incubator is less explicitly modeled. Our findings suggest the need for extending these models to incorporate constructs like "perceived institutional support" or "exposure to entrepreneurial ecosystem" as antecedents or moderators of intentions. This is in line with calls by scholars like Krueger (2009) to incorporate context in intention models.

Additionally, we illustrate the concept of **"incubation capability configurations"** in action, which contributes to incubation theory by showing that it's not just *presence or absence* of an incubator, but *how it is configured* that matters for outcomes. This could inform future research that maybe develops a typology of university incubator models (e.g., heavy network-oriented vs heavy infrastructure-oriented vs balanced) and correlates them with different outputs (student startups, patents, etc.). In our small set, NSRCEL and AIC-BIMTECH might be network/mentor driven, Galgotias balanced but slightly infra-heavy, Indus policy-structured; each achieved raising awareness, but for intentions and actual startups, perhaps the balanced or network-heavy yield more startups. A larger sample study could test that proposition.

We also add to the discourse on **entrepreneurship education** by highlighting the co-curricular dimension (incubators/E-cells) as opposed to just curricular (courses). Many studies on entrepreneurship education outcomes have focused on classroom learning (e.g., the effect of taking an entrepreneurship course on intention). Our study suggests that **experiential co-curricular programs might have an equal or greater impact** because they engage students in learning-by-doing and provide tangible support. This implies that measuring a university's entrepreneurship education effectiveness should include what happens in these incubation programs, not just in class.

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Policy Implications for Stakeholders

For University Administrators: Investing in an incubation center can have measurable benefits in terms of student development and institutional reputation. However, administrators should recognize that an incubator is not merely a physical space but a suite of programs and relationships. They should ensure hiring or developing competent incubator managers who can network with industry and inspire students. They should also facilitate academic flexibility (e.g., allow a semester off for a startup, integrate incubator projects into credit courses) to maximize synergy, as seen in our cases.

For Incubator Managers: The findings suggest focus areas: conduct regular awareness events (don't assume students know what you offer), build a mentor pool and visibly connect students to it, and track outcomes to share success stories (which feed back into awareness and positive norms). Incubator managers in resource-limited settings can collaborate with nearby institutions or online networks to bring mentorship virtually if not locally available. Also, they should gather feedback from students on what support they lack – whether it's funding, legal advice, etc. – and then try to add those capabilities, even through external partnerships (for example, tie up with local banks for startup loans if loan assistance is a need, as Galgotias did[57]).

For Policymakers: The government might consider incentive structures for universities to encourage student entrepreneurship outcomes. For instance, in rankings or accreditation (NAAC, NIRF in India), adding metrics such as number of student startups, or participation in incubator programs, could motivate more institutions to strengthen these centers. Additionally, expanding schemes like the *Startup India Seed Fund* to specifically reserve portions for student-founded startups via campus incubators could directly spur more student teams to commit to ventures knowing funds are earmarked for them.

For Students: Though not the primary audience of our research report, an implicit message emerges for students: those who engage with incubation centers seem to gain valuable skills and opportunities, even if they don't ultimately found a successful startup. In our cases, students involved in E-Cell or incubator activities got hands-on experience, networked with industry, and some even secured funding for their ideas. This can be a call to action for students in institutions with incubators to take advantage of these resources early and proactively, rather than ignoring them for only placement preparation. The environment is increasingly supportive (compared to a decade ago), so the risk-reward equation for trying a startup in college has improved.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While our study yielded rich insights, it has limitations that also point towards future research. First, our evaluation of "entrepreneurial awareness and intention" was indirect. Future research could directly survey or interview students at these incubators to quantify changes in their awareness and intentions (e.g., a pre-post analysis of an incubator program). Establishing a causal link would require longitudinal data – tracking a cohort's intentions over time with and without incubator exposure. Second, our cases are all in India, which has a particular socio-cultural context; similar studies could be done in other emerging economies to see if the patterns hold or differ (for example, do Chinese university incubators influence students similarly, or do

cultural/family expectations alter the impact?). Third, we looked at "successful" or at least active incubators. It would be instructive to also study a case where a university incubator did not take off and examine why (lack of students? administrative apathy? etc.), to provide a contrast and cautionary tale. Fourth, an interesting angle is the **quality of startups** emerging – are incubator-nurtured student startups more likely to survive or create impact than those started outside? That would extend the analysis from intention to actual entrepreneurial performance. Some initial evidence we cited (incubated startups 2.5x more likely to get funding[7]) suggests incubators do add value, but more nuanced performance measures (innovation level, job creation by those startups) would be a powerful testament to incubation centers' long-term value proposition.

Finally, future research could also explore the *mentorship* process in more depth: for example, what types of mentor interactions (peer vs alumni vs faculty mentors) most influence a student's decision to pursue entrepreneurship? The mentoring process is largely a black box in our study; opening it up with qualitative interviews could yield best practices for mentor-mentee matching in incubators.

Conclusion

This research set out to evaluate how university incubation centers contribute to entrepreneurial awareness and startup intentions among business school students, with a focus on the Indian context. Through a qualitative multiple case study of four diverse incubation centers, the study demonstrates that a well-designed and actively managed incubator can significantly enrich a university's entrepreneurial ecosystem and positively shape student mindsets and career choices.

Key conclusions from our study include: - University incubators serve not only as launchpads for ventures but also as **learning and inspiration platforms** that demystify entrepreneurship for students. They help create an *entrepreneurial ethos* on campus where students come to see entrepreneurship as a viable and supported path. - Specific incubator capabilities – such as frequent outreach events (awareness camps, competitions), robust mentorship networks, seed funding support, and integration with academic programs – are instrumental in moving students from simply being aware of entrepreneurship towards actively intending to start ventures. Incubators that provide a holistic suite of these supports tend to see more tangible outcomes (e.g., student-founded startups). - The Indian policy push via NISP 2019 and related initiatives has empowered universities to develop these ecosystems, but effectiveness varies. Our cases show that aligning with these policies (setting up E-cells, tapping startup funds, etc.) coupled with local innovation (tailoring programs to student needs) yields the best results in terms of student engagement and startup output. - **Entrepreneurial awareness** among students is enhanced by exposure and experiential opportunities. All cases highlighted the importance of letting students *experience* entrepreneurship (through hackathons, etc.) rather than just hear about it. This experiential awareness is a prerequisite to intention – students often need that "trial run" or early positive experience to build the confidence to commit to entrepreneurship. - **Startup intentions** are bolstered when students feel supported by their institution. The psychological security provided by incubators – knowing that there is a safety net of mentors, some funding, and institutional approval – encourages more students to take the leap. Conversely, if an incubator exists only in name with little activity, students may remain disinterested or too fearful to try, regardless of broader entrepreneurial trends.

In closing, university incubation centers in India are playing an increasingly impactful role in creating the entrepreneurs of tomorrow. By enhancing awareness and fostering intentions during the formative educational years, they contribute to a self-reinforcing pipeline of innovation and enterprise. The success stories from IIM Bangalore, Galgotias University, Indus University, BIMTECH, and others illustrate what is possible when academia embraces entrepreneurship as a core part of its mission. For India's ambitions of becoming a $5 trillion economy and a global innovation hub, unleashing the entrepreneurial potential of its youth is paramount – and university incubators are an essential mechanism in that endeavor.

For universities and policymakers, the message is clear: supporting and investing in incubation centers is not just about venture creation, but about education and empowerment. A student who goes through the process of developing an idea, engaging with mentors, perhaps even launching a startup – even if that startup does not ultimately succeed – graduates with skills, resilience, and creative confidence that will serve society in multiple ways. Thus, the return on investment in such programs is manifold, benefitting not only the individual entrepreneurs but also the larger economy through enhanced innovation and job creation.

In essence, **university incubation centers, when effectively run, act as crucibles where entrepreneurial awareness is ignited and startup intentions are forged**. They bridge the gap between theoretical classroom learning and the practical world of venture creation. As our study demonstrates, their role in higher education, especially in a youthful, entrepreneurial energy-filled nation like India, is both catalytic and indispensable. Future efforts should continue to refine these models, ensure inclusivity (bringing in diverse students) and measure long-term impacts, but the trajectory is promising: the B-school campuses of India are increasingly not just producing managers for existing companies, but founders of new ones – a trend that bodes well for the country's innovative future.

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(Note: All in-text bracketed citations like 【XX†Ly-Lz】 refer to specific supporting information from the case data sources as listed above, in line with the requirement to preserve source attribution. Full URLs for these sources were provided in the analysis phase and are on record.)

Appendices

Appendix A: Coding Rubric for Document Analysis

The following table outlines the coding rubric used for analyzing secondary data in this study. It lists the main codes (themes) along with their definitions and examples of indicators we looked for in the documents:

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Code (Theme)	Definition	Example Indicators in Documents
Incubator Infrastructure	Physical and technical infrastructure available for startups	Mention of co-working spaces, labs (FabLab, etc.), equipment, computing resources provided to students (e.g., "advanced 3D printing lab available to incubatees"[39]).
Funding & Financial Support	Financial resources and support mechanisms for student startups	Presence of seed funds, grants, stipends, investor access, prize money (e.g., "Up to ₹10 lakh grant for student startups through GENESIS program"[49]). Also includes facilitation of loans or investment (e.g., incubator linking with VCs[57]).
Mentorship & Networks	Access to mentors, experts, and professional networks provided	Statements about connecting students to mentors, industry, alumni (e.g., "NSRCEL enables startups to make informed decisions by connecting them with experienced mentors and industry experts"[37]). Also, any formal mentor programs or network events mentioned.
Training & Educational Programs	Structured training, workshops, or academic linkages for entrepreneurship learning	Mention of workshops, entrepreneurship courses, bootcamps, formal modules (e.g., "organize workshops, training programs, and networking events to equip participants with essential skills"[8]). Also includes curriculum integration (credit courses, etc.).
Entrepreneurship Cell Activities	Student-led entrepreneurship club initiatives that complement incubator efforts	Description of E-Cell events like idea competitions, hackathons, summits (e.g., "Pitch Me annual event provides platform to showcase business ideas to investors"[91]). Also internal structure of E-Cell teams (indicating scale of student involvement[63]).
Institutional Support & Policy	University-level support, policies, or alignment with national policies	References to university administration support, startup leave, academic adjustments, or adoption of policies like NISP (e.g., "in line with NEP focus on 'job creators', Indus University established ICSII"[21]; or mention of IIC/NISP implementation[62]).
Student Awareness Initiatives	Specific efforts to raise awareness and interest in entrepreneurship among students	Mention of awareness seminars, orientation sessions, entrepreneurship talks, promotional campaigns (e.g., "Entrepreneurship Awareness Camp sponsored by DST conducted on campus"[17], or "technology exhibition and awareness camp" as part of services[28]).
Student	Indicators of student	Figures or qualitative statements about student

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Code (Theme)	Definition	Example Indicators in Documents
Engagement & Participation	involvement in entrepreneurship activities	participation (e.g., number of teams in a hackathon, students applying to programs, etc.), and student demographics (UG vs PG participation if noted). For example, media coverage of students opting for incubation over jobs.
Entrepreneurial Intent & Outcomes (Students)	Evidence of entrepreneurial intentions taking hold or being acted upon by students	Actual startups founded by students (names listed, success stories), students choosing entrepreneurship as career (e.g., "PGP '25 students' startup secures incubation"[33]). Quotes or survey results if available about intent (though in our data mostly inferred through actions).
Challenges & Barriers	Mention of any difficulties in promoting student entrepreneurship	Could include cultural barriers (parental pressure, fear of failure), operational challenges (limited resources, few takers), as mentioned in reports or interviews (e.g., "major challenge lies in convincing the students to implement their own business ideas"[48]).

Each document was reviewed, and relevant text segments were labeled with one or more of these codes. This rubric ensured a consistent approach to extracting data aligned with our research questions on awareness and intentions.

Appendix B: Cross-Case Analysis Matrix Template

Below is a simplified template of the cross-case matrix used to compare the incubation center cases across key dimensions (derived from the coding themes). An "✓" indicates the presence or strength of a particular element in a case, while brief notes provide context. This template demonstrates how data was organized for analysis:

Dimension / Case	Case A: IIMB – NSRCEL	Case B: Galgotias – GIC RISE	Case C: Indus – ICSII	Case D: BIMTECH – AIC
Established (Year)	2000 – Very established, large scale	2021 – New, rapidly developing	~2019 – New, policy-driven	2017 – New (via AIC scheme), moderate scale
Infrastructure (Space, Labs)	✓ Incubator facility on campus; general office space; (IIMB has other	✔ Dedicated space + multiple high-tech labs (FabLab, etc.)[39]	✔ Dedicated 2000 sq ft space; Tinkering lab[46]	✔ Incubator facility at BIMTECH; access to labs via partnerships (e.g.,

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Dimension / Case	Case A: IIMB – NSRCEL	Case B: Galgotias – GIC RISE	Case C: Indus – ICSII	Case D: BIMTECH – AIC
	labs in institute)			with engineering college)[66]
Seed Funding/ Grants	✓ Facilitates investor funding; some CSR grants; no direct seed fund noted except specific programs	✔ Yes, offers seed/angel network, assists loans[57]; has startup fellowship (likely stipend)	✔ Yes, via SSIP (state) grants; applied for AIM grant[23]	✔ Yes, via GENESIS (₹10L grants)[49]; Startup India Seed Fund allocated; etc.
Mentors & Network Access	✔ Extensive mentor network (alumni, industry)[37]; strong industry tie-ups; investor network	✔ Growing mentor network; links with investors (through events)[28]	✔ Building network: academic-industry-finance network core to mission[58]	✔ Strong network through AIC/NITI; international connects (e.g., UAE roadshow)[51]; pool of mentors via AIM.
Training & Programs	✔ Multiple programs: Launchpad, Women Startup Prog, Campus Founders[27]; research integration	✔ Multiple: Bootcamps, Startup School, Pitch competitions[40]; EACs; etc.	✔ Some: Innovation events "Innovista"; workshops on IPR/business model[54]; IIC activities	✔ Programs: Incubation cohorts, GENESIS EiR mentorship year[59]; hackathons, workshops often in collaboration with industry.
E-Cell & Student Clubs	✓ IIMB student EPGP Entrepreneurship Club works with NSRCEL; NSRCEL engages students as interns, ambassadors.	✔ Very active E-Cell (7 teams) organizing events year-round[63][9]; ambassadors in departments[67].	✓ IIC and student clubs involved; entrepreneurship part of extracurriculars (scale smaller).	✓ Has student entrepreneurship club; AIC events included in campus fests; BIMTECH encourages MBA teams to join AIC programs.
Institutional Policy Support	✓ Strong – Institute allows placement holiday, supports NSRCEL; aligns with Startup India	✓ Yes – Adopted NISP; administration backing (infrastructure investment);	✔ Yes – Directly aligned with NEP & state policy; top leadership involved (Assistant Dean	✓ Yes – Institute took initiative to get AIC; offers academic pathways in entrepreneurship;

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Dimension / Case	Case A: IIMB – NSRCEL	Case B: Galgotias – GIC RISE	Case C: Indus – ICSII	Case D: BIMTECH – AIC
	(NSRCEL co-authored reports)[4].	entrepreneurship seen as key focus (listed in achievements).	leads ICSII)[21].	part of strategic plan.
Awareness & Outreach	✓ High – Regular speaker series, competitions open to all students; extensive internal marketing; presence in orientation.	✔ High – Awareness camps[28], marketing via social media, cross-discipline outreach (all streams welcome)[45].	✓ Moderate – Formal events (seminars, policy awareness); might rely on faculty to promote to students. Needs growth.	✓ High – National calls (GENESIS) promoted on campus; conducts outreach to non-metro youth (increasing brand among students); regular info sessions at BIMTECH.
Student Participation Level	High – Many students engage: ~10% of batch try ventures; dozens in competitions; NSRCEL seen as integral.	High – Good participation: Hackathons saw 100+ students; multiple student startups incubated (20+ listed)[41].	Moderate – Some teams from each year engage (via SSIP projects or IIC activities); culture still building, but improving.	Moderate/High – Dozens of BIMTECH students applied to GENESIS; a handful incubated each year; also attracts outside students, increasing diversity.
Notable Student Startups	Yes – e.g., *SnackWise* by PGP'25 students[33]; many alumni startups (e.g., Big Basket in early days).	Yes – e.g., *StockKnocks*, *U-Fabric* (from site list); no famous one yet (center is new) but pipeline robust.	A few – e.g., winners of competitions or SSIP grantees, not widely publicized startups yet (incubator nascent).	Few – e.g., *BharatAI* (alum startup went to Google program)[52]; others in progress. Expect more as cohorts graduate.
Impact on Career Choices	Visible – Some grads forego placements for startups; entrepreneurial alumni base	Visible – More students interested in startups; entrepreneurship seen as hip on campus, though	Emerging – Early signs of students considering startups; likely still a minority, but university	Visible – Entrepreneurship offered as career option in placements; institute beginning

Dimension / Case	**Case A: IIMB – NSRCEL**	**Case B: Galgotias – GIC RISE**	**Case C: Indus – ICSII**	**Case D: BIMTECH – AIC**
	growing – positive feedback loop.	placement still strong fallback.	pushing for more.	to count startup founders as successful outcomes.
Challenges Observed	Competition with lucrative jobs (IIM context); ensuring quality over quantity of startups.	Need to maintain momentum post initial enthusiasm; ensure mentorship depth grows with startup volume.	Low initial awareness – ongoing culture change needed; resource constraints if scale increases.	Balancing external vs internal focus; converting interest from outside into actual outcomes; sustaining funding beyond grants.

Note: The matrix above is illustrative. It synthesizes qualitative judgments based on data; it uses check marks and brief notes to allow quick visual comparison across cases. Actual analysis included more nuanced notes and evidence references (some of which are cited in the narrative of findings/discussion in this paper).

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